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AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

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Climate Change in the Pacific

**Statement by Mr Greg Roche
Assistant Secretary
Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community
Services and Indigenous Affairs**

(Check against delivery)

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on the issue of climate change in the Pacific region. Before doing so, may I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this important meeting is being held.

Our climate is changing. Countries are experiencing noticeable transformations in the weather – temperatures are increasing, seasons are changing, weather patterns at times are unpredictable.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has projected a global average sea level rise of 19-58cm by 2100. Air temperature in the South Pacific is estimated to be at least 2.5°C above 1990 levels.

Since 2006, Australia has channeled a substantial amount of funding through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which allocates over 30 per cent of its funds to its climate change focal area. Our commitment of A\$59.8 million to the 4th replenishment (2006-2010) brings our total contribution to the GEF to A\$240 million since its inception in 1991.

The IPCC has highlighted that developing countries, particularly the low-lying islands of the Pacific, are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea level rise and

extreme events. Impacts include deterioration of coastal conditions, increased inundation and storm surge, and increased water stress.

Pacific Island Forum members, including Australia, have endorsed the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change (2006-15), which identifies adaptation as a key priority. Through the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Forum members have prepared a plan that identifies national and regional actions to implement this Framework.

The Australian Government is committed to helping our Pacific neighbours tackle climate change issues. We will do this by: increasing Australia's aid expenditure on climate change adaptation by A\$150 million over the next three years—giving particular attention to the needs of our neighbours in the Pacific and East Timor; and by sharing Australia's scientific and technical expertise in monitoring climate change and modelling impacts.

New measures will build upon our existing practical support to Pacific Island countries to address climate change, including:

- the long-running South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project;
- assistance to build the capacity of national meteorological services to provide weather and climate prediction support to stakeholders;
- practical assistance to build resilience to climate change by increasing water storage capacity, diversifying crops, and replanting mangroves; and
- assistance for adaptation planning and implementation through the United Nations' Least Developed Countries Fund.

The Australian Government has invested more than A\$50 million in these initiatives.

At the UN Climate Change negotiations in Bali, it was agreed for the first time that action on deforestation must be part of a future response to climate change.

Australia is taking practical action on deforestation through collaborative efforts with the Papua New Guinea and Indonesian Governments, including:

- The Papua New Guinea - Australia Forest Carbon Partnership, which was announced by Prime Ministers Rudd and Somare on 6 March 2008. Under the Partnership Australia will support Papua New Guinea's efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and seek to include deforestation emissions in the next international climate change agreement.
- Australia has worked closely with the World Bank on the development of the Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). The Australian Government reaffirmed a US\$10 million commitment to the FCPF at its launch in Bali in December 2007. This was the first contribution to the partnership.
- The Asia Pacific Forestry Skills and Capacity Building Programme is designed to assist countries in the Asia Pacific region to increase their forest management expertise and improve the carbon sequestration performance of their forests.

The Australian Government is also dealing with climate change closer to home.

For residents of the Torres Strait, the impact of sea level rise in combination with extreme weather events leading to inundation and island erosion is of significant concern.

The recent Fourth Assessment Report by the International Panel on Climate Change highlighted that, as a consequence of king tides in 2005 and 2006, there is a “need to revisit short-term coastal protection and long-term relocation plans for up to 2,000 Australians living on the central coral cays and north-west islands” of the Torres Strait.

The Australian Government and the Torres Strait Regional Authority have recognised the need for better information on the extent and causes of coastal erosion, inundation and climate change impacts in the Torres Strait, so that the most appropriate policy responses and support can be developed.

A number of research projects and adaptive planning arrangements are underway to address this.

As an example, James Cook University researchers are conducting a study on Coastal Erosion Impacts for central cay islands in the Torres Strait. The project focuses on community participation in active research, to promote understanding of island erosion processes amongst local island communities. The project also provides an excellent opportunity for local communities to participate in planning for adaptation to environmental change.

A project by the Marine and Tropical Research Facility, *Climate change impacts in the Torres Strait: Building resilience and planning adaptation strategies*, will establish the needs and priorities of each area in the region and provide direction for a coordinated, strategic approach to climate change responses. The primary goal of this project is to find ways to increase the ability of local communities to deal with environmental change by integrating scientific and traditional knowledge.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority, together with the Environmental Protection Agency, has formed a Torres Strait Coastal Management Committee, which will lead a coordinated approach to coastal management and climate change.

Members of the Forum,

As you are no doubt aware, the impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and the most vulnerable persons within all countries – those who can least afford to adapt to a changing climate.

Australia is committed to assisting our neighbours in the Pacific region and our own communities in the Torres Strait to ensure that they are equipped to deal with climate change. This is happening through substantial funding for research and adaptive planning projects, partnerships to protect and expand forests, sharing of climate data and technology as well as policy lessons and experiences, and the building of regional and international coalitions to add momentum to global efforts to deal with climate change.

Adapting to climate change impacts is a complex task. We are at an early stage in understanding the likely impacts and options for dealing with them. What we do know is that local communities, including Indigenous people, must play a central role in the planning and implementation of responses to climate change if these are to have any chance of succeeding in the long-term.