

- Greenhouse Gas Emissions to be Reduced by Shipping Industry
- Fijian Villages Relocate Due to Climate Change
- Palau’s National Marine Sanctuary Remains in Place for Now

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~ Albon Ishoda

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## **GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS TO BE REDUCED BY SHIPPING INDUSTRY**

The international shipping industry is responsible for 3% of the world’s carbon emissions, but these emissions were excluded from the Paris Climate Agreement, and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a branch of the United Nations, is the only forum where they can be addressed. More than 80% of the world’s traded goods are transported by sea, and the shipping industry’s greenhouse gas emissions are equivalent to that of the sixth largest emitting country.

The Pacific Island countries, including the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, have been calling for the IMO to decarbonise the shipping industry by 2050. In addition, they are seeking a global greenhouse gas (GHG) levy to

generate revenue to end the shipping industry's reliance on fossil fuels, and to support countries severely impacted by climate change.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is a leading white-listed flag state, the third largest shipping registry in the world due to its low taxes and operational flexibility. But it is also facing severe threats from greenhouse gas emissions causing rising sea levels and CO<sub>2</sub>-fuelled ocean acidification impacting its coral reefs. It has been emphasising the urgency of addressing shipping's contribution to climate change since 2015.

When the talks began the group of Pacific Island countries, led by the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands called for an emissions reduction target of 37% by 2030, 96% by 2040 and 10% by 2050. They said this was necessary to put the industry in line with the Paris Agreement goal of keeping global warming at 1.5 degrees. To reach the targets the Pacific Island countries proposed a mandate to use cleaner fuel, and a levy on greenhouse gas emissions from ships starting at \$100 per tonne.

“We believe that the levy is essential if we are to ensure that this transition is going to be equitable to all,” said the Samoan spokesperson at the IMO's Intergovernmental Working Group on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships (ISWG-GHG 15). “The main aim of the levy is, and should be, to incentivise and speed up the transition by reducing the price difference between fossil fuel and zero GHG alternatives.

“In addition to this, it has the potential to generate significant revenues which can be used to address disproportionate negative impacts, as well as research, development and deployment of alternative zero GHG fuels and technologies.”

After two weeks of recent talks in June and July 2023 Governments resolved to cut total emissions from international shipping by at least 20% by 2030, with an ambition to reach 30% cuts, and the IMO said that international shipping would reach net zero close to 2050. And to encourage the uptake of clean technologies the agreement stipulated that at least 5% of the energy used for international shipping by 2030 should be carbon free, with an aim to reach 10% by that date.

Attempts to impose a levy were opposed by a group of South American countries, the representatives of which said it would be a tax on distance. China opposed it due to the potential impact on trade. Australia supported exploring all economic measures designed to help meet the reductions target but didn't specifically support the levy.

In the final round of talks the imposing of a levy was delayed. It is one of five “economic measures” which might drive down emissions to be considered. One of the five will be introduced by 2028.

The Marshall Islands chief negotiator, Albon Ishoda, Ambassador of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to Fiji and the Pacific Islands, said after the talks,

“I'm proud of what the Pacific achieved. It is always those that have the most to lose who have to fight the hardest.”

Vanuatu's Climate Minister Ralph Regenvanu said,

“This outcome is far from perfect, but countries across the world came together and got it done – and it gives us a shot at 1.5 degrees.

*Sources: 'Pacific nations advocate to steer shipping industry on clear path to climate action' by Kevin Anthony, 1 July 2023, RNZ Pacific; 'Shipping emissions levy delayed but goals for greenhouse gas cuts agreed' by Fiona Harvey, 7 July 2023, The Guardian; 'After mammoth negotiations, the world adopts a plan to cut shipping emissions' by Nick O'Malley, 8 July 2023, Sydney Morning Herald.*

## FIJIAN VILLAGES RELOCATE DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2014, Vunidogoloa, a village of 140 people on Vanua Levu, Fiji's second-largest island, was the first place in Fiji to be relocated due to climate change. Thoughts of moving the village had been talked about since the 1950s, but serious discussions began in 2004, and in 2006 the community approached the provincial government to ask for help with relocating.

The original site of the village was on the coast, but decades of rising sea levels, meant that families had had to move their homes often several times, one sea wall had been destroyed by waves and storms, and the remains of a second one now lies about four metres offshore.

The Vunidogoloa community fortunately already owned land that was safe for a new village to build on, and they owned forest, so had timber to construct the new homes. Thirty new homes were built on a hillside, with the idea that each would have an external kitchen to be constructed in the second building phase. However, that did not happen, and villagers ended up building their own kitchens, in many cases using materials from their kitchens in the old village.

The new homes have septic tanks, solar panels and flushing toilets, and it's easier to grow food in this region, because the soil is not salinated, but there are setbacks. Fish makes up a major part of the villagers' diet and now the villagers have to walk two kilometres back to the old village to fish several times a week. The new village is near a road, which means easier access to healthcare facilities and schools in bigger towns, but it has brought alcohol consumption with all its problems to what was previously a dry village. Devastating for the villagers was having to leave their dead behind when they relocated.

Six Fijian villages have been relocated due to climate change, and there are plans for another 42 villages to be relocated over the next ten years with a further 830 communities identified as being "at-risk from climate change". Over the past four years a special government taskforce in Fiji has created a plan and a 130-page document for community relocation entitled *Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocations*, which was launched by the Fijian Deputy Prime Minister, Manoa Kamikamica, in April this year.

Kamikamica said that relocation is a last resort, a response to the most extreme impacts of climate change. However, he said that it must be planned for, because the reality is that some communities will become uninhabitable in the years to come. The aim is to give communities the best support to find a suitable relocation site and ensure that the villages' cultural, social, economic value and needs are taken into account.

The Standard Operating Procedures are being piloted in the relocation of the village of Nabavatu in the Province of Macuata, which was damaged initially by Tropical Cyclone Yasa in December 2020 and then by Tropical Cyclone Ana in January 2021. Since then the 262 residents have been living in tents.

Other Pacific Island countries are also experiencing the effects of climate change. In the last 70 years five Solomon Islands have sunk, as sea levels rise between 7 to 10mm per year, and another six islands are predicted to disappear in a number of years. The Republic of Kiribati, a 32-atoll nation with a population of 100,000 people bought 5,500 acres of land in Fiji in 2014 in the face of climate change and rising sea levels.

*Source: 'Graves sink, fisheries shrink as climate change hits Fiji' by Steven Trask, 20 January 2023, Japanese Times; 'In Fiji, the climate crisis is no longer off in the future – it's a daily reality' by Craig Reucassel with Deborah Richards and Victoria Allen, 6 April 2023, ABC News; 'Standard Operating Procedures launched to relocate 42 villages by climate change' by Rashika Kumar, 19 April 2023, Fiji Village; 'How to move a country: Fiji's radical plan to escape rising sea levels by Kate Lyons, 8 November 2022, The Guardian.*

## PALAU'S NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY REMAINS IN PLACE FOR NOW

The October 2020 GJOP Pacific Outlook Bulletin outlined Palau's National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS). In January 2020, Palau declared 80% of its Exclusive Economic Zone a marine sanctuary, closed off not only to fishing but also deep-sea mining and oil exploration, and the other 20% for domestic fisheries.

Palau has a population of about 18,300 living on nine of its 340 islands. In 2019, over 90,000 tourists visited Palau. Its rich biodiverse waters surrounding its tropical islands are considered one of the seven undersea wonders of the world. Tourism accounted for nearly 50% of Palau's GDP, but tourist numbers dropped significantly with Covid, and in 2023 visitor numbers are predicted to only reach about 32,000. International visitors pay a US\$100 green fee to support conservation and sign the Palau pledge, which was drafted with the help of children from all over Palau, "Children of Palau, I take this pledge as your guest, to preserve and protect your beautiful and unique island home. I vow to tread lightly, act kindly, and explore mindfully. I shall not take what is not given. I shall not harm what does not harm me."

The plan with the Palau National Marine Sanctuary was for the nation to shift from raising revenue from commercial fishing to increasing income from tourism, but that has not happened with the Covid pandemic. Palau's President Surangel Whipps Jr, who took office a year after the PNMS was enacted, along with several other in government have discussed reducing the size of the PNMS, saying that the country needs to find a better balance between protection and production. Palau has set aside 80% of its waters, while the rest of the world is aiming to protect only 30% by 2030. And Palau's Minister of Fisheries, Agriculture and Environment says the 80% conservation zone may be restricting efforts to grow the local fishing sector.

But local Palau fisherman have already noticed a positive change, reporting being able to catch yellowfin and big-eye tuna closer to traditional artisanal fishing areas than a few years ago. In April 2022 during the Our Ocean Conference people protested on the streets and on social media against the proposal to re-open the PNMS to commercial fishing. Palau's Council of Chiefs opposed the plan to change the marine sanctuary, saying it was designed with the traditional practice of "bul", implementing conservation to protect resources.

However, the government says that domestic fishing companies cannot support Palau's domestic consumption, and therefore has introduced the Blue Prosperity Plan, which supports the expansion of Palau's fishing industry – both domestic and foreign – and only to have 30% of its EEZ as a marine sanctuary. But due to a grant of \$2.6 million from a group of international conservation NGOs for the next three years the PNMS remains at 80% of its EEZ, while it looks at the best way to provide the Palau people with both fish and also revenue.

*Source: 'Palau's National Marine Sanctuary is one of the most ambitious ocean protection programs in the world. With Covid-19 decimating the island's tourism industry, the fate of the reserve remains uncertain' by [WHO], 27 December 2023, The Island Times (produced with the support of the Earth Journalism Network).*

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