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**"With our technological capacity, we are literally destroying the very systems that keep us alive."**

**~ Oceanographer and marine biologist Dr Sylvia Earle**

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## **DEEP SEA MINING IN THE PACIFIC**

In mid-January 2023 the French Parliament voted to ban deep-sea mining in its waters, in a move against the controversial practice.

Deep-sea mining uses heavy machinery on the ocean floor to extract small rocks containing rare metals such as cobalt, nickel and manganese, which are used in electric car batteries.

But conservation groups and scientists are concerned about the potentially devastating effect deep sea mining could have on marine ecosystems, and also the climate, as huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> are stored in the ocean depths. The world's 'deep seas' make up 90% of the ocean. Because they are so inaccessible little is known by scientists about the species and ecosystems.

The Metals Company, a Canadian enterprise, is planning to start mining a section of the Pacific Ocean called the Clarion Clipperton Zone and in September 2022 was granted a 'test permit' over 3,000 tonnes of nodules (small rocks) at a depth of 4,000 metres. Mining involves scraping off the top layer of the ocean floor, separating the nodules from the mud, using a giant tube to pump them

to a surface ship, and returning the water and fine particles through another tube. Scientists are just starting to study species at these levels, shrimps, octopods and sea anemones which have adapted to living in depths up to 5,000 metres. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts fact sheet ‘monitoring of experimental dredge sites in deep-sea sediment has shown that decades after a site is disturbed, few, if any communities of organisms have recovered.’

Four Pacific Island countries – Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati and Cook Islands – have given the go ahead for deep-sea mining projects, and in July 2021 Nauru triggered a United Nations rule that gives authorities two years to come up with regulations. However, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Fiji and Palau are calling for a moratorium on deep-sea mining. The Pacific Blue Line (PBL) which includes the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG), Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Pacific Islands Association of NGOs, World Wide Fund for Nature Pacific and the Development Alternatives with Women for a new era (DAWN) are calling for a global ban on deep sea mining.

‘Our position to ban deep sea mining is very clear. It’s destructive, our ocean is already facing multiple destruction from pollution... We don’t want to see any further destructions of our marine resource. The ocean, to us is a lifeline to the indigenous people of Samoa and the Pacific,’ said Aiono Sapa Saifaleupolu of O le Siosiomaga Society Inc, Samoa.

However, as islanders call for a ban Australia’s independent national science agency, CSIRO, has agreed to work with The Metals Company, alongside New Zealand’s National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research. In a statement CSIRO said it had a major role in the “provision of scientific advice to support decision making so that decisions can be made on the best available scientific advice.”

According to a 2020 report from the World Bank a 500% increase in production of minerals, such as graphite, lithium and cobalt, will take place by 2050 to meet the demand in the transition to green technologies. Nickel and cobalt are needed for high performance batteries for longer range electric vehicles.

“If we can’t find enough of those minerals that we can easily extract in an environmentally sensitive way, or that we can procure through recycling and reuse, some of them may instead come from deep sea mining,” says Dr Chris Vernon, a senior research scientist who heads the CSIRO’s Green Minerals Technologies Initiative.

But the European Parliament, the European Commission and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature are supporting a ban on deep sea mining, and multinationals such as Google, Microsoft, Samsung, Tesla, BMW and Volvo have committed not to source minerals from the deep seabed.

*Sources: ‘Palau Leader Warns of ‘Catastrophic’ Consequences of Deep-Sea Mining’ by Steven Trask, 9 December 2022, Agence France-Presse; <https://www.pacificblueline.org/pacific-blue-line-statement>; ‘Blue Peril’ reveals how deep-sea mining would impact Pacific Islands’ by Deborah Pranis, 1 December 2022, China Dialogue Ocean; ‘CSIRO joins deep-sea mining project in Pacific as islands call for industry halt’ by Graham Readfearn, 14 July 2022, The Guardian; ‘Creating a blueprint for responsible, low-impact deep-sea mining’ by Ruth Dawkins, 29 November 2022, ECOS, CSIRO.*

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## **THE KAWAKI WOMEN’S NETWORK PROTECT TURTLES IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS**

The Arnavons are four small islands in the Manning Strait between the Solomon Islands’ provinces of Isabel and Choiseul. The Arnavon Islands have the largest rookery of the critically endangered hawksbill turtle in the South Pacific region. In 1995 the Arnavon Community Marine

Conservation area, covering 40,000 acres of land and sea, was established in partnership with government and the communities of Kia, Katupika and Waghena to protect the hawksbill turtle populations and the unique flora and fauna of the region. Since the area was established the number of hawksbill turtle nests each year has doubled.

Men from the three communities have been involved for more than 25 years as community rangers, but few women had set foot on the islands. Then in 2016 KAWAKI was formed by Marilyn Gedi from Kia village, with the vision of uniting women across the three communities, a love of conservation and a concern for the future. The network is funded by The Nature Conservancy and the Ministry of the Environment. Now women are acting as rangers, alongside the men, watching over the turtle nests to prevent the eggs and hatchlings from being preyed on by predators and poachers. In 2020, Marilyn Gedi, the Solomon Islands' first female police officer, was awarded the Commonwealth Points of Light for her community conservation work.

The number of hawksbill turtles had plummeted, due to predators such as rats, and illegal poaching, as well as turtle hunting and egg collecting, which is allowed for subsistence. And the turtles are hunted and their eggs collected for legal subsistence. But in recent years the KAWAKI women have been running awareness campaigns in local villages to promote practices such as proper rubbish disposal and not eating turtles. KAWAKI have created conservation programs for local schools and are working to make the area an ecotourism destination, and establishing a community conservation centre.

In 2017 the area became Arnavon Community Marine Park, and it was awarded a Blue Park Award in 2019 by the Marine Conservation Institute for the outstanding community-led protection of the local ecosystem and its species, including the hawksbill sea turtle.

*Sources: 'Women are Making the Arnavon Islands Community Marine Park Stronger', Marine Conservation Institute, 6 May 2021; 'The KAWAKI Women's Group: Turtle Advocates', The Nature Conservancy.*

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## **THE SAFEGUARD MECHANISM, CLIMATE ACTION AND AUSTRALIA'S CORPORATIONS**

For years the Pacific Island countries have been looking to Australia to reduce its CO2 emissions to prevent the global warming which is already having a devastating impact on these small island nations. The Labor government, which came into power in May 2022, has pledged to cut greenhouse emissions by 43% by 2030. At the same time, Labor made a pre-election promise not to block new coal and gas developments, proposing under a revised Safeguard Mechanism that any new facility which starts operating after 1 July 2023 has to adhere to international best practice baselines and use the best low emissions technology available in the world.

The Coalition government under Tony Abbott established the Safeguard Mechanism to limit CO2 emissions from Australia's 215 biggest industrial sites, which emitted over 100,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, 28% of Australia's total emissions. Now Labor is looking to amend the Safeguard Mechanism and Chris Bowen, Minister for Climate Change and Energy, has released a proposal which will require most companies to reduce their emission by 4.9% per year. The companies can choose to reduce CO2 emissions on site, with incentives to do that, or by offsetting up to 100% of their emissions.

But the Greens, and environmental groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Climate Council are concerned that this will not do enough to cut emissions, and that the unlimited use of carbon offsets could actually lead to a rise in emissions.

In 2021, Greenpeace Australia Pacific revealed in its report *Hero to zero: uncovering the truth of corporate Australia's climate action claims* that some of the country's high emitting corporations

such as Woodside, Qantas and AGL have set net zero targets without any commitment to reduce their use and production of fossil fuels, or to commit to switching to 100% renewable energy.

The report finds that the carbon dioxide emitted from fossil fuel consumption exceeds tenfold the amount that could be sequestered through carbon offsetting schemes, such as tree planting projects, which in many cases are overseas and poorly regulated.

The International Energy Agency and the United Nations have said that the world must stop opening new gas and oilfields and coal plants and make significant cuts to emissions this decade to limit global warming and reach net zero emissions by 2050.

According to the Climate Council's briefing paper on the Safeguard Mechanism there are currently more than 100 new coal and gas project in development stage in Australia. These fossil fuels are the primary drivers of climate change, and no amount of offsetting can replace limiting new developments. Glenn Walker, Head of Advocacy and Strategy at Greenpeace Australia Pacific believes that the Safeguard Mechanism must be significantly strengthened.

"We need to Federal Government to raise its ambition and bring Australia's big corporate polluters to heel. This includes capping the use of offsets and setting a zero emissions baseline for new entrants."

Dr Nikola Casule, Greenpeace Australia Pacific Head of Research and Investigation, said: "Carbon offset schemes enable companies like AGL, Australia's biggest corporate climate polluter, Santos and Qantas to make impressive-sounding net-zero emissions and carbon-neutral claims while doing nothing to reduce dangerous emissions from their use and production of fossil fuels."

"Many of the net zero targets from Australia's biggest climate polluters are nothing but corporate greenwash, distracting from the urgent need for emission reduction. A primary test of credibility is a commitment to reduce emissions from business operations by switching to 100% renewable electricity, but almost two thirds of companies in the ASX200 with net zero emissions targets do not pass the renewable test."

With corporations making up almost 70% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, Greenpeace is urging Australian businesses to commit to switching to 100% renewable electricity by 2025.

If Australia is sincere in wanting to support its Pacific Island neighbours in the face of climate change now is the time to transition away from fossil fuels by ruling out new coal and gas projects and making sure that current projects are held accountable for their emissions and contribution to global warming.

*Sources: 'Strengthening the Safeguard Mechanism: improving proposed policy settings', Climate Council and Australian Conservation Foundation, February 2023; 'New safeguard mechanism runs risk of same old mistakes', Greenpeace, 10 January 2023; 'Safeguard mechanism: what is it, will it cut emissions and what role do carbon offsets play?' by Adam Morton, The Guardian, 17 February 2023; 'Hero to Zero: uncovering the truth of corporate Australia's climate action claims', lead author Zali Fung, 14 September 2023, Greenpeace Australia Pacific.*

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**Pacific Outlook is produced by** the Grail Global Justice Overcoming Poverty Network (Australia). Published in Sydney with 6 issues per year. Contributions to Pacific Outlook and responses to its content are welcomed via the Editor.

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**Design:** Thanks to Marian Kelly for her donation of time and talent.