

To be taken seriously in the Pacific, Australia must put Pacific climate security front and centre, says former ADF chief

Australia must put climate and security concerns at the centre of Pacific policy if it is to regain trust in the region, according to Rtd Adm Chris Barrie, the former Chief of the Australian Defence Force, and an Executive member of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group.

“Years of worsening diplomacy in the region, has led to Australia not being well trusted by Pacific nations, highlighted by the damaged relationship with the Solomon Islands government”, said Admiral Chris Barrie.

Adm Barrie said that climate impacts, not China, is the biggest concern for Pacific Island States and, indeed, for Australia itself: “The government needs to draw a red line on climate security, instead of specifically targeting the Solomon Islands”.

“Pacific governments have long argued that climate change and security are inter-linked. The key to Australia’s successful re-engagement in the Pacific is a Pacific Climate and Security Initiative that would give priority to the Pacific’s needs.”

This would include new commitments to the Green Climate Fund, and mitigation actions consistent with the Pacific’s focus on warming of less than 1.5 degree Celsius.

“Australia continues to ignore the very plain facts that climate change represents the single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and wellbeing of Pacific people and this, in turn, has huge security implications for Australia.”

“Pacific island leaders have clearly and repeatedly identified climate change as the greatest threat to their peoples’ future security. This has been confirmed in official declarations from the Pacific Islands Forum, such as the 2018 Boe Declaration, which states that ‘climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific’.”

“All Pacific island leaders say Australia is not taking their concerns seriously enough. Many are concerned that the government is prioritising the expansion of Australia’s coal and gas industries at the expense of the Pacific’s future, as the islands face fossil-fuel driven sea-level rise and extreme weather events like more intense cyclones.”

“They are quite right, but Australia’s leaders must recognise that we are equally exposed to the climate threat. By holding on to this obsession with fossil fuels we are destroying our own future as well as theirs’

“Australia’s security and Pacific security are two sides of the one coin, and can only be based on mutually agreed priorities.”

“The fall out from the government’s failure to recognise the scale of climate driven security and economic threats will be existential for nation states in the Pacific and heighten geopolitical tensions and stability of the entire region, ultimately costing many lives and livelihoods.”

Media contact: Luke Taylor, 0449 641 160

Media Assets & images: www.aslclg.org/media-assets