

STORIES FROM PNG'S TWO NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS ON THE SINKING OF THE MORTLOCK AND CARTERET ISLANDS

[PC = Post-Courier; TN = The National]

TN 1/3/05: Academic warns of rising seas (By DAMARIS MINIKULA)

LOW-LYING areas and atolls are most likely to observe rapid rises in sea levels, an academic said last Thursday.

Dean of the Research and Postgraduate Studies Centre at the University of Papua New Guinea Professor Simon Saulei said the recent rise in sea levels in the Mortlock and Carteret Atolls in the North Solomons province and other low-lying areas in Papua New Guinea could be the result of geological movements (plate movements) and climatic changes.

“We do not have the necessary data to pinpoint whether it is the climate or the plate movements that is the actual cause of the rise in sea level. It could be due to both factors,” he said.

He added that coastal areas could now see the evidence of the rise in sea levels in previous beaches that are now under water.

Further, the rise in sea level may vary in different areas.

“The lower the land is below sea level, the greater the risk of a rapid rise in sea-level,” he said.

Professor Saulei explained that not only coastal areas are affected by the rise in sea level.

“Inland areas that are below sea-level are and will also be affected,” he explained in light of reports that Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare’s home village in the Murik Lakes of East Sepik was sinking.

Professor Saulei explained further that the Bismarck Plate that lies on the bigger Pacific Plate cuts right through Wewak in the East Sepik province and could be another contributing factor to these speculations. He said there are three main factors that can lead to sea level changes:

- Heating of oceans that leads to changes in density and a thermal expansion of the oceans;
- Melting of glaciers in temperate regions and non-polar ice caps; and
- The melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets.

TN 23/3/05: Outbreak of dysentery on Mortlock Is under control

THE outbreak of dysentery on Mortlock Island was put under control after the 15 children who were taken ill were treated by a medical team dispatched to the island late last month.

Provincial Disease Controller Alois Pukunei said overcrowding and hygienic problems on the island have caused the disease outbreak.

The team has advised the islanders to move their makeshift toilets to the other side of the island and to get rid of the rubbish that piled up all over the place.

At present, the makeshift toilets face the westerly winds which usually push back towards the island the wastes dumped out at sea, and these build up on the village beach front.

The outbreak has caused the island’s paramount chief Avo Sini to call on Bougainville

Administrator Peter Tsiamalili to immediately assign a health worker for the islanders. Mr Pukunei said although Mortlock Island has an aid post it has been without a health worker for the last two years.

The medical team sent to the island treated 15 children with dysentery and three adults with tuberculosis and urinal track infections.

Meanwhile, Mr Pukunei also called on North Bougainville MP James Togel to assist the islanders to rebuild the seawall as the island will be under water due to global warming in a few years if nothing is done immediately.

During high tides and strong winds, the seawater reaches the first rows of houses as the seawall built by the former North Solomon Islands provincial government has been washed away.

To add to the islands woes, the islanders have only two teachers handling 65 pupils at the local primary School.

The school needs at least three more teachers, said the principal Len Sewaka.

PC 24/8/05: Caterets [sic] plan needed

THE Autonomous Bougainville Government and its administration should seriously address the long term relocation of Carteret Islanders.

This is because of the continuous erosion of the shorelines by high tides contribute towards the land shortage situation on the island.

A report submitted last month by Joyceline Lessie, of the Department of Economic Services, under the title Carteret Island High Water Damage Report examined food gardens, shoreline vegetation, sea level assessment and general living standard of the five islands and their population — Han (638), Piul (327), Yanuain (41), Iesila (82) and Yolasa (118) — that make up Carteret Island.

Carteret Island has always been in the spot light for many years because of its people suffering from food shortage due to eroding shorelines and rise in sea level.

The then Bougainville Interim Provincial Government had in place a plan for evacuation and relocation but was never accomplished.

The report stated that the administration and the Government immediately address the resettlement program and implement it as soon as possible if already in place.

Other recommendations included the provision of sufficient funds to introduce and develop a farming system suitable to the atolls environment.

“That the relief supply (rice supplies) should continue until such time the level of food supply is reassessed and possible measures taken to address this problem,” the report stated.

PC 28/11/05: That sinking feeling

The topic of rising sea levels is on the agenda at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta. A UN conference on climate change in Montreal, Canada today will also spotlight the issue. Here, Michael Perry of AAP reports on the dilemma facing low lying islands.

SYDNEY: The Carteret Islands are almost invisible on a map of the South Pacific. But the horseshoe scattering of atolls is on the front-line of climate change, as rising sea levels and storm surges eat away at their existence. For 20 years, the 2000 islanders have fought a losing battle against the ocean, building sea walls and trying to plant mangroves. Each year, the waves surge in, destroying vegetable gardens, washing away

homes and poisoning freshwater supplies. Papua New Guinea's Carteret islanders are destined to become some of the world's first climate change refugees. Their islands are becoming uninhabitable and may disappear below the waves. A decision has been made to move the islanders to the larger nearby Bougainville island, four hours' boat ride to the south-west. Ten families at a time will be moved, over one to two years, once funds are allocated for the resettlement program. "It's a pretty hard life out there on the islands. Some of the homes have been washed away," Joe Kaipu, senior district co-ordinator of Bougainville, told Reuters by telephone. "The only action now is to resettle them." A United Nations panel of more than 2000 scientists has predicted that average sea levels are likely to rise between nine and 88cm by 2100, mainly because of a build-up of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels, such as oil and coal. Sea levels are expected to rise because of a melting of ice caps and because water expands when it warms. If the entire Greenland ice sheet melted in coming centuries, sea levels would rise by 7m. Many scientists say a 50cm rise in sea levels could cause a 50m retreat of the coastline in low-lying areas. At the higher end of the forecast, the sea would overflow the heavily populated coasts of countries such as Bangladesh and cause low-lying island states like the Indian Ocean's Maldives and South Pacific's Kiribati and Tuvalu to disappear. "It's a matter of survival for us. If our islands go under, we all go under," said President Anote Tong, of Kiribati, where 33 low-lying islands covers five million square km in the South Pacific and home to about 100,000 people. "We move back from the shoreline, (but) how far can we move back? We are in danger of falling off the backside of our islands," Mr Tong told Reuters at a recent Pacific leaders' summit in Port Moresby, capital of Papua New Guinea. Kiribati's highest point is 87m above the sea. Most islands are coral atolls covered with just 2.5m of hard sand and meagre soil. Two uninhabited Kiribati islands, Tebua Tarawa and Abanuea, disappeared underwater in 199 and the island of Tepuka Savilivili no longer has any coconut trees due to salination. Mr Tong said the world's big polluters, like the United States and Australia who have remained outside the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gases, must face the moral consequences of their inaction. "That is a question that they have to ask themselves — are they willing to see us go under?" he said. The US pulled out of Kyoto in 2001 when President George W. Bush said it was too expensive and wrongly excluded poor nations from the first round of cuts to 2012. Australia has also refused to ratify the protocol. A UN study forecast some 50 million people could become environmental refugees by 2010, driven from their homes by desertification, rising sea levels, flooding and storms linked to climate change. Tuvalu Prime Minister Maatia Toafa hates the term "environmental refugee" but admits his 11,600 people may have to abandon their South Pacific island homes. Tuvalu consists of a fringe of nine atolls, with the highest point no more than 5m above sea level, but most a mere 2m high. A small island off the capital Funafuti has already disappeared and some islanders have been forced to grow crops in tins because the soil has become too salty. In February, only days before Kyoto came into effect, Tuvaluans in the capital watched high tides and strong winds send waves crashing across the main road. "The prediction is (that) in 50 years Tuvalu will not exist," said Mr Toafa. "Resettlement is impossible in the country because all the islands are low-lying." In the Indian Ocean, the Maldives' 1200 coral islands lie so low that some were briefly swamped when the December 26 Asian tsunami hit the scattered island state off India. Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom published *The Maldives: A Nation in Peril* in 1998, outlining the danger of rising seas. Since then, coastal defences have been built and efforts made to protect reefs and guard against storm surges. "We are doing all we can to protect our nation. However, what we do here

in the Maldives does not guarantee us an environmentally secure future,” Mr Gayoom told Reuters. “Our safety would only be certain when the international community takes concrete steps to curb greenhouse gas emissions and specific actions to reduce the threat of sea level rise.” Mr Gayoom said he hoped the UN climate change conference in Montreal, starting today, would lay the foundations for a post-Kyoto solution by finding common ground with big polluting nations. “Those who have rejected the Kyoto Protocol should not wait for unequivocal scientific proof of the climate change process but need to find the political will to go beyond the short-term benefits of their respective countries for an environmentally secure future,” Mr Gayoom said.

PC 7/3/06: Waves wipe out atoll food gardens

MORE than 4100 people of the outer atolls of Bougainville are going hungry after their food gardens were engulfed by storm waves last week. The big winds hit hard last weekend, washing out food gardens and damaging houses on Carterets, Nuguria, Mortlock and Tasman Islands. Atolls District Manager Paul Tobasi said the huge storm wind at the weekend hit hard most of the island’s shorelines with the large waves battering gardens and villages along the shorelines. He said the enormous floods spoilt the gardens and people have been without food for the last week. Mr Tobasi said the worst affected was Carterets and Nuguria islands where three-quarters of the island was covered under water Mr Tobasi, upon a request from the Bougainville administration, travelled with his officers to the island to carry out an assessment on the affected areas. In Mortlock, residential areas were affected with several houses blown off by strong winds and the shorelines had shifted inland following the huge battering by the waves. All the gardens in Nuguria and Carterets were washed away. “Gardens on the island of Piul and Yangain in Carterets were completely washed away by floods and high deposits of salt damaged all the crops in the gardens,” Mr Tobasi said. He said a long stretched of food gardens on Han Island, also in Carterets, was engulfed by floods from the huge waves. People have been without food for a while and were living on the little food collected from the ruins after the flood. They are now living on dry coconuts and fish. Mr Tobasi had submitted a report to the administration and it had responded with more than 2000 bales of rice for the affected atolls. Another 2000 bales of rice from the National Emergency Service were loaded on the MV Sankamap yesterday afternoon to be sent to the hungry islanders.

PC 10/3/06: Foreigners depleting resources

THE Carterets Islanders have complained of their sea resources being depleted by illegal foreigners. The islanders said they could not rely on their marine resources for food supply when they were currently experiencing food shortage. Last week, the islanders had to wait for relief food supplies from the Autonomous Bougainville Government’s shipment after they were hit hard by huge storm waves caused by strong winds. The islanders are facing desperate food shortage as their food gardens and homes were caught under water in a flood that covered three-quarters of the islands, destroying food crops and fruit trees in its path. In a report compiled by Atolls District Manager Paul Tobasi — after his visit to the island — the islanders stated that the sea has been a major resource of food supply to them. But a lot of resources have been depleted by islanders themselves or by foreigners. Giant empty clam shells lying around on the reef in the lagoon was a result of discriminate and unauthorised harvesting by Japanese and Taiwanese fishing vessels. The villagers are demanding that their respective

governments be held responsible for the damage done to the reefs. The report stated that the presence of these clam shells is a very valuable factor for the atolls. First of all it keeps the coral alive and attracts fish species. The assessment report stated: "It also slows down inward tides and stops shoreline erosion."

PC 27/4/06: Islanders go hungry

THE situation of food shortage on one of the atolls on Bougainville has gone from bad to worse, the local MP revealed yesterday. Member for Atolls and Fisheries Minister Taehu Pais said the Carterets Islanders were in dire need of food supply with their gardens washed away in recent floods. Mr Taehu, who visited Carterets and its outer atolls during the Easter weekend, said the people were living on dry coconut meat and fish because the relief food supplies from Bougainville had run out. The more than 1000 bales of rice supplied by administration lasted only two weeks. The atolls of Carterets, Nuguria, Tasman and Mortlock experienced huge waves that destroyed the food gardens. The waves were caused by high seas instigated by strong north-westerly winds. The strength of the wind at that time was recorded at 40-50 knots an hour while the sea current was flowing at 20 knots an hour. The floods had destroyed everything in its path and had travelled more than 300 metres inland in some areas of Nuguria and Carterets. The salt water had not subsided at Busuria and Sauma on Nuguria and Piul, Han, Iangain and Iesila islands on Carterets. Since the 1960s, the atolls have suffered badly from the effects of global warming. The shorelines have receded further thanks to the recent high tides. Mr Taehu said as a result of the rising sea level there is still water on the land and people could not tell when it would be safe to plant crops. Up till now the islanders have continued to ignore the government's call for their relocation to the mainland. But Mr Taehu said he held meetings with the islanders, and they have expressed a desire to relocate to mainland Bougainville. A piece of land in Manetai (Kuberia) in Central Bougainville has been made available for the relocation but until now the islanders have ignored the government's plea for them to vacate their islands. Mr Taehu said the National Emergency Services must provide funding for the people's relocation. The Autonomous Bougainville Government chipped in its share of the funds when the sea level rose about three weeks ago. Mr Taehu has called now on the National Government through the NES to respond immediately to the situation in Bougainville. Mr Taehu is now visiting Mortlock and Tasman Islands, which are faced with similar predicaments.

PC 4/5/06: 5000 islanders going hungry - MP

A MORE than 5000 people of the atolls of Bougainville are currently surviving on dry coconuts and fish as the situation of food shortage deteriorates, their local MP revealed yesterday. Autonomous Bougainville Government Member for Atolls and Fisheries Minister Taehu Pais told the Post-Courier the situation was the same in all the atoll islands of Nuguria, Mortlock, Tasman and Carterets, whose food gardens were washed away by recent high tides. Mr Taehu, who returned from a fact-finding mission to the outer islands yesterday, said after a month of flooding the staple food crop of kanokano (swamp taro) and other food crops have dried up. It means the islanders are at the mercy of the government's relief supplies. "They are currently living on dry coconut meat and fish because the relief food supplies from the Bougainville administration have run out a month ago," Mr Taehu said. More than 1000 bales of rice supplied by the administration had lasted only a couple of weeks, he said. The island of Carterets,

Nuguria, Tasman and Mortlock experienced huge waves that destroyed the food gardens.

PC 27/7/06: Rapid erosion affecting food crops in Bougainville

RAPID erosion is taking place on small islands in Bougainville, causing the sea level to rise, thus sinking the coastlines. The erosion and the rise in sea level has also increased the salt concentration and is affecting food crops on certain islands, especially Cartrets, Mortlock, Tasman and Nuguria. Autonomous Bougainville Government disaster co-ordinator Ephraim Eminoni said the four islands were the most affected in the region and the Autonomous Bougainville Government was supplying food on a quarterly basis to these islands. "The sea level is rising and causing the soil to have high concentration of salt which is killing food crops while many do not produce fruits," Mr Eminoni said. "We are looking at relocating the people from these islands but it is a costly exercise and might take a while for us to arrange land to settle them," Mr Eminoni said. The rapid erosion is caused by high seas, winds, sea surge and rising sea level.

TN 8/9/06: The ocean is slowly claiming Malasiga [Weekender]

MALASIGA, Papua New Guinea -- First, their fathers noticed the palm trees that seemed to be inching toward the water's edge and the fire pit that vanished beneath the tides.

Later, researchers came, scribbled measurements and offered a grim diagnosis: The sea is coming.

There is not a power line or factory or air conditioner within a day's walk of this village of 400 people in the southwest Pacific, but these subsistence fishermen are no strangers to the power of industrialization and climate change.

"There used to be two rows of houses," said Mickey Tarabi, a wood carver in his 50s, nodding toward the crystal blue sea. "The first one has been moved, and the second one will be gone soon."

Far over the horizon from the most advanced nations, scientists are measuring the effects of global warming in the world's least-industrialized corners. As the World Bank puts it, 15 percent of the world's population lives in high-income countries but releases "more than 75% of the carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are altering the Earth's climate."

If anyone still had doubts, the Bush administration's Climate Change Science Program in May found "clear evidence of human influences on the climate system," echoing the world's leading science organizations on the causes of global warming:

That climate change raises sea levels by heating the oceans, causing them to expand, and by accelerating the melting of glaciers and ice sheets, which funnels fresh water into the seas. By the middle of this century, smokestacks, tailpipes and other sources are on pace to raise the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by about 50 percent. In turn, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that sea levels will rise about 1 1/2 feet, or as much as 3 feet, by century's end.

That doesn't sound like much until you visit a place like this--or Sri Lanka or coastal Louisiana -- where communities are thriving on vulnerable shorelines. In Bangladesh, more than 10 million people live within 3 feet of sea level. Overall, the World Bank predicts that rising sea levels "could displace tens of millions of people living in low-lying areas" around the world.

Worries about the next century

"Sea-level rise isn't going to go away," said John Hunter, an oceanographer who studies sea levels at the University of Tasmania in Australia. "Our main worry is not what has happened in the past 30 or 40 years, but what will happen in the next century."

In a broad new study supported by the Australian government, Hunter and a team of researchers examined decades of measurements of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, concluding that natural fluctuations could not explain the rise. "The analysis clearly indicates that sea level in this region is rising," they wrote.

That is little surprise to Papua New Guinea, a rugged island nation about the size of California, east of Indonesia. The 5.7 million people in PNG, as it is known, have particular interest in their natural surroundings because 85 percent subsist on what they grow, fish or hunt.

Here, rising waters are swamping coastal villages and small islands.

Salt water is inundating coastal farms, destroying vital crops and orchards. Among the hardest hit areas are the Carteret Islands, where citizens have tried and failed to hold back rising waters. In April, a minister who visited the area returned to report that islanders were surviving on only coconuts and fish after relief supplies ran out.

You eventually get drowned'

Professor Hugh Davies of the University of Papua New Guinea calculates that if the estimate holds true, a rise of 50 centimeters to 100 centimeters would be enough to affect all of PNG's coastal plains and swamplands.

"If you are on one of these islands," Hunter said, "you will be continually swamped by water-laden sand, and if you don't clear it up, you eventually get drowned."

PNG has a plan, of sorts. While the country might seem to have little role in reducing carbon emissions--it is better known for forests than factories--its leaders see a way to take part in global efforts to control greenhouse gases.

In international climate talks, PNG and eight other rain forest countries have proposed that nations that reduce deforestation should be eligible to earn and sell "carbon credits." A carbon credit, which represents a ton of carbon absorbed from the atmosphere or prevented from burning, can be traded in international markets under terms set by the Kyoto Protocol--meaning, in theory, a farmer could make more money from saving his forest than razing it. Current rules allow countries to earn credits for planting new trees but not for protecting existing ones.

"You want us to go down the path to sustainable forest management. Now give us the right incentive to do this," said Gunther Joku, a senior policy planner at PNG's Department of Environment and Conservation.

Whatever happens, it will probably be too late for Malasiga. The village sits on a small, flat peninsula jutting into the Solomon Sea. Drying turtle shells dangle in the wind, and children shinny up palm trees for coconuts.

Some villagers have fled for higher ground, but most have not. They seem to know that when the history of the village is finally written, nobody will say they weren't warned. Yet they struggle to recognize the problems before them.

"I grew up here," said Aaron Mokedu, who is preparing to move the single-room thatched-roof home he shares with his wife and two sons. "But now the water comes up too far. It's not like before."

Elders first noticed the rising water in 1982. It eroded the sand and bared the rocks beneath. Then it tugged down the palm trees beside the ocean's edge.

Eventually it began lapping at the stilts that hold up their thin-walled homes. About five years ago, the highest tides swamped the village entirely for the first time anyone could recall.

Holding back rising seas

A world away, other places are trying to hold back rising seas as well. A Dutch developer is selling "amphibious homes" built on pontoons. The German island of Sylt is reportedly coating its rocky shores with a polyurethane that it hopes will dampen erosion caused by waves and hurricanes.

Here in Malasiga, they have a slightly lower-tech strategy: reclaiming land on the leeward side of the peninsula, one handful of dirt at a time.

"When we sweep up, we put all the leaves and coconut shells and sand over here," Tarabi, the wood carver, said, studying the fragile brown sliver of land they had filled in behind their homes. He shrugged.

"In 1997, some graduate students came and told us this was going to happen," he said, "And now it has happened."

TN 11/12/06: Film crew visits Carterets Island

A FILM crew and research team is on Carterets Island this week filming the island mostly affected by global warming and rising seas in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

The team includes reporters and Greenpeace monitoring members, who are researching the effects of global warming in many parts of the world.

The research team went to Carterets at the request of the Member for Bougainville Leo Hannett, who said that the trip to Carterets Island was seen as a very needed and worthwhile exercise to determine the current needs of the people of the Carterets Group of Islands.

Mr Hannett said the trip to Carterets was taken as a charity trip for the people of Carterets Islands.

The group went on the MV Shimmer Jean, which had been in the region for the last three months awaiting the granting of a licence to buy fish and other marine products from Bougainville fishermen.

TN 21/12/06: British TV to film sinking Carteret isles (By MARILYN PAUL)

THE ITN TV news crew from London will visit Bougainville next month to do a documentary on the Carteret Islands which are sinking due to rising sea levels. News editor Michael Herrod said the programme was part of a series of reports into climate change showing the environmental threats on the planet due to rising sea levels. Mr Herrod said they would like to take footage of the Carteret Islands and talk to the residents about the impact of the rising waters as well as film their effects.

The report and the live presentation of the programme will focus on the geographical, geological, physical and the human impact of these changes and what the world should learn from it as well as what it can do to help stop it.

Mr Herrod said each report would be broadcasted over a series of five nights from Jan 15 to 19.

The reports will be seen in the UK by up to six million viewers daily, and also by the networks affiliated links like CNN international, which gives the report a massive global coverage.

In the US, they have a link up with NBC reaching still more potential viewers.

The team is expected to leave London and arrive in Buka via Port Moresby on Jan 10 and return to Britain on Jan 20.

ITN is based in central London, with bureaus and offices in Washington, Moscow, Johannesburg, Jerusalem, Bangkok, Brussels, Beijing, Paris, LA, Leeds and Sydney. Autonomous Bougainville region chief administrator Peter Tsiamalili said ABG welcomed the TV group's coverage of the sinking islands.

TN 27/12/06: Atolls may not exist after 2008 (By CLIFFORD FAIPARIK)

ABOUT 600 Mortlock islanders in Bougainville face being homeless forever when their atolls disappear under the rapidly rising sea by 2008, takuufilm website reported yesterday.

The 12 atolls are currently been filmed by a documentary team made up of New Zealand anthropologists and filmmakers.

According to www.takuufilm.blogspot.com, the main atoll where the people live on is only 300m², while the rest are smaller and used for gardens and as a source of materials to built houses and furniture. Only one atoll has been reserved as a sea birds sanctuary. Auckland University anthropologist Dr Richard Moyle with documentary director Briar March and cameraman Zane Holmes will stay for two months to study the phenomenon of the rising seas levels as a result of global warming.

Dr Moyle who has visited the atolls eight times since 1996, believe the islands will soon sink.

“The sea is rising at a rate of 2cm annually and the atolls, which are home to about 600 people of Polynesian origin, are about 2m above sea level. Currently the highest point on the atolls is just 1m. Its possible disappearance can be viewed as a dummy run for other low-lying Pacific islands, as sea levels rise due to global warming.”

Last year, a king tide, which occurs biannually and can reach 1.5m, almost washed over the island. Already, rising sea levels meant soil was too salty to grow taro and within two years, safe anchorage for the community's vital fishing canoes is expected to be lost.

TN 4/1/07: Atolls in risk of sinking (By CLIFFORD FAIPARIK)

THE people on the Mortlock and Tasman atolls in the Autonomous Bougainville Region are now becoming aware of the possibility of the sinking of their atolls by next year, a website reported yesterday.

“The people are now having open discussion about the changes that are taking place on their atolls.

“These atolls that are home for generations to about 1,200 people of Polynesian origin face the risk of going homeless forever when it sinks under the rapidly rising sea.”

According to www.takuufilm.blogspot.com, an officer from the Bougainville government had held talks with these people about the possibility of relocating them to the mainland Bougainville.

Currently, a documentary team made up of New Zealand anthropologists and filmmakers have been on the Mortlock atolls since last month.

The team that comprises of Auckland university anthropologist Dr Richard Moyle with documentary film director Briar March and camera man Zane Holmes will stay for two months to study the phenomenon of the rising sea levels on the 12 atolls as a result of global warming.

PC 12/1/07: What is the policy on rising sea level? [editorial]

A three-member television crew from the United Kingdom are now in the Carteret islands of Bougainville filming the effects of the rising sea levels on the lives of the people there.

This is a global issue that affects the lives of thousands or millions of people living on small islands all over the world. In Papua New Guinea, people living on low lying islands around Bougainville, East New Britain, New Ireland, Milne Bay and Manus provinces are being affected by rising sea levels.

This issue surfaced at the 2006 Governors conference held in Alotau. Manus Governor Jacob Jumagot raised concern about the future of many islands people in a presentation to the conference. To date, nothing has been forthcoming from the Minister for Environment and Conservation nor his department on this issue. We have heard nothing from the Government about whether it has a national policy or position on how to deal with people affected by rising sea levels. The fact of the matter is that thousands of islanders have either lost their homes or are about to lose their homes as the level of sea water rises. It is expected this situation will get worse this year as the El Nino effect starts to hurt people. It is an extremely serious matter that deserves urgent national government intervention. People are losing their homes for good.

Is this not a matter of concern to the Government? Mr Jumagot said at the Governors' Conference that seven islands in Manus had already become submerged and inhabitants were evacuated to other parts of the Manus mainland. More are expected to go the same way. In East New Britain, people in the Duke of York Islands are also suffering in similar circumstances. The Carteret islanders have lost their gardening land and their homes are under serious threat. The survival of thousands of islanders in the Islands region is at risk. When can we expect the Government to come out and state its position and tell these people what its plans are for helping them?

This is a major environmental disaster of global proportions. It calls for urgent government action to save thousands of lives affected by a weather phenomena that is not likely to stop. We have heard no screams for help from those affected but we expect the National Government and provincial governments to work together to rescue them. The island governments through Governor Jumagot and his Provincial Administrator, Wep Kanawi, have raised the alarm.

It is up to the Minister for Provincial Affairs, Sam Abal and his department to take it up with the relevant government authorities for action.

TN 6/2/07: Relocation office set up on Carterets (By AUGUSTINE KINNA)

The Carterets Islands in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville has now in place a central office to deal with the relocation programme for its habitants.

The Tulele Peisa Association through the Hapiu and Mabilu council of elders established the association to coordinate the relocation programme of the Carterets people.

Instead of setting up a committee to oversee relocation processes, Tulele Peisa has now been managing and overseeing the process, liaising with the atoll's district office, local level government, Bougainville administration, Atolls Member James Togel and provincial MP Leo Hannet.

Tulele Peisa chairlady Ursula Rakova said the association was a legally registered entity that sought to help the ABG find land to locate the Carterets islanders, who were threatened by the rise in sea level due to global warming.

“We have located several plantations which we think might suit the islanders, however, negotiations with land owners is yet to be conducted,” Mrs Rakova said.

She revealed that in the early 1980s, an area in Kuveria, Manetai, was identified and purchased by the Government, but due to the civil unrest, the area was no longer available.

Mrs Rakova said the situation on the island was worsening as the rise in sea level continued to eat away the shorelines.

TN 9/2/07: A sinking paradise [Weekender]

Carteret Islanders in the Solomon Sea are fighting a losing battle against rising sea levels. AUGUSTINE KINNA reports.

The Carterets Island in the Solomon Sea is fighting a losing battle against rising sea levels.

The atoll is located 86 kilometres north-east of Bougainville in the South Pacific region at a latitude of 4°45'S and a longitude of 155°24'E.

The atoll has a total land area of 0.6 square kilometers and a maximum elevation of 1.5 meters above sea level.

Life for the islanders is not like it used to be. Each day they are having to build sea walls out of giant clams shells and plant mangroves to protect their island from the sea which is slowly eating away at their island.

Global warming and climate change results in strong winds, heavy storms and high tides which washes away homes, destroys food gardens and contaminate fresh water. Many of the islanders are ignorant of the global factors that are affecting their simple way of life.

They are not aware about pollution caused by industrialised countries pumping out tonnes of poisonous gas into our atmosphere is causing climate change and global warming.

Recently I accompanied a TV crew from the British Independent Television News who went to film a documentary on the island.

We were warmly welcomed by the islanders and I saw that they were well prepared for our coming.

The chiefs and the Atolls Executive Manager Pual Tobasi met and spoke with the ITN crew about life on the island.

The ITN cameraman Duncan Jones filmed various aspects of the island life and the effects on rising sea levels.

They interviewed a number of people about how life has changed because of climate change.

The crew was amazed by the colourful culture and tradition of the people and how they have learnt to survive through difficult times.

A common sight on most islands are sea walls being built with giant clam shells.

The effects are evident, coconuts tree trunks in the sea which only a few years ago was dry land.

The islanders are very worried and are looking for vacant land on the mainland of Bougainville to resettle.

The Autonomous Bougainville Government is also trying to negotiate for some land to resettle displaced people.

But as the sea levels rise there are many that find it hard to move away.

Many say they can not bear to leave their island home, which they love and treasure

down deep in their hearts and soul.

"This is our heart, this is our home and it will be difficult for us to leave it behind. This is where we are born, our island home in the sun and we won't just let selfish people take it away from us is like this," they said.

Despite everything the people on the island maintain their traditions. Dancing and singing is part of their everyday life.

The television crew were warmly welcomed to every island we visited with a traditional singing kaur, solomon dances and string band music.

After all filming was done the ITN crew sent the footage from the island by a satellite phone system to their headquarters in Britain.

On the last day the islanders had a big feast to farewell us.

It was sad saying good bye to such beautiful people on a beautiful island which in a few years time may not exist.

PC 5/4/07: Nukumans' dilemma [Weekend Extra]

A RING of more than 20 small islets surrounding a large lagoon is all that makes up the fascinating Nukumanu Atoll or the Tasman Group of Islands.

The islands were named after the European navigator Abel Tasman, who first sighted the islands in the early 1640s, according to historical records.

Of the land, none of the sandy strip over coral is more than a metre or so above sea level.

Tasman lies just four degrees south of the Equator and is one of several Polynesian outlying atolls which are part of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

Tasman Islanders, also known as Nukumans, are closely related to the Feads (Nuguria), the Mortlocks (Nukutoa) and Ontong Java.

The latter share a sea border (PNG/Solomon Islands) with the Tasmans. Also from one of these atolls, Mortlocks hails the popular Na'a horau (the travellers) band which recently stormed the airwaves with their ever popular song "Tehine Moana". In addition; these people also have similarities with those of Tuvalu and Tokelau islands north of Samoa.

Amotu or Imotu is the name of the incredibly tidy village where most of the islanders' reside. The islanders use a larger island to grow mostly swamp taro and bananas.

This larger island, known as Waihare, is also used as a burial ground and mourning huts erected at the western end. The rest of the Waihare Island is mainly coconuts used to supplement the diet of fresh reef fish.

The rest of the smaller islands are used for camping and fishing activities.

Back at Amotu Village, tattooed elderly people greet you with a smile and even though they hardly speak Tok Pisin, men and women nod their head as they pass by to carry out their everyday chores necessary for their survival. Inquisitive children follow you around asking you all sorts of questions in their own tongue while one or two kids who'd been to Buka would act as translators in Tok Pisin.

It's not uncommon for a smiling Polynesian child to greet you with good morning late in the afternoon then running away to hide as his senior scolds or laughs at him.

This alone speaks volumes of how isolated these people are from the rest of Papua New Guinea.

With limited food plants and economic opportunities on land, Tasman Islanders make maximum use of the lagoon and the nearby ocean.

The people are excellent fishermen, divers and sailors. They would have died out centuries ago if they were not skilled ocean people. In addition to the seafood used for

local consumption, trochus shells (used for making buttons and jewelry) and beche-de-mer are the two most important resources of the islanders. These products are exported to Asia and are the backbone of the Tasman economy.

According to a team of researchers who visited the neighboring Ontong Java just a few kilometres away, the term beche-de-mer refers to the dried product manufactured from the marine animals commonly known as sea cucumbers, sea slugs or scientifically called holothurians.

Pislama as bech-de-mer is referred to in Tok Pisin is produced by a process of boiling, cleaning and drying and some cases smoking.

The finished product which has a hard rubbery texture is normally prepared by repeated soaking and boiling before it is consumed. This product is considered a delicacy in China and South East Asia. In diving for beche-de-mer, which is the occupation of most able-bodied Nukumans fishermen, deep free-diving is the method commonly used. Young divers are much better because they can dive deeper than those of 24 years and upward who “retire” to easier types of fishing, as they cannot dive nearly as deep as the younger boys.

The actual diving techniques are interesting.

In waters about 20m deep, using masks, fins and snorkel, the diver hyperventilates then slowly descends (rather than hurries) to the bottom using only a partial “dog paddle” type arm stroke. The diver is able to remain leisurely at that depth for a considerable period before calmly and slowly rising to the surface. The absence of any long arm-strokes or quickly stretching back to the surface at the end of the dive is noticeable.

In waters deeper than 20m, a device nick-named a “torpedo” is dropped over the target. This device is lead weighted with finlets and a barbed shaft at one end. Mono filament fishing line is attached to the other end. Like a wire guided missile the torpedo can be directed after launch by tugging to one side on the fishing line. If the diver is a good shot a sea cucumber will be stuck and subsequently pulled to the surface.

Sometimes though, a poor turtle may stray in range.

As there are high prices for beche-de-mer, a huge overseas market and eager divers, these factors combine with the limited area of the Tasman lagoon has resulted in a situation where over-exploitation is becoming a serious problem. Too much bech-de-mer is being harvested.

Without some form of regulation, the market forces could easily drive the Tasman pislama resources to commercial extinction. To ensure sustainability, the Tasman Council of Elders or chiefs close the lagoon for bech-de-mer during alternate years. During the closed years the lagoon is open to trochus diving.

The future for bech-de-mer divers is uncertain.

Whether they will be able to continue with beche-de-mer harvesting depends on their homegrown management system and the determination of the Tasman Council Elders to make the system work.

PC 10/8/07: Carterets transport cut off

CARTERETS islanders will be out of touch for the next couple of months after supporters of a losing candidate confiscated their only passenger boat last Monday. This boat was donated to them last year under a “member project scheme” to ferry passengers between Carterets island and Buka town.

The Atolls district manager Paul Tobasi confirmed the reports yesterday, saying he was upset about the manner in which their boat was taken away from them.

He said they were looking at alternatives like a possible court challenge to set up an

investigations as the actions of those that took the boat away were making the Carterets Islanders to suffer.

“I thought that the boat was given as a token under development projects for the people of North Bougainville, which the Carterets is part of, to transport basic services like medicine and other stuff but that does not seem to be the case,” said Mr Tobasi.

“We also use that boat to ferry passengers and it is sad now as the people of Carterets will be out of touch for a long time until we find another boat to help them” he said.

“The actions by the people who took the boat will be investigated and if we find out that it was done to bribe people during elections we will sue.”

Carterets Islanders, he said, were hungry because there was no food on the island due to rising sea levels for the 2550 people living on the island and they were also badly affected. The soils on the island, he said were affected by sea water and they were no longer able to make gardens as vegetables grown there were dying.