

Scientists join forces in call for action to save coral reefs

July 9 2012

Like their warrior ancestors, leaders of many Pacific Island nations have been making efforts to safeguard their countries, this time by sounding an alarm as the impact of climate change becomes more apparent. Today their efforts received a big boost with the release of a Scientific Consensus Statement on Climate Change and Coral Reefs that is supported by over 2,400 scientists, showing the threats that reef corals are under across the globe and calling for governments worldwide to take steps to protect valuable coral reef ecosystems. The statement was drafted by a group of eminent scientists under the auspices of the Center for Ocean Solutions (COS) at Stanford University in California and was released at the 12th International Coral Reef Symposium in Cairns, Australia.

"[Rising sea levels](#), more intense storms, changes in ocean chemistry due to air and water pollution - all these stress coral reefs," observed Steve Palumbi, an expert on corals with the Center for Ocean Solutions and the chief organizer in developing the [consensus statement](#). "At least 25 percent of the world's coral reefs have been degraded. Because of the global origin of climate change, the only way to tackle this is through a worldwide effort."

[Pacific island](#) nations have a special relationship with coral reefs. Long a part of their culture and heritage, today many islanders derive their livelihoods from tourism and fishing that are dependent on healthy reefs. Pacific island leaders will again take their case for a concerted effort to help coral reefs to world bodies including the [United Nations](#)

[Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) and Pacific Islands Forum where they hope the support of scientific experts representing diverse interests will galvanize action by governments and the islands' development partners.

"We want leaders of Pacific island nations to know that the scientific community has their backs and is ready and available to support them in their calls for action, based on scientific evidence," pointed out Meg Caldwell, executive director of COS. "Members of our working group have agreed to be on call, to show up at conferences and to be available to write materials to share locally, regionally and globally."

"This is an extraordinary example of science working in close collaboration with policy makers to better the human condition and the environment," stated Larry Crowder, science director at COS. "As a scientist, it's exciting to apply the best available science to urge and shape a better policy course."

The Climate Change and Corals working group was the brainchild of a discussion between COS management and the founder of the Okeanos Foundation, Dieter Paulmann, which has supported the COS working group.

The threat of climate change to Pacific island nations has been periodically spotlighted by world bodies, including the 2000 UN Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and Pacific which issued this statement: "The Pacific islands view climate change as a major disaster and have openly and continuously criticized the industrial nations for failure to take definitive steps towards abating pollution of the global atmosphere. There are three distinct impacts from this pollution; global warming, sea level rise and climate change. In fact, despite continuing improvement in measurements and predictive computer programmes, nobody knows exactly what the outcome of

atmospheric pollution will be, but if the current range of peculiar weather and catastrophic deaths of a wide range of important ecosystems are any indication, the small islands of the world have good cause to be worried."

In another move to build momentum behind the issue, last month Pacific island leaders met at their annual Association of Pacific Island Legislatures assembly in Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. There Meg Caldwell and working group member, Robert Richmond, Professor of Conservation Biology, University of Hawaii, explained the implications of the Scientific Climate Change and Coral Consensus Statement and urged island leaders to utilize the scientists from the COS working group to help them build and support their cases for action on climate change in discussions with world bodies and for actions locally toward coral reef resilience in the face of [climate change](#). At the conclusion of the APIL meeting, the delegates adopted a resolution strongly supporting local, regional and international action. Their resolution joins a March 2012 companion resolution from their executive branch counterparts from the Micronesia Chief Executives' Summit.

By the end of this century, the best available science predicts that sea levels may rise by as much as 1.7 meters while [ocean chemistry](#) and temperatures could change enough to kill many of the [coral reefs](#) that support thriving Pacific ecosystems critical to people's jobs and habitat. Pacific warriors have a long history of defending their islands. The world may be at the edge of another pivotal period in history where the well being of nations hangs on actions to safeguard the planet's environment.

Provided by Stanford University

Citation: Scientists join forces in call for action to save coral reefs (2012, July 9) retrieved 17

July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-scientists-action-coral-reefs.html>

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