

# TROUBLE IN PARADISE

CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC



**TROUBLE IN  
PARADISE**  
CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC

COVER AND PAGES 8-9

**Maxim Va'a  
Samoa**

'Many residential areas are heavily affected by floods, like this house in Taumeasina village.'

PAGES 4-5

**William Yates  
Solomon Islands**

'Houses are already submerged in the sea, while there are still homes on partial land that is slowly but surely being eroded and taken over by the sea.'





# A Message from Her Excellency Ms Iona Thomas OBE, British High Commissioner to New Zealand

We are living in a climate crisis and need to intensify our global efforts to address it. The Pacific is at the forefront, with climate change now an existential threat to the security and well-being of the region.

In the lead-up to the COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow, Scotland, the UK Government invited people from Pacific Island Countries to document the everyday impacts of climate change in their region.

The photographs in this exhibition are a selection of the winning entries from that competition. They paint a stark picture of how climate change is affecting life in the Pacific – through the eyes of the people that live in these nations.

The photographers, some then as young as eight, have recorded rising sea levels, warming temperatures, increased frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones, and the resulting negative impacts on their communities and environment.

These images show devastation, but also hope. They demonstrate the resilience of the Pacific and make a compelling case for action to reduce emissions and for amplifying the voices of communities in Pacific Island Countries across the world.

The UK Government is renewing its efforts to tackle the climate and nature crisis at home and around the world together with our partners in the Pacific. Supporting this exhibition is a demonstration of these efforts. We hope diverse viewers find the photographs engaging, thought provoking and a catalyst to take action.



# A Message from Ms Natasha Beckman, Director, British Council Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Our mission is to support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. For British Council New Zealand and the Pacific, arts and culture are an important means to address the global issues of our time. Climate change and cultural diversity are key priorities for us, working closely alongside Māori and Pacific communities.

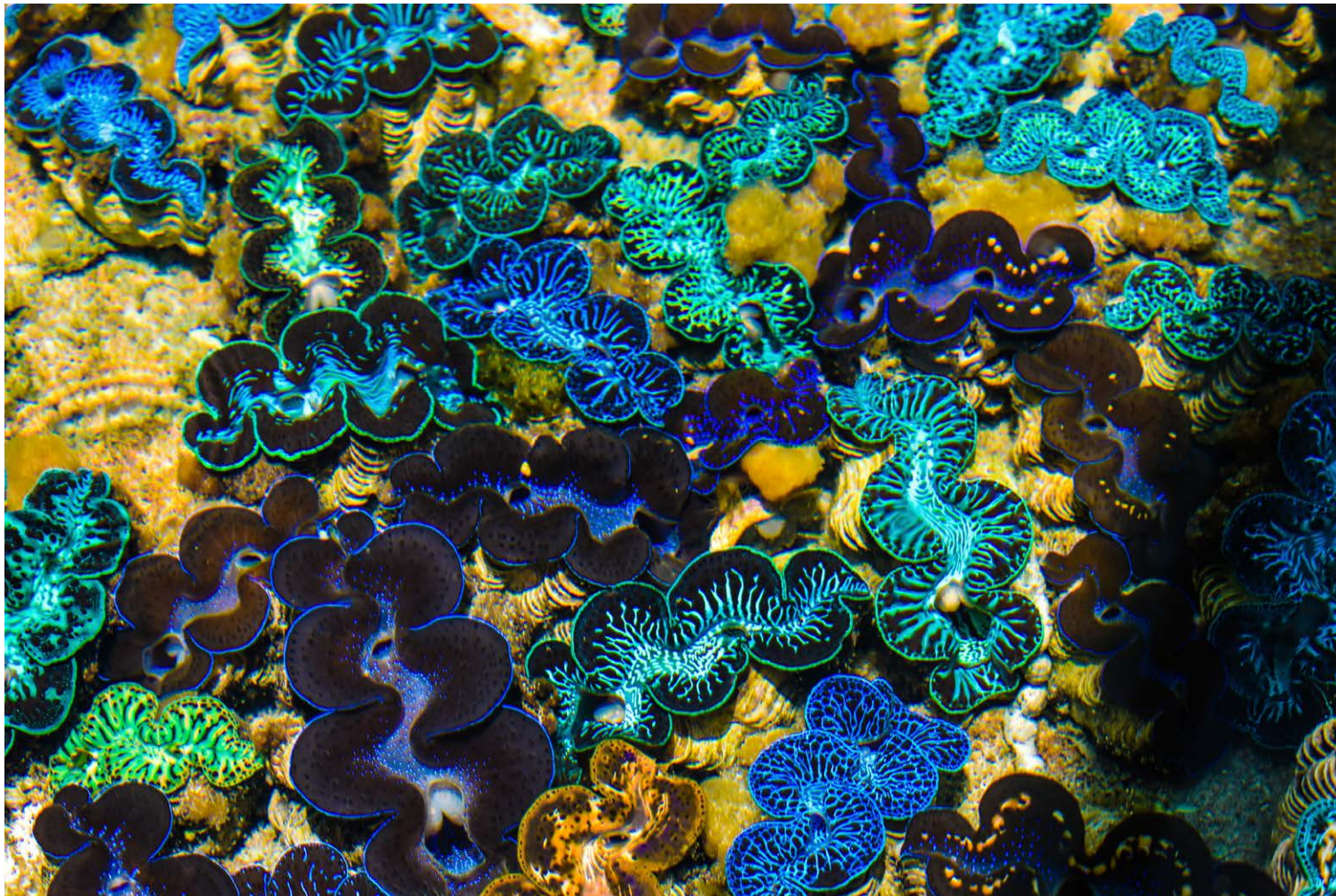
We have worked with many organisations to tour this exhibition and help raise awareness about the climate crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, including Ngā Pātaka Kōrero o Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Library, Festival for the Future, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa National Library of New Zealand, Pāremata Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament, Tūhura Otago Museum and The Turner Centre, Kerikeri. Photographs from the exhibition are also available online.

We are delighted to partner with the British High Commissions in Wellington and Apia, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Auckland University of Technology to present the exhibition at Falemata'aga/Museum of Samoa during CHOGM 2024. The exhibition speaks to CHOGM's theme 'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth'. World leaders will walk among these visual stories of resilience, confronting the reality of our changing world.

The journey of *Trouble in Paradise: Climate Change in the Pacific* doesn't end in Samoa. These compelling images will feature in exhibitions at Auckland University of Technology in 2025, supporting its teaching, learning and research while inspiring the next generation.

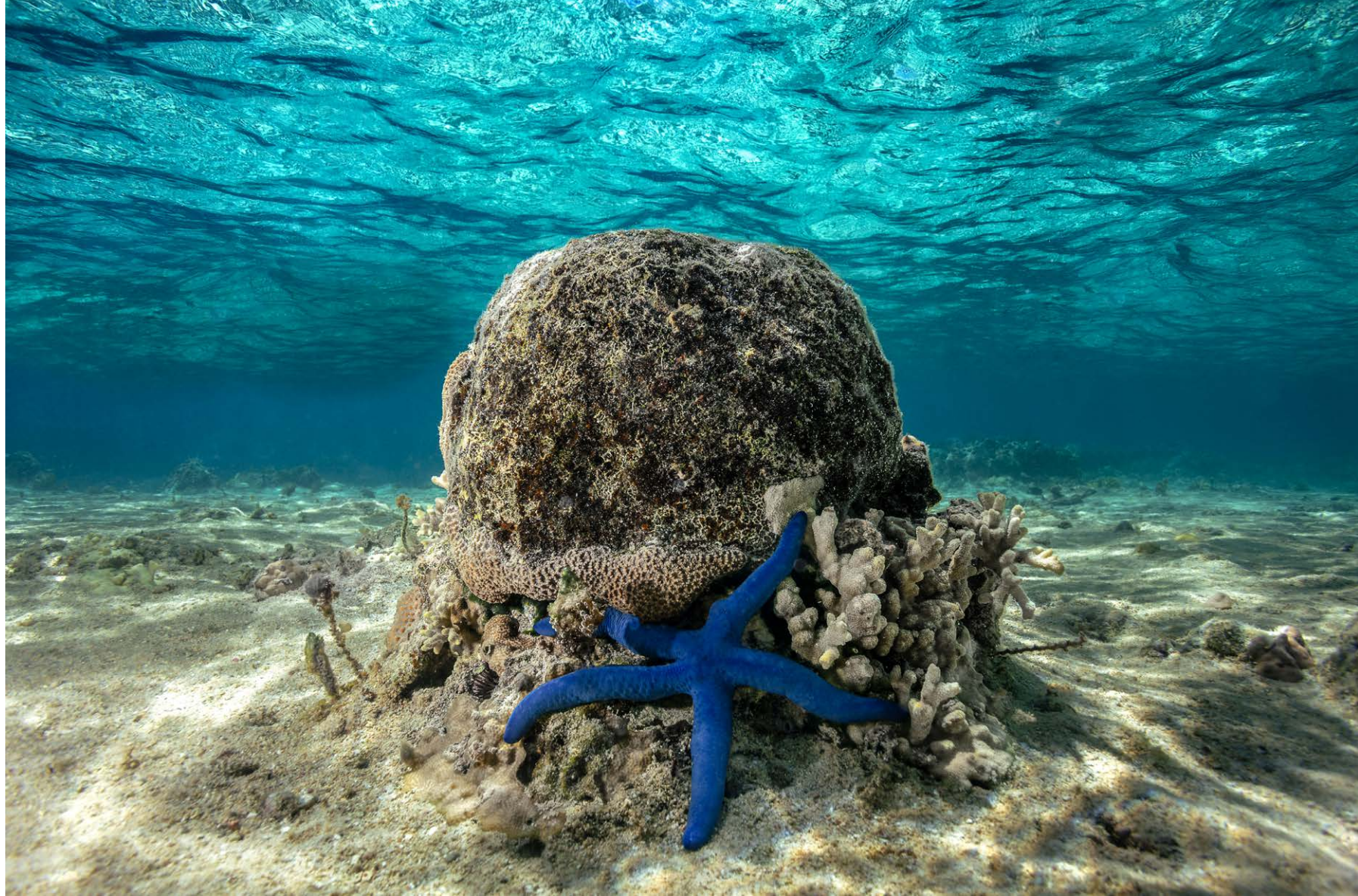
*Trouble in Paradise* is a visual odyssey, capturing the raw beauty and urgent challenges faced by Pacific communities on the front lines of climate change who, despite being some of the lowest emitting countries, are often the hardest hit. In the words of Tim Kong, Director, Digital Experience, National Library of New Zealand: "This project starts to re-centre a Pacific version of the lived challenges and very concrete realities that exist for Pacific people. That is incredibly important".





**Tarani Takai**  
**Cook Islands**

'Baby blues need our help.  
We need to be better caretakers  
of our island.'



**Dan Shipp**  
**Fiji**

'This blue sea star is extremely sensitive to changes in water temperature, oxygen levels and acidity, all of which are key indicators of the health of our marine environment. The marine environment directly affects our climate on Earth.'



Taina Toi  
Cook Islands

'Our corals are bleaching.  
We need to save them.'

from big waves  
that undercut  
the low-lying road  
and shrinking beach,  
where your tide-beating  
heart rolls

From *A Report on the Ocean* by David Eggleton



**Jovesa Naisua**  
**Fiji**

'Niko Vulaca looks at the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Yas, which demolished his island home in December. The physical devastation was something the Yara on Kia Island had never experienced.'

**Justin Naisua**  
**Fiji**

'Ten-year-old Epineri Lata takes a dip in the ocean to escape the incredible heat at his village of Yaro on the island of Kia, which was ravaged by Cyclone Yasa. The islanders of Kia have had to deal with two extreme climate events: rising sea levels and the powerful super storm, Yasa.'



your weather  
your blue starfish,  
your purple  
your forked stabs  
of lightning,  
shape-shift in the  
lagoons of your

patterns  
of wild indigo,  
thunderheads,  
your  
hammering rain  
latitudes

From *A Report on the Ocean* by David Eggleton

# Trouble in Paradise

Professor Damon Salesa,  
Vice-Chancellor, Auckland  
University of Technology

Those who live close to the waters of the Pacific, in traditions that go back thousands of years—in some cases tens of thousands—know that there are new troubles in our world. These troubles, now evident to so many of the peoples of the Pacific, are climate and sustainability-centred, and are the catalyst for the photographs and creativity that are brought together in *Trouble in Paradise: Climate Change in the Pacific*.

Through the power of visual media, a group of new, often young, Pacific creatives have turned their lenses towards capturing the ways that this climate and sustainability trouble has come to them, in their parts of the world. These photographs—and their creators—come as authentic voices speaking to our shared global challenge, offering powerful and unique insight, vision and critique, coming in parts sombre, poignant, celebratory, and defiant.

These are voices, and a vision, we need.

Pacific ways of both being in and seeing the world have always been marginalized when others have held the pen, the paintbrush or the camera. This has even been true when—as so often has happened—the Pacific and its peoples are not only central, but essential, to the story. By putting Pacific voices at the centre, we not only allow authentic Pacific voices to be heard with integrity, but to hear and see what we would otherwise not.

I have written elsewhere about the uniquely Indigenous nature of the Pacific Ocean (see my recent book, *An Indigenous Ocean: Pacific Essays*). As an Indigenous Ocean, the Ocean of (Over) a Thousand Languages, it is a uniquely diverse place, where more than a fifth of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity is held amongst less than 1% of its people.

It is little wonder that the Pacific brings distinctive and complex contributions that often challenge the way the world sees climate change. This is fed by the unique oceanic context in which Pacific people live as guardians of land and sea at a vast scale (the Pacific is nearly one third of the world's surface). Once seen as small and remote, the renewed framing of these archipelagos as Large Ocean Nations invites a new vision, one supported by the shared regional vision of the 'Blue Pacific Continent' (now laid out in the Pacific Island Forum's 2050 strategy). These are all unique Pacific contributions to addressing global climate change.



In 2015, at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, we clearly saw how the world itself needed Pacific leadership. The contribution of the Pacific region, its leaders, and its individual nations, emerged to lead the world with the kind of courageous and ethical leadership that it was desperately in need of. It was to Pacific capitals like Majuro, Tarawa, Suva, Ngerulmud, and Avarua that the world turned, not Washington, Beijing or Berlin, and Pacific leaders, particularly the late Tony deBrum, were the animating force behind the 1.5 degree target, and the ‘coalition of high ambition’.

In a very real sense, in 2015 (as we have seen at times since) the continent that mattered most was the Blue Pacific Continent—an Indigenous Ocean.

Part of the search for new leadership in our world, is not only turning to the political and cultural leaders of the Pacific, but to other wellsprings of leadership also marginalized. On the issues of sustainability and climate change, perhaps the most determined and eloquent of new voices have been those of the young, and this is particularly true of the indigenous Pacific.

In a range of ways, through advocacy, activism, consciousness raising, and protest, youth have staked their claim on the issues of climate leadership. For Pacific youth in particular, the ways of tackling these challenges are notably diverse; they are increasingly digital, especially social media, but perhaps most interestingly they are very often artistic.

This intersection of the unique vision of the young with the astonishing cultural variety of the Pacific, and with the creative and critical spirit, is at the heart of *Trouble in Paradise*.

The art of photography has, as a visual medium, a unique power to capture and narrate the impacts of climate change. For our Pacific photographers represented here, it is clear that many of these impacts are already present in their everyday lives. *Trouble in Paradise* gives this group of artists a platform to capture these images and to tell their stories, and to tell them in their own ways.

In *Trouble in Paradise* the range of images, the array of stories, is as broad as the Pacific and as diverse as these peoples’ worlds. While outsiders’ views and images of Pacific climate change are attracted overwhelmingly to catastrophizing images—of dead coral, inundation and flooding, for our artists here this is only one kind of

image, one kind of story. And while there is plenty of attention given to the damage and harms, the risks and pains of climate change, from people who know it intimately and best, there is a broader range. These images make clear that these impacts of climate change are all very different when they are happening to you, to your family, and to your home.

But the range of images here make equally clear that, as we have already seen, Pacific people—including these artists and their art—are themselves leading, responding, and acting. Young Pacific people are rightfully concerned and angry at the challenges they face, which are not of their own making. But these young artists and those they image are not passive or simply victims. As the Pacific Climate Warriors have put it, ‘we are not drowning, we are fighting’.

Here art is action. And art as an action is not simply symbolic, but in alignment with the unique climate leadership contribution that the Pacific has made and will continue to in the future. The climate science is in, and we know exactly what we need to do to secure our future in that sense; the challenging part remains the ‘human and social science’ of how we get people to commit, to change, to act in ordinary ways that make a sustainable world real.

A big part of that is to tell stories that move people, from inaction, indifference or complicity, to sustainable climate action.

Following the exhibiton in Samoa, these photographs will be hosted at Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau. Here at AUT, a grateful caretaker of this powerful collection, we have found it speaks both to who we are, and the role we must play in our shared existential challenge. We are a university that is not just in, but of the Pacific, with an indigenous past and present that defines us, and where a third of our students are indigenous to Aotearoa or the Pacific.

In our new strategy—Te Kete—AUT has committed, after extensive consultation with our people, to a net zero carbon future. Our people, in their hearts and minds, are highly committed; but realizing this in the day to day, in our ordinary business will be the deeper and ongoing challenge. This collection will help us on this voyage: a voyaging star that will help keep our course, through a continued life at AUT, inspiring our staff and students and our teaching, learning and research.



PAGES 30-31

**Jacqui Shipp**  
**Fiji**

'Cyclone frequency has doubled in the last decade, exposing many Fijian villages to high winds, heavy flooding and sea surges.'



**Elena Pasilio**  
**Tokelau**

'As climate change threatens the future of our low-lying atolls, our only defence are the concrete sea walls four feet above sea level.'



**Hina Chuang**  
**Marshall Islands**

'The land of the sun-kissed skin.'

PAGES 36-37

**Kersom Richard**  
**Vanuatu**

'Vanuatu's main food supply is its local crops. Climate change is having an impact on agricultural production, but this doesn't stop people from Mele harvesting yam every 1st of January.'



**Stephanie Stevens**  
**Vanuatu**

'Protect our trees,  
they will protect us.'



moana waves

a hand

swallows

a yellow  
median strip

From *Girl from Tuvalu* by Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh



**Savenaca Viriviri**  
**Tuvalu**

'A view of the impact of climate  
change in Pacific Island countries.'

this week  
her name is Siligia

next week her name will be

Girl from Tuvalu:

Environmental  
Refugee

From *Girl from Tuvalu* by Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh





# Girl from Tuvalu

girl sits on porch  
back of house  
feet kicking  
salt water skimming  
like her nation  
running fast  
nowhere to go  
held up by  
Kyoto Protocol  
*An Inconvenient Truth*

this week her name is Siligia  
next week her name will be  
Girl from Tuvalu: Environmental Refugee

her face is 10,000  
her land is 10 square miles  
she is a dot  
below someone's accidental finger  
pointing westwards

the bare-chested boys  
bravado in sea spray  
running on tar-seal  
they are cars  
they are bikes  
they are fish out of water  
moana waves a hand  
swallows  
a yellow median strip

moana laps at pole houses  
in spring tide  
gulping lost piglets  
and flapping washing  
girl sits on porch  
kicking

**Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh ONZM FRSNZ,  
New Zealand Poet Laureate, 2017–19**



PAGES 44-45

**Faiiuga Vaialia**  
**Samoa/New Zealand**

'Young women of the islands.'

**Esther David**  
**Cook Islands**

'We are the next caretakers.  
The future awaits.'



moana laps at pole

in spring tide

gulping

and flapping

girl sits on porch

houses

lost piglets

washing

kicking

From *Girl from Tuvalu* by Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh



PAGES 50–51

**Geoggreyna Henry**  
**Cook Islands**

'Nature reminds us to appreciate  
life and the little things.'

PAGES 54–55

**Tera Takai**  
**Cook Islands**

'Polar opposites.'

**Dan Shipp**  
**Fiji**

'This lone mangrove root  
in Savusavu growing up  
through the water and into  
the air symbolises the critical  
relationship between the  
health of our oceans and the  
health of our climate.'



where roots of  
mangrove forests  
bend like limbo dancers  
beneath the  
of flow  
sea currents

From *A Report on the Ocean* by David Eggleton





you drown the taro

in its

islands boggle  
to your

the niu falls from

and floats out  
of

plantation

flooded salt marsh,

and settle  
brackish surge,

the coconut tree

in search  
another island

From *A Report on the Ocean* by David Eggleton





PAGES 60–61

**Daniel Kakadi**  
**Solomon Islands**

‘Sikaiana is one of the atoll islands affected by the challenges of climate change. One of the main sources of food is taro, but over time the sea-level rise causes damage to land and crops, which sometimes means hunger for weeks and months.’

PAGES 64–65

**Ashetosh Kumar**  
**Fiji**

‘The rapid rise in sea-level is causing salt water intrusion, leading to soil erosion. Tree roots are getting weaker, as depicted in this picture.’

**Edward Manuga**  
**Solomon Islands**

‘Nature has taken a toll on this family home. This is what remains after two days of heavy rain and rough seas. Developing countries earn money from massive factories and enjoy their lives, while a family loses their home because of sea-level rise.’

the planet  
smudged to  
high heaven  
by carbon

*From A Report on the Ocean by David Eggleton*



**Maikolo Fonua  
Tonga**  
'This is Ha'apai Island,  
Kingdom of Tonga.'

# A Report on the Ocean

you want to strip the atoll,  
drag it all underwater,  
you want to extend your tidal reach,  
you want to bring the standing wave ashore,  
the darker tinge of your deeper waters,  
lapping from crystal shallows and acquamarine,  
where roots of mangrove forests  
bend like limbo dancers  
beneath the flow of sea currents

~

you survey, you eddy,  
you shuffle, you surround,  
you lift the copra freighter  
from its rusted anchors,  
you drown the taro plantation  
in its flooded salt marsh,  
islands boggle and settle to your brackish surge,  
the niu falls from the coconut tree  
and floats out in search of another island

~

you leave your message  
in the anger of the bigger storm,  
while buoys and fuel drums swirl  
with bottles, toothbrushes, plastic bags,  
cigarette lighters, tampon applicators,  
a plastic six-pack beer can holder  
wrapped around the muzzle of a dolphin,  
driftnets in mazy patterns of screen-savers,  
factory trawlers that vacuum shoals of fish  
through washes of dead water

~

your weather patterns of wild indigo,  
your blue starfish, your purple thunderheads,  
your forked stabs of lightning,  
your hammering rain  
shape-shift in the lagoons of your latitudes,  
your guano islets lie abandoned,  
your powder-white sandbanks glitter,  
coral skeleton reefs fall away to the sea floor  
from the languid lisp of your breakers

~

above you, bony ribs of thin clouds  
hang, streaked by vapour trails,  
the planet smudged to high heaven by carbon,  
but, colossal from your horizon,  
climbs the sun, and a frigate bird glides  
over the the shining mud, the living crab,  
the octopus squeezing through rocks,  
the parrotfish that revels in gentle rills  
from big waves that undercut  
the low-lying road and shrinking beach,  
where your tide-beating heart rolls

**David Eggleton,**  
New Zealand Poet Laureate, 2019–22

PAGES 78-79

**Maciu Nadore  
Fiji**

'These are pine trees. According to village elders, none of them have grown a single leaf since Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2015.'



**Genesis Nake  
Papua New Guinea**

'What once used to be a sealed road, making it an hour's drive to my village, is now a cliff because the sea has eaten the land. This is a clear result of the rising sea level due to climate change.'



salt water  
like

skimming  
her nation  
running fast

nowhere to go

held up by  
Kyoto Protocol

*An Inconvenient  
Truth*

From *Girl from Tuvalu* by Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh



The exhibition *Trouble in Paradise: Climate Change in the Pacific* is an official side event of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2024 in Apia, Samoa.

From 2025, Auckland University of Technology will host the exhibition across its campuses.

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