



Climate Change and the Pacific: Sharing Knowledge, Listening and Strengthening Pacific Voices

Australian Awards Program Fellowships

in partnership with

Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO)

Draft Program Report

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Executive Summary

This program has been an empowering and eye-opening experience. It strengthened my understanding of climate, human rights, and advocacy, and created valuable connections with other Pacific voices. I appreciate the supportive facilitators, practical learning sessions, and the safe space to share our experiences. Overall, it has equipped me with confidence and skills that I will carry back to my community and organization¹.

The Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) in partnership with the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) delivered the *Climate Change and the Pacific: Sharing Knowledge, Listening and Strengthening Pacific Voices (Pacific Voices on Climate Change)* program from 13 November to 3 December, 2025. 15 Pacific island community advocates were hosted in Australia for an intensive and tailored 3-week program to build knowledge and understanding of how climate change is impacting communities in the Pacific, and to make connections and networks between Australia and the Pacific. The program took place in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. The program was funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) under their Australian Awards Fellowship Program and was organised with the support of UNSW, Sydney.

Participants engaged with academics, researchers, development NGOs, faith-based organisations and state and federal parliamentarians and government agencies and the media. They explored topics of climate justice and mobility, engaging the media, advocacy, human rights and international environmental law, engagement with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), children's rights and climate change and the history of Pacific regional leadership to address the climate crisis. There was a strong focus on connecting with Pacific diaspora community in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra as well as embedding Pacific cultural activities and ways of learning and sharing throughout the curriculum.

Post-program evaluations highlighted the value of the program for participants and in creating a supportive environment to build networks and share knowledge on issues surrounding climate change in the Pacific.

The following report provides a description of the program content, draws on the participant evaluations, reflects on the outcomes and next steps for DTP.

Program Objectives

The objective of the program was to build the relationships and networks between Australia and the Pacific through a knowledge exchange that increases the impact and influence of Pacific voices- calling for more ambitious action on climate change.

Program Partners

- Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO)- the leading representative network of civil society organisations in the Pacific.

¹ Quote taken from participant evaluations

- UNSW Faculty of Law and Justice

Program Participants

PIANGO and DTP selected 15 key community representatives from seven countries to participate in the program, to come to Australia to share their stories, share their knowledge and experience and to help build collaborations between Australia and the Pacific. The selected participants come from Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Participants (6 male and 9 female) were selected by PIANGO based on their work, their experience and their commitment to sharing the knowledge and networks that they build.



Age and gender balance: There were slightly more female participants (9) than male participants (6). Age ranged from 20 to 45 years old.

Disability: One of the participants represented a national NGO focused on the rights of persons with a disability.

Program Description: Program Schedule and Highlights

Week One- Sydney

Participants arrived in Sydney and were introduced to the program at UNSW. The opening ceremony included a welcome to country from Noelene Timbery from the La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council and a welcome from Professor the Hon. Verity Firth AM, the Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement at UNSW. Highlights from week one included a full day workshop of climate media training, run by the Climate Media Centre, a welcome BBQ at the university campus and sightseeing in Sydney Harbour. Participants were introduced to the DTP's human rights capacity building training as a cornerstone to climate justice and advocacy. Sessions on climate justice, climate mobility and climate policy were led by academics from the UNSW Faculty of Law and Justice and the UNSW Institute for Climate Risk and Resilience.



Week Two - Sydney to Melbourne

In week two, participants were welcomed to NSW Parliament House by the Hon Janelle Saffin, Minister for Recovery, and discussions around key issues for the Pacific on climate change and Australian climate emergency response were held. They met with Aileen MacDonald OAM, MLC and Shadow Minister for Youth Justice who is co-chair of the NSW Parliament's Friends of Solomons. She asked the participants for their views on commitment net zero and committed to take these views into their party room discussions. A highlight for many participants was the afternoon at the Pasifika Collection at the Australian Museum. Observing the collection's cultural artefacts and living memory from across the Pacific Islands was very moving, especially for participants from some islands, like Tuvalu, who commented on the lack of infrastructure and funding back home for this standard of preservation – and the lack of museums keeping their history, stories and culture. Key sessions were held with Dr Wes Morgan, Maria Nawaz, Professor Jane McAdam and others at UNSW. The group then made its way to Melbourne, spending the next couple of days acclimatising to the cooler weather, whilst meeting with important Australian NGOs focused on climate change in the Pacific such as International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Oxfam Australia. There was a strong focus on gender and a feminist analysis of climate change impacts and responses.

The inclusion of feminist analysis and Indigenous perspectives on climate action were significant. Sheena Watt MLC, Special Envoy on Climate Change (and DTP alumna) welcomed participants to the Victorian Parliament and Legislative Assembly and led a personal tour, including the history of Indigenous representation in parliament. Other highlights in Melbourne included meetings with the Oceania Institute academics at Melbourne University as well as an afternoon at the ABC Asia Pacific Newsroom. Participants enjoyed the chance to meet Pasifika community members through DTP Alumni and friends who hosted Pacific style dinners



Week three- Melbourne to Canberra

In Canberra, participants met with the ANU Pasifika students society and shared reflections post the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Belem, Brazil (COP30). Advocacy was a focus in Canberra, as participants had the opportunity to meet with Kate Thwaites MP, Special Envoy on Climate Change at Parliament House. Participants also met with representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) including Pacific and Indigenous focused teams working on climate change. Other highlights in Canberra included a private tour of the Bilong Papua New Guinea Exhibition from the curator Crispin Howarth at the National Gallery of Australia, as well as meeting with David Purnell and fellow Quaker friends in Turner. Participant enjoyed a glimpse into Australian politics when attending Question Time in Parliament House.



Week Four- Sydney

Back in Sydney for the final few days, participants enjoyed a Pasifika community dinner organised by Rosaline Parker of Micah Australia. Participants led discussions on Pacific Regionalism as well as the in-country activities planned for when they return home. DLA Piper hosted participants at their office in Sydney for a session on the International Court of Justice's



Advisory Opinion Climate Change Case. DTP Board Member, Philip Chung also hosted a practical session on the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AUSTLII) including how to navigate the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute (PACLII). Final sessions included knowledge exchanges with Jubilee Australia, the Australian Climate Change Authority and representatives from WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF). The

Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs was the special guest and speaker at a closing reception hosted by Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Chair of the DTP Board, Michael do Rozario. The Dean of the Faculty of Law and Justice, Professor Andrew Lynch spoke and presented the participants certificates at the closing ceremony at UNSW Faculty of Law and Justice.

Participant Evaluations and Recommendations

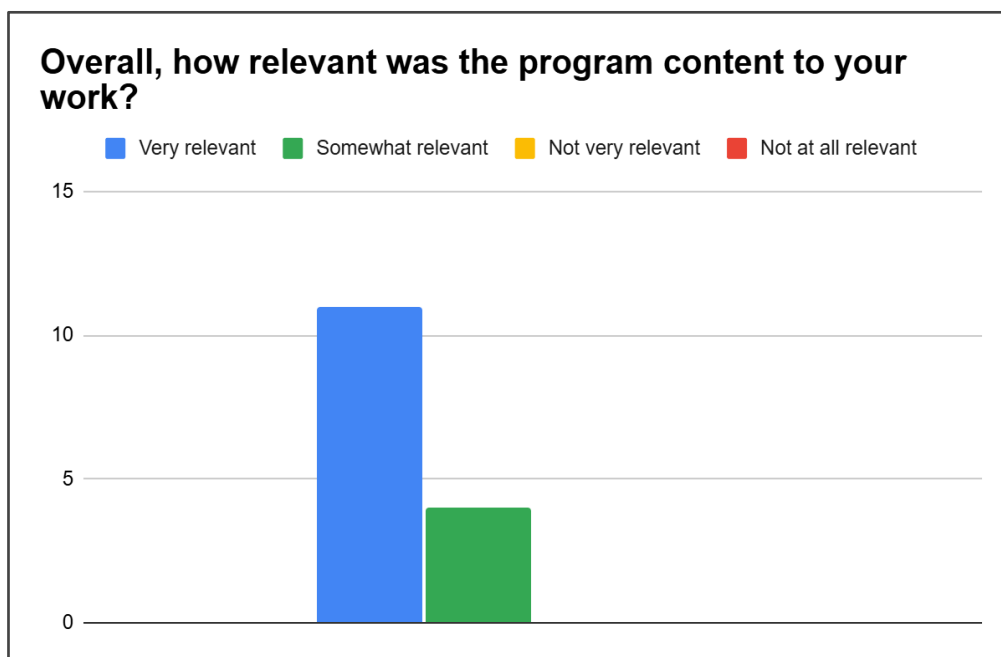
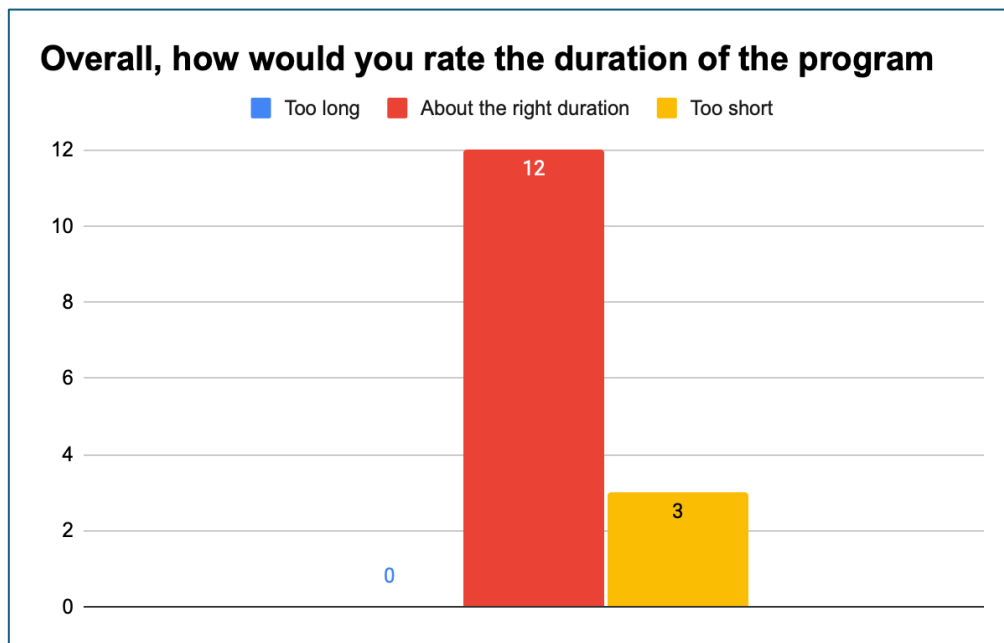
Throughout the program, participants were involved in reflection sessions and Talanoa dialogue. This enabled both participants and DTP staff to gauge the engagement, speed of delivery and other issues with program design and delivery. These processes ensured that participants could make the most of opportunities to meet with relevant stakeholders and be present in situations to have their voices heard. These reflections also enabled program coordinators to



adjust and change the program and activities, including the process of the daily reflections themselves.

This process also helped considerably with the building of the networks and friendships between the participants.

At the end of the training, participants completed extensive anonymous evaluation questionnaires – and this was followed by a final group sharing of reflections. During the session, participants had the opportunity to take stock of what they had learned and experienced over the two weeks and discuss future plans, both personal and how they plan to incorporate their new learning into their work. The graphs below summarise the participant's evaluations.



Most Useful Sessions/Content:

Many participants reported finding all the sessions offered invaluable to their development as human rights defenders, and several particularly emphasised the impact of the programs that engaged with law and law related organisations.

One participant noted that:

“I found all program and sessions useful...particular sessions engaging with lawyers and law-related organisations have been insightful. I got to learn about avenues of research; I got to learn about the journey of the ICJ AO on climate change; and really engaging with communities and organisations such as the Pacific diaspora here in Australia, the Quakers community, OXFAM, ABC news, IWDA and more; these engagements have all been useful for me. I also want to mention getting to meet parliamentarians in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra respectively, and how we got the chance to voice out our concerns to them in regard to climate change and COP31. The program has been incredible in delivering and striving to achieve objectives.”

Highlights of the Program:

Many participants reported that the highlights of the program included the ability of DTP in creating a space that facilitated opportunities to meet leaders, policymakers and parliamentarians. This allowed the participants to share their stories and perspectives on how climate change has impacted their communities and build their professional network with influential lawmakers. Additionally, several participants highlighted the program as providing a space to work directly within their communities, strengthening their ability to engage in collective action and learn from a diverse range of perspectives.

One participant noted:

“The space DTP through PIANGO has given us working directly in our communities to be in the same room to connect, and share our stories on climate change. I find this inspiring to continue the work I am doing in my country, knowing there are others like me in this space that are also in this fight. This space has also given us some fresh ideas and way forwards on how we can strengthen the works we are doing with our communities.”

Program Delivery/Duration Comments:

Some participants suggested improvements to program delivery/duration including:

1. An initial presentation by participants on their organisations, so that the group is able to better understand each other’s backgrounds and motivations.
2. Additional sessions such as finance management and accountability in relation to climate change, and hands-on policy development and analysis.

Other general comments about your experience with this program:

Overall, participants had an extremely positive experience with this program, noting that it was empowering and offered them entirely new perspectives on advocacy. One participant noted that *“It strengthened my understanding of climate, human rights, and advocacy, and created valuable connections with other Pacific voices. I appreciate the supportive facilitators, practical learning sessions, and the safe space to share our experiences. Overall, it has equipped me with confidence and skills that I will carry back to my community and organization.”*

Program Outcomes

Overall, the Pacific Voices on Climate Change met and exceeded participants' expectations by providing a safe, inclusive and enthusiastic environment to enable knowledge exchange and sharing on climate issues and advocating for further action.

Participants shared the confidence built from advocacy and capacity building training, which will grow on return to their home countries and shared with their respective organisations.

The program encouraged participants to build strong networks with each other, with members of Pasifika communities in Australia, government officials, NGO's and other stakeholders. There is a WhatsApp group connecting participants and enabling follow-up, information sharing and exchange. Participants are also encouraged to connect with the larger DTP Alumni network.

The way forward: DTP's next steps

Supporting Pacific civil society to engage their governments and the governments of Australia and other developed countries is critical to driving ambitious action on the climate emergency.

The post-program evaluation demonstrated that a clear strength of the program is its application to participants' ongoing work and future advocacy. All participants have committed to sharing what they have learned during the program with their home organisations and networks after the program. The final activity of the program will be within their home countries. DTP will facilitate and support this final activity by hosting follow up virtual meetings with participants back in their home countries before and after their meetings with the high commissions.

This program is part of a wider strategy of PIANGO / DTP capacity building for civil society in the Pacific. It follows a 5-day regional capacity building program on climate change and human rights in Suva, Fiji in June 2025. Some of these Australian Awards Fellows participated in that program.

PIANGO has recommended that future DTP regional capacity building programs be seen as an initial preparatory program to future Fellowship programs.

PIANGO and DTP, together with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Fiji Council of Social Services are now working on the *2026 Pacific Regional Climate Change and Human Rights Program* to be held in Suva from March 23 – 27. Funding will be sought for a longer-term capacity building strategy.

Pacific voices on climate change need to be heard more in international processes and forums. This program coincided with COP30 with the expectation that COP31 would be a Pacific/Australian COP – and this program would have been a valuable contribution to preparations for Pacific civil society engagement. A key focus for the Pacific now is the Pacific Pre COP31.

Acknowledgements

DTP would like to acknowledge the support of DFAT Australia Awards Fellowships, PIANGO and the UNSW Faculty of Law and Justice throughout the Pacific Voices on Climate Change program. DTP would also like to acknowledge with thanks and appreciation the support and engagement of the trainers, facilitators, NGO colleagues, Pasifika community representatives, DTP alumni and parliamentarians and officials who helped so much with the program.