

# Speaking up on Asia Pacific sea-level rise impacts



The members of Green Cross Australia's citizen's jury. Green Cross Australia

An April 2008 advertisement placed in *The Australian* newspaper by Green Cross Australia began a unique, deliberative process inviting the country to consider the role that Australians might play should sea-level rise and climate change result in a significant displacement of people in the Asia Pacific region.

Green Cross Australia, the national affiliate of Green Cross International founded by Mikhail Gorbachev, encourages a shift in personal values and attitudes to achieve a more peaceful, sustainable, and secure future for all. The current focus of activities is preparation for the humanitarian impacts of climate change in the Asia Pacific region, through 'The People's Assembly: Sustainable Solutions for Victims of Sea Level Rise', held at the Queensland State Library in late August.

By generating early discussion and debate, the organisation aims to encourage strategies and policies that anticipate and prepare for change, in order to avoid suffering and conflict.

The national People's Assembly process, conducted over four months, involved a citizen 'jury' of 14 diverse participants being initially briefed by Australian climate change experts. It culminated at the August Assembly event with the jury debating

key questions and issues with a panel of eminent national leaders from scientific, business, academic, defense, humanitarian and environment community sectors in order to develop key recommendations.

At the recent Pacific Islands Forum in August, international aid agency Oxfam released a blueprint<sup>1</sup> for Australia's new engagement with Pacific nations, which (among other things) recommended urgent and significant action to mitigate the effects of climate change. It suggested we reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2020, and at least 95 per cent by 2050; provide funding to help Pacific nations adapt to the expected changes in climate; and commit to assisting communities displaced by the impacts of climate change, such as sea-level rise.

Dr Andrew Ash, CSIRO Climate Flagship Director was one expert Assembly panel member who outlined some practical adaptive strategies that Australia could implement to assist throughout the Asia Pacific region. As an example he detailed how better weather forecasting to predict extreme events could better prepare

people for emergencies. This would require capacity building in the related sciences and improved training in meteorology, he said.

'The adaptive potential for Australia and in Australia is very high because of our socioeconomic system and our strong government system and that, I think, puts on us some responsibility to use that high adaptive potential and capacity to help out in the region,' Dr Ash said.

Robert, one of the 14 public jurors chosen to participate in the People's Assembly, feels that his contribution to the citizens' panel will help Australia take a lead role in response to increased climate variability.

'I hope that our report encourages the government and all Australians to act quickly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and develop renewable energy alternatives, which could be exported to countries like the United States and China to reduce emissions globally,' he said.

The citizens' jury met for two intensive briefing weekends to initially learn from climate change experts. They agreed on a series of questions about four areas they felt were important – mitigation,

adaptation, governance arrangements and preparations for forced immigration – to ask the expert panel.

The climax for participants was the recent People's Assembly, when they debated, determined, and then delivered their recommendations to government, organisations, community groups and other Australians. Mr Howard Bamsey, Australia's Special Envoy on climate change,

accepted the report on behalf of the Federal Government, which will now absorb the process advice.

The final report will also be presented by Green Cross Australia volunteer Hugh Jorgensen to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Poznań, Poland, later this year.

● **Leanne McKnoulty**



More information:  
Green Cross Australia:  
[www.greencrossaustralia.org](http://www.greencrossaustralia.org)

<sup>1</sup> Oxfam Australia (2008) Partnering with our neighbours – Realising the potential of Pacific partnerships for development. <http://www.oxfam.org.au/media/article.php?id=495>