

Climate change and sea level rise: media and public information needs

People get most of their information about science from the news media. With climate change and sea level rise, the news media have not adequately informed people of real risks to life, health, property and economic security. Nor have they passed on readily available scientific advice about how to reduce or prevent these risks. Instead, climate change has been represented as an issue which is political but not physical, and global therefore not local.



In New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific, journalists need training to better understand which populations, regions and economies are most in need of credible information about the risks, and what preventive strategies and options have already been developed. Such training would help journalists observe one of their more fundamental ethics: of telling people what they need to know. It would also provide much better protection for people, environments and economies.

Recommendations:

- Professional, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and national and international aid organisations should work with journalists, scientific experts and communities to devise training for the primary communicators of risk information: the news media.
- This training should focus both on journalists in the developed countries of Australia and New Zealand, and on journalists in the front-line atoll nations of Micronesia where climate change and sea level rise are already endangering populations and environments.
- Pacific Islands training should take into account the needs of news media in Micronesia's atoll nations. Journalists in these nations have different needs compared with media based in Polynesia and Melanesia.
- In Micronesia, training of journalists should include community representatives, and should take place on the islands or villages where climate change and sea level rise are already affecting communities and their environment.
- This training should use the local language and work with the equipment which is available to local journalists trying to adequately inform their communities.
- Journalists in low lying islands need training in using social media to communicate how climate change and sea level rise are affecting local communities. Such training would help local journalists get stories to their own people and to the outside world.
- Universities in the Pacific region should design undergraduate courses in reporting on climate change risks. These courses should target the region's journalists, with the aim of improving the quality of information about climate change risks which reaches Pacific island communities. Such courses would most benefit journalists and communities if they were delivered at central campuses on the islands most affected.