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The IPCC just met on a Pacific island to talk oceans and climate change

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One of the many islands of Fiji. The meeting was hosted on the main island.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) this week brought together around 100 experts from over 30 countries on an island, in Fiji to be exact, to begin drafting the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate.

What more fitting place to meet than in a region whose residents are seeing and experiencing the initial impacts of these two interacting issues.

"This is the first time the IPCC has undertaken a focused report on the processes that drive change and the resulting impacts to oceans and the frozen parts of our planet," said IPCC Vice-Chair Ko Barrett. "There is a huge volume of scientific information for us to assess, which can help policy makers to better understand the changes we are seeing and the risks to lives and livelihoods that may occur with future change."

Experts at the meeting this week are from IPCC Working Group I (the physical science basis) and II (impacts, adaptation and vulnerability) communities, including scientists from the ocean and cryosphere communities. It is hosted by the Government of Fiji and The University of the South Pacific.

Still a fairly unexplored area under the relevant conventions, both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, the meeting itself will set the tone for the science of oceans and climate change.

The fact that the first authors meeting is held in the Pacific not only shows the foresight of the science entities involved, it also demonstrates a very neat commitment by the University of the South Pacific to advancing the science from an island perspective.

Dr. Barret, the Co-Chair in her opening remarks reflected on this point. "The report that we start work on today will be released in September of 2019, in just under two years' time. It devotes chapters to polar regions, high mountain areas, the changing oceans and extremes. It devotes a whole chapter to Sea-Level Rise and Implications for Low-Lying Islands, Coasts and Communities, and will include a cross-chapter box to integrate information on low-lying islands and coasts, looking at the impacts and risks of climate-driven changes and how these can be addressed. It's therefore right that we are holding this first meeting in Fiji, because this country, along with other small island developing states in the Pacific, is particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise and other climate-driven changes. But, as we enjoy this island setting, our thoughts, too, go out to people on the small islands of Barbuda, Dominica, Puerto Rico and other islands and coastal communities in the Caribbean that have recently suffered the devastating impacts of tropical storms and hurricanes. It is a sad truth that we rarely gather together as an international scientific community without the need to acknowledge a climate-related tragedy taking place someplace on our great planet."

Although there are a limited number of Pacific scientists who are authors in the report, one of them has been busy advocating for more Scientists from the Pacific to take part. Professor Elisabeth Holland a current author and director of USP's Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD) was also one of authors of the 2007 IPCC report and co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

"We need more Pacific voices in the IPCC," she said in a recent IPCC outreach event.

IPCC reports are produced in a process of repeated drafting and review. Following the meeting in Nadi, the authors will start to draft the six chapters of the report. The draft will be refined following a second meeting in February 2018, and then circulated for expert review in May 2018. The report will be finalized in September 2019.

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