

OPINION

Tiny Tokelau leads the way

Piece from Tokelau's Climate Change Unit

Tokelau will be part of the New Zealand delegation to the all-important climate change conference in Paris this year.

As a non-self-governing territory, the atoll country will not have its own voice at the meeting.

Nevertheless it is working hard towards establishing its own Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (I.N.D.C) as a tool to curb countries' carbon emissions in future.

By doing so, Tokelau wants to send this message to the industrial nations: "Although you are clearly the cause of climate change effects that we, small atoll nations are already suffering, any contribution to reducing emissions is a step in the right direction."

A tiny nation of only about 1400 people living in three atolls without any significant industry, Tokelau's resident emissions per capita are less than one-hundredth of the world average.

Such emissions have not risen significantly in decades because of little use of fossil fuels within the country. Indeed, since 2013 the country is entirely dependent on solar energy for its power supplies, and has reduced the diesel consumption of its power generators by 90 percent.

During overcast days and in emergencies some electricity remains generated using diesel, but further efforts are being made to reduce even those.

Statistical data are being collated, and a consultant is being employed to assist the Tokelau climate change team in its I.N.D.C calculations and projections for C.O.P21.

"This is important in terms of assessing our future contribution to global emission reduction; and it helps identify new targeted

projects on the atolls for both adaptation and mitigation measures to climate change," says Paula Faiva of the Tokelau Climate Change Unit.

One of the difficulties in assessing Tokelau's emissions lies in its remote location. There are no planes flying into the country and the nearest port is Apia in Samoa, 500 kilometres away.

There is an approximately fortnightly boat service between Apia and the three Tokelau villages - which does consume a considerable amount of diesel fuel. Delivery of a new passenger and cargo boat, commissioned by New Zealand, has been delayed for about a year already.

It is hoped that more efficient fuel conversion processes of the new ship, Mataliki, will lead to a reduction in fuel use - but the effect of that is yet to be determined.

Meanwhile, Tokelau remains proactive in adapting to the changes brought about by climate change.

Its people are trying to benefit from scientific interventions, strong leadership, innovative management practices, and community education and involvement to keep emissions down.

Tokelau is one of the most low-lying atolls in the world and extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change; yet the nation's contribution to global warming is negligible.

The New Zealand territory is therefore a strong advocate for the highest possible emissions reductions in international climate change conventions and treaties. Its government is choosing to follow a low-carbon development path as part of its overall commitment to a sustainable future. Through its solar energy initiative, Tokelau exemplifies the motto "Island Energy for Island Life".