

Deal to resettle climate-hit Tuvalu residents shows world ‘what’s at stake’, European officials say

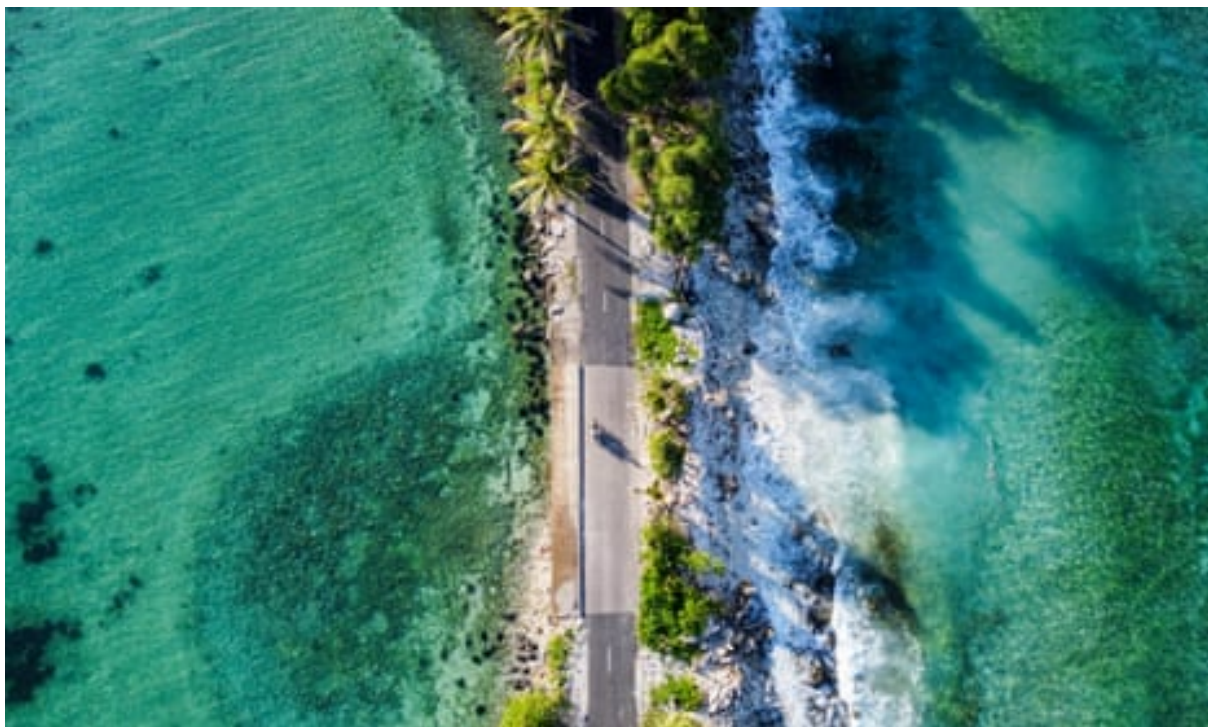
German and EU officials say the treaty between Australia and the Pacific island country should spur global cut to emissions

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- Australia’s agreement to resettle Tuvalu residents affected by climate change shows urgent action on emissions is needed, European officials have said. Photograph: Kalolaine Fainu/The Guardian
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Australia’s residency offer to citizens from the low-lying Pacific country of **Tuvalu** must spur the world to dramatically cut emissions, two senior European officials have declared.

Germany's climate envoy, Jennifer Morgan, said the deal "puts a very clear pointer on what's at stake" as the negotiators prepare for next month's UN climate summit, adding that "all countries have to scale up their ambition for 2030".

The message was echoed by a senior European Union official, Koen Doens, who said the climate crisis was putting Pacific island countries under increasing stress and more urgent action was "absolutely essential".



Tuvalu residency and security treaty: what is it and why is Australia doing it?

The comments follow the Australian government's announcement that it would offer up to 280 people from Tuvalu access to residency, work and study rights each year, as part of a new treaty that also **binds the two countries closely together on security**.

The deal is driven by recognition that Tuvalu – a country of nine low-lying islands about halfway between Australia and Hawaii – is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels.

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But Australia has also promised to fund coastal adaptation projects – including land reclamation work around the capital, Funafuti – to help as many as possible of Tuvalu’s 11,200 citizens “stay in their homes with safety and dignity”.

Speaking to the Guardian on the sidelines of a Pacific summit in Cook Islands, where the deal was announced, Morgan said the news was “attracting attention” in Germany.

“What I’ve heard back from friends – not climate people – in Germany is that they’re very sad about the fact that a country like Tuvalu has to be thinking about where their people may have to go,” Morgan said.

She called for “even more focus on driving down emissions to avoid that, so that people can stay in their homes”.

Morgan said the world must not abandon the goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, saying this was “a matter of life and death for many people here in this region”.

Doens, the European Commission’s director general for international partnerships, said the Australia-Tuvalu treaty was “a very impactful agreement”.

“We all know what is happening to some of the islands in the Pacific. We know what is happening to Tuvalu,” he told the Guardian.

“The stress on the people living on the islands is increasing.”



Australia to offer residency to Tuvalu citizens displaced by climate change

Doens also called for “a more ambitious climate mitigation agenda than what we are seeing from the global community”.

The US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who also visited Cook Islands, told reporters the climate crisis was having “a disproportionate impact on Pacific island nations”.

Asked whether the Australia-Tuvalu agreement was a sign of things to come, she said: “We have seen these displacements take place already, not just here in the Pacific but across the world.

“We see environmental migration, if you just look at the situation in the Sahel, where you see people moving across the Mediterranean. So the Australian announcement, I think, is a positive response to that movement.”

The comments came after the Pacific Islands Forum (Pif) – whose 18 members include Australia and New Zealand – wrapped up **its most important annual political summit**.

Despite many Pacific island leaders wishing to explicitly call for a phase-out of fossil fuels, the final communique include caveats that were seen to be heavily influenced by Australia.

The Cook Islands prime minister and summit host, Mark Brown, confirmed that leaders “aspired” to phasing out fossil fuels while acknowledging the pathway was “not immediate nor one size fits all”.

The summit also rebuffed calls by a group of former Pacific leaders to make Australia’s bid to **co-host the 2026 Cop UN climate summit** conditional on it stopping new coal and gas developments.

The Pif secretary general, Henry Puna, said the regional grouping had already agreed to promote the joint bid, “keeping in mind that Australia has already committed to making this the Pacific Cop”.



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But he said advancing the bid had to be “done by consensus”. That was likely a reference to the “western European and other states” – a UN grouping that will be decisive in who hosts the 2026 conference. Germany is in that group.

Morgan reiterated Germany’s support, saying her country was “quite positive about the approach of having the **Pacific islands** going hand in hand with Australia on that bid”.

“We would expect, of course, that the Pacific islands’ priorities and goals would play a big role in how that Cop is carried out,” Morgan added. “And being here just reinforces that even more.”

Shiva Gounden, the Greenpeace Pacific adviser, said the Australian government should prove its seriousness by no longer approving new fossil fuel projects – “something Pacific leaders and civil society have been crying out for in very clear terms”.

The Pacific Islands Climate Action Network’s regional coordinator, Lavetanalagi Seru, described the Australia-Tuvalu pact as “a mere Band-Aid solution that in no way adequately addresses the fossil-fuelled climate crisis”.

The Climate Council senior researcher Wesley Morgan said Australia’s “first responsibility must be to get emissions down as fast as possible” to minimise the risk of people being forced from their homes.