

# Media release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Citizens' Panel calls for urgent action on sea level rise for the Torres Strait Islands and Asia Pacific**

While US and Caribbean citizens battle with the onslaught of Hurricane Gustav, a Citizens' Panel of ordinary Australians concluded twelve weeks work on how to tackle sea level rise in the Asia Pacific by handing their recommendations to Howard Bamsey, Australia's Special Envoy on Climate Change.

The National People's Assembly is a deliberative democracy initiative modelled after a "consensus conference". After intensive briefing by eminent experts, the Citizens' Panel deliberated on the question of *How Australia should respond to the humanitarian challenges of sea level rise in Asia Pacific* on August 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> in Brisbane. The project was hosted by Griffith University and was inspired by Green Cross Australia, the local arm of the international NGO founded and led by Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water, speaking via video, shared many of the citizens' concerns and welcomed democratic input into this major humanitarian challenge for Australia.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a one-metre sea level rise will displace 145 million people, and over 90% live in Asia Pacific. Food security, water security and health impacts will worsen. Significant adaptation efforts can ease the burden of sea level rise, however, there is no international law giving rights to the people who will be displaced by climate change.

The Citizens' Panel focussed on the themes of mitigation, adaptation and governance, and how to prepare for mass displacement of people. The Panel's top recommendations include:

- A Torres Strait Island plan to address climate change impacts, preparedness, adaptation and emergency response in partnership with the TSI community.
- A Climate Change Commission (like the Murray Darling Basin Commission) to co-ordinate mitigation and adaptation and lead an integrated research agenda.
- More flexible visa options for Australia's neighbours as a first step towards a regional burden sharing solution.
- An insurance scheme that provides immediate payout for disaster relief for vulnerable Asia Pacific communities.

Green Cross Australia CEO Mara Bún said: "These ideas reach beyond electoral and business cycles. They reflect the depth of the Australian community's commitment to act on climate change, and they encourage our leaders to be bold."

The Citizens' Panel was chosen after a national advertising campaign to be representative of the nation by state, age, gender and occupation. Aged from 17 to 69, it includes a high school student from Mount Isa, a young medical doctor of Indian descent from Perth, a retired Sydney-based chemical engineer, and a practicing member of the Anglican church from Grafton, and a town planner from Brisbane is also included, to name a few.

Over the past four months the Citizens' Panel was briefed by experts from four universities, by companies such as Worley Parsons, MunichRe and IAG, and by the CSIRO. Community organisations involved in the education process included World Vision, Oxfam, Engineers Without Borders and Friends of the Earth.

The project is modelled on the idea of a Consensus Conference which has been used across Scandinavia, Europe, the USA and Australia to engage ordinary citizens in policy development for issues such as nuclear waste disposal, human cloning, and regulation of genetically modified food.

Green Cross Australia CEO Mara Bún said "We have used a powerful and proven process of participatory democracy to develop clear action plans to address the problem of sea level rise in our region. We are confident the Federal Government will find some practical and innovative ideas in this report, and will move to act on them."

For the full report visit: [www.greencrossaustralia.org](http://www.greencrossaustralia.org)

## **ENDS**

Participants are available for local interviews:

**Mrs Madonna Barraclough**, Environmental artist, teacher and writer, **Mt Gravatt, QLD**  
**Mr Terry Bowring**, Retired Food Engineer, **Bilgola Plateau, NSW**  
**Mr Scot Brown**, City Planner, **Windsor, QLD**  
**Ms Kat Byron**, Youth Harm Reduction Officer, **Darwin, NT**  
**Mrs Rosemary Catt**, Member of the Anglican Church, **Grafton, NSW**  
**Ms Michelle Drummond**, Conflict Management, **Stepney, SA**  
**Ms Maeva Fried**, Arctic explorer, **Newport, VIC**  
**Dr Daniel Heredia**, Medical Practitioner, **Perth, WA**  
**Mr Robert Mrozowski**, Local Government Environmental Health Officer, **Sunshine Coast, QLD**  
**Mr Brodie Paul**, QLD Government, Father, **St Lucia, QLD**  
**Mr Simon Tannock**, Research Scientist, Environmental Engineer, **Moggill, QLD**  
**Mrs Kristin Warr**, Educator, University of Tasmania, **Hobart, TAS**  
**Mr Ben Webster**, Student, Youth Parliament, **Mount Isa, QLD**  
**Ms Jan Williams**, Indigenous Australian Artist and Elder, **Hervey Bay, QLD**

To arrange an interview or for further information, please contact:

Mara Bún  
CEO Green Cross Australia  
(07) 3003 0644  
[mara@greencrossaustralia.org](mailto:mara@greencrossaustralia.org)

Anya Phelan  
Project Manager National People's Assembly  
0433 960 500  
[anya@greencrossaustralia.org](mailto:anya@greencrossaustralia.org)