

EDITORIAL: Connecting the Pacific dots

WHEN University of the South Pacific climate change scientist Elisabeth Holland gave a keynote address at the Second Pacific Climate Change Conference at Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, New Zealand, on February 2018, her message was simple but inspiring. In an address advocating ‘connecting the dots’ about the climate challenges facing the globe, and particularly the coral atoll microstates of the Asia-Pacific region, she called for ‘more Pacific research, by the Pacific and for the Pacific’. The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize co-recipient, Professor Holland, director of the University of the South Pacific’s Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD), noted many of the global models drawn from average statistics were not too helpful for the specifics in the Pacific where climate change had already become a daily reality.

Describing herself as a ‘climate accountant’ making sense of critical numbers and statistics, she said it was vital that indigenous Pacific knowledge was being partnered with the scientists to develop strategies especially tailored for the ‘frontline region’. Communication and media also have a key role to play.

Local research in the region is of utmost importance, leading to informed development choices and is the best way forward as it creates a direct connection between the research and the communities once it is implemented. Our Big Ocean States are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and remote research does not suffice, calling for the creation of leaders and experts locally through joint Pacific-led research. (Cited in Robie, 2018)

PaCE-SD itself, a research entity based at USP’s Laucala Campus with some 200 postgraduate climate researchers and a 14-strong faculty, has been pioneering and leading much of this research ‘connecting the dots’. ‘Our climate change research at USP focuses on both describing the problems and searching for solutions related to adaptation, risk and science-backed policy,’ she says. Dr Holland recently took the argument for a carbon tax—a tax on fossil fuel consumption to create economic incentives to reduce carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions—a stage further. Writing in the California Academy of Sciences website *bioGraphic* (2017), she echoed climatologist James Hanson’s argument for a carbon tax. However, she advocated such taxes as being a mechanism for supporting the Pacific and other vulnerable regions.

I take the carbon tax argument a step further. Revenues from the tax should be reinvested in those countries most affected by climate change, such as

the Pacific Islands. The [2015] Paris Agreement acknowledges that these states retain special status because of their vulnerability to climate change, defined as the seriousness of the challenges and impacts they face as a result of increasing climate change worldwide.

To support the Pacific, carbon tax revenues should be directed towards sustaining and generating ecosystem services. Take, for example, the coasts. By investing the revenue from a carbon tax in replanting mangrove or dilo seedlings, we could provide storm protection, create subsistence fisheries and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. (Holland, 2017)

By protecting the coastal ecosystems and establishing blue carbon economies, this would become the ‘foundation for truly sustainable ocean economies for our big ocean states’, Holland argues. While conceding that such investments are costly, the value of the services is vital. ‘Every year, in Fiji alone, healthy ecosystems provide nearly US\$1 billion worth of services, driving \$78 million in fisheries revenue and \$574 million in tourism revenue, not to mention \$85 million worth of coastal protection and sequestration.’ Holland stresses the positive effects of these investments around the world.

Holland admits that when she needs inspiration, she stops for a moment and recites the names of the countries she represents – the 16 tropical island nations that ‘rise from the Pacific’, including Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Vanuatu ... and also Timor-Leste on the cusp of Asia-Pacific.

The poetry created by the recitation calms me, reminds me of the history and resilience of these countries and the people who live there, and reassures me that there is still hope for a better future, for our oceans and our planet. (Holland, 2017)

As well as a selection of research papers from USP in this “Disasters, Cyclones and Communication” being published in this edition of Pacific Journalism Review, it is timely that this issue is also a collaboration with the Indonesian Center for Southeast Asian Social Studies (CESASS), a centre of excellence in social science based at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta in Central Java. This collaboration was initiated and steered through the dynamic vision of Dr Hermin Indah Wahyuni whose tireless leadership has taken CESASS to great heights. Two papers, in particular, a co-authored comparative study from CESASS and PMC on the *rob* flooding of the northern city of Semarang in Central Java affecting some 76,000 people and the impact of Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016, and a paper about media disaster narratives in Indonesia, are a product of this collaboration.

The themed research topic of ecological communication in maritime disasters was chosen by CESASS and was achieved through a grant from the Indonesian

Ministry of Higher Education’s World Class Professor Programme in 2017. This programme has brought together the CESASS researcher team and has provided fruitful collaboration experiences shared with many professors with expertise in various aspects of maritime disasters (geology, fishery, anthropology, and journalism). Working with these professors, the team has also produced several joint publications, including one that is appearing in this special edition of *PJR*. The journal’s editor David Robie—a media and communications academic, journalist and consistent environmental activist as well as a researcher from Auckland University of Technology—was one of the six global WCP academics chosen on this programme. He has contributed significant and enriching perspectives to understanding the problem of tidal flooding (*banjir rob*) in Semarang.

This research collaboration programme has also revealed that the management and mitigation of maritime disasters requires a multi-perspective approach. In the case of Indonesia, social problems resulting from poorly integrated policies and limited consideration of environment-based development have created ‘turbulence’ and community neglect. The declining quality of the environment has forced many Indonesian citizens to endure a below-average standard of living. In ecological communication, Indonesia still shows the need to develop transformative discussion to promote a better quality of life. The publication of the *rob* flooding article about Indonesia in *PJR* has been very meaningful for strengthening the epistemic community and transferring the knowledge collected through this study. In future, we strongly expect our initiatives to strengthen cooperation between these two institutions, as well as others, as scientists attempt to promote better lives within maritime communities.



DELABCE/PMC

Figure 1: Maintenance workers repair parts of a natural seawall constructed from bamboo near the village of Timbulsloko, Semarang, Indonesia, in November 2017.

Our co-editors for this special edition of *PJR* are Hermin Indah Wahyuni and Vissia Ita Yulianto of CESASS, Khairiah A. Rahman and David Robie (AUT's Pacific Media Centre), Shailendra Singh (USP) and Philip Cass (Unitec). Many thanks to the team and also to *Frontline* journalism-as-research editor Wendy Bacon, designer Del Abcede and proof reader Linnea Eltes.

The opening themed article in this edition is a comparative case study of social adaptation in the Tropical Cyclone Winston disaster case in Fiji and *rob* flooding in Semarang, Indonesia. Flooding has become an increasingly acute disaster situation in the northern coastal region of Java. **Hermin Indah Wahyuni, Andi Awaluddin Fitrah, Fitri Handayani** and **David Robie** present comparative findings about mitigation and adaptation efforts in this joint CESASS/PMC study.

Dubbed as the 'ring of fire', Indonesian territories have witnessed many forms of natural disasters such as volcano eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis, which have been widely reported in the mass media. **Budi Irawanto** of Universitas Gadjah Mada employs textual analysis of media reports, particularly the weekly news magazine *Tempo*, to examine how narratives of natural disaster survivors are framed.

In Australia, **Amanda Gearing** of Queensland University of Technology explores the recovery experiences of survivors of a 2011 flash flood event in South East Queensland that killed 23 children and adults five years later. Her research data reveals that many of the survivors and rescuers were in a worse situation weeks and months after the disaster.

Johan Lidberg of Monash University argues Australia's 'climate change wars' make research into media coverage of the issue interesting from an international and journalism studies perspective. His article compares coverage in two major daily newspapers, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, of the two pivotal climate change summits in Copenhagen (2009) and Paris (2015).

In Fiji, **Shailendra Singh** and **Vijay Naidu** of the University of the South Pacific argue that the media have 'generally failed to satisfactorily cover the unfolding of natural hazards and disasters'. Using Fiji as a case study, they discuss media coverage of various cyclones and analyse the gaps in reporting.

From the Philippines, **Norman Zafra** of the University of Auckland offers an analysis of digital technology implications on disaster reporting from the perspective of a journalism-documentary practitioner. His study examines the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan disaster with an ethnographic analysis of 'backpack news production' in post-disaster regions. He argues that while media convergence adds valuable new elements to storytelling and presentation of news, it only refines and does not replace traditional newsgathering methodologies.

The role of social media in Fiji during the 2016 Tropical Cyclone Winston was the research subject for **Glen Finau, John Cox, Jope Tarai, Romitesh Kant, Renata Varea** and **Jason Titifanue** of the University of the South Pacific. Social

media is being used increasingly in crises and disasters as an alternative form of communication. Their study shows how social media was used at different stages – before, during and after the cyclone struck. The hashtag #StrongerThanWinston was ‘coined as a rallying point to bolster a sense of national solidarity’.

Philip Cass of Unitec examined the need for New Zealand to have policies in place to address the possibility, or probability, of climate induced migration from the Pacific Islands. This is a vital precaution. However, what would that policy look like and how far ahead would planners have to think? This article canvases some intriguing and practical answers to the problem.

Rounding off this disasters and communication themed section is the *Frontline* article, about the second year of the Pacific Media Centre’s Bearing Witness climate project in Fiji. The analysis by **David Robie** is framed in the context of the new 10-year strategic plan 2017-2126 of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The postgraduate students involved in the project and reportage of a relocation village, Tukuraki which was struck in quick succession by two cyclones and a mudslide in the space of four years, won the 2017 Dart Award for trauma journalism.

OPENING the unthemed section of *PJR* are two articles on divers topics. **Catherine Strong** of Massey University profiles the ‘gender gap in leadership in the traditionally staid daily newspapers industry’. Noting that one-third of New Zealand’s dailies have never had a female editor, Strong says the low ratio of woman editors is ‘incongruous with the fact that the majority of journalism students are female’. Her study includes every woman who has been a daily newspaper editor in the country—just 15.

Although television conflict reporting has usually been limited by risks to journalists’ safety, **Steve Ellmers** of Unitec provides an intriguing glimpse of the ‘death throes of Ba’athist Iraq’ with an analysis of how viewers had the opportunity to ‘vicariously witness the fall of a large modern city’ in Baghdad. He contrasts the iconic moments in April 2003 when Saddam Hussein’s statue in Firdos Square was toppled and when US troops violently destroyed the equestrian statue close to the ‘Hands of Victory’ monument. This article, presented originally as a paper at the 20th Anniversary conference of *Pacific Journalism Review*, in Auckland in 2014, is also the ‘tale of two Fox News correspondents.’

Two obituaries follow for contrasting and important contributors to New Zealand journalism. The first by **James Hollings** of Massey University profiles **Pat Booth** of *The Auckland Star*, who was ‘arguably the finest investigative journalist New Zealand has produced’ and who ‘set a new standard for investigative journalism’. Recalls Hollings, while Booth began his investigation into the Arthur Allan Thomas scandal, described as New Zealand’s ‘Watergate moment’, what the journalist ‘saw and heard turned him into something else; a campaigner, an investigator, a crusader even’. Thomas was wrongly convicted for a double

murder in 1970 and eventually granted a royal pardon and awarded almost NZ\$1 million in compensation for his nine years in prison.

Yasmine Ryan was a young New Zealand journalist who died tragically in Istanbul, Turkey, after a stellar career reporting in conflict zones from the Pacific to the Middle East. She was particularly noted for her early reports on the so-called Arab Spring from Tunisia in 2011. Ryan, writes *Evening Report* editor **Selwyn Manning** in his tribute to her, was ‘driven by a deep sense of right and wrong ... sensitive to the wants of humble people, challenged by the inhumanity that she was witness to,’ and sought solutions through her journalism.

READERS may have noticed with the last edition of *PJR* that the journal proudly has a new Te Reo Māori name, *Te Koakoa* | *Pacific Journalism Review*. *Te Koakoa* is one of the Te Reo names for the sooty shearwater, or muttonbird (*Puffinus griseus*), Sooty shearwaters are a common dark seabird off coastal New Zealand and the Pacific, and are known for their spectacular flocks. *Koakoa* has a more common meaning of happiness and joyfulness in a research context. Linguist Dr John Moorfield, Professor of Māori Innovation and Development with AUT’s Te Ara Poutama contributed the metaphorical name. He also provided the name of Te Amokura—the red-tailed tropic bird—for the Pacific Media Centre when we were established in 2007, and he more recently gave us *Te Koakoa : Ngā Rangahau*, meaning research (in the plural) for our companion publication *Pacific Journalism Monographs*, founded in 2012. Sadly, he passed away just as *PJR* was going to press. Kia ora rawa atu John.

PROFESSOR DAVID ROBIE

Director: Pacific Media Centre (PMC), Auckland University of Technology (NZ)
www.pmc.aut.ac.nz

DR HERMIN INDAH WAHYUNI

Director: Indonesian Center for Southeast Asian Social Studies (CESASS)
Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta
pssat.ugm.ac.id

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