

“The Tonga Climate Change Fund Bill is passed by Parliament”

On a Wednesday morning 24th of August at 11:35am, the staff in the office of the Department of Climate Change are working as usual except the radio was turned up for all to hear the procession happening in the Parliament of Tonga. A surge of excitement and celebratory clapping of hands begins to form in the department office as they listen to Parliament pass the Tonga Climate Change Fund Bill, *one* of four Bills that were submitted by the Ministry of MEIDECC in the final session of Parliament for 2021. The approval of the Tonga Climate Change Fund Bill is a milestone achievement and victory for a journey which has come a long way.

A cabinet decision in 2011 approved the establishment of the Climate Change Trust Fund and the drafting of the Climate Change Fund Bill. In 2012 the Bill was formulated by the legal consultant Ms Sela Bloomfield and international climate finance expert Mr Brian Bell of Nimmo—Bell Consultancy Ltd with the assistance of the JNAP Secretariat. The JNAP Secretariat at the time comprised of three staff led by Ms Lu’isa Tu’i’afitu Malolo who is now the Director for Climate Change in Tonga and Sione Talo Fulivai and Ms ‘Ofa Ma’asi Kaisamy who are now both working at SPREP in Samoa. The Bill was developed with the intention of establishing a fund which enables Tonga to access global climate funds.

In 2015 the Bill was submitted to Cabinet Law Committee only to be rejected. Following several consultations in 2019 and 2020 adjustments were made to the Bill to incorporate feedback from the Ministry of Finance and MEIDECC and other stakeholders. The Director of Climate Change, Ms. Luisa Tu’i’afitu Malolo commented on the approval of the Bill, “This is a milestone achievement for Tonga and will go on to help the people of Tonga and especially the communities in areas most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change; it has taken ten long years but today we are very happy.”

Ms. Sela Bloomfield of Solutions Consulting House Limited and the Bill’s legal drafter has been liaising closely with Policy & Planning Division in the Department of Climate Change on revising the Bill since 2019, and as she explained, “The Bill brings major benefits for a small island developing nation like Tonga in terms of climate financing. Not only will it enhance Tonga’s ability to access global climate funds, it will ensure national climate initiatives can be addressed in a more proactive rather than reactive manner.

The Tonga Climate Change Fund Bill devises a management structure in which the technical aspects and scientific advice is provided by the Ministry of MEIDECC and the fiduciary management of the Fund will be taken care of by the Ministry of Finance. The next step will be the approval of His Majesty the King to finalize the process and create the Climate Change Fund Act. The Policy & Planning Division responsible for driving the TCCF Bill is headed by Ms Fololita Sila and the JNAP Secretariat, and as Ms Sila commented, “This is the ultimatum for the Bill that we have been advocating for all these years – that it will reach Parliament and for Parliament to endorse it. Today has really lifted the team’s morale and our entire department especially during these unprecedented times. Although it has taken a decade long and not to mention the many challenges we were faced with along the way, we thank God for paving the way for us. His timing is always the best. We wish to thank also the continuous and firm support of our donor partners and stakeholders who have supported this Bill right from the beginning”.



A long awaited moment and tears of joy after the Tonga Climate Change Fund Bill is passed by Parliament on 24 August 2021. Pictured here is the Director of Climate Change Ms Luisa Tuiafitu Malolo (center), the Bill’s legal drafter Ms Sela Bloomfield (right) and Head of Policy and Planning Division Ms Fololita Sila (left), outside Parliament Office at Tofoa.