

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE CARTERET ISLANDS

### GEOGRAPHY

The Carteret Islands (also known as Carteret Atoll, Tulun or Kilinailau Islands/Atoll) are located 86 km (53 mi) north-east of Bougainville in the South Pacific. The Islands are an atoll (an archipelago of coral islands) made up of six islands: Lesala, Lolosa, Huene, Han, Piul, and Lagain. The entire atoll measures 24 km (15 mi) in diameter and encompasses a total land area of 0.6 square kilometers. The highest point in the Carteret Islands measures 1.5 m (5 ft) above sea level. This low elevation above sea level makes the Islands and its people particularly susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change. For example, rising sea levels in the 1980s divided the Huene Island into separate parts. Additionally, episodic storm surges and high tides have demolished homes, decimated vegetation and arable land, and contaminated fresh water sources with salt water. Moreover, the coral bleaching that result from increased sea water temperatures poses a tremendous long-term threat to this chain of coral islands.



Image adapted from [www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/carteret-islands/6771651/The-sea-is-killing-our-island-paradise.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/carteret-islands/6771651/The-sea-is-killing-our-island-paradise.html)

It should be noted that the Carteret Islands are by no means the only place where “climate refugees” are considering how best to address the consequences of climate change. For example, the former President of the Maldives—an island nation in the Indian Ocean that has the lowest high-point elevation of any nation on Earth—has discussed the possibility of mass Maldivian emigration to Australia in order to escape the rising sea levels scientists predict could engulf the country by the end of the century (<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/climate-change-castaways-consider-move-to-australia-20120106-1pobf.html>). Similarly, the President of Kiribati—an island nation in the Pacific roughly 1,000 miles south of Hawaii with a peak elevation only 2-3 meters above the high-tide mark—has met with New Zealand officials about establishing a climate change-induced migration program. The Kiribati government has also launched an entire website devoted to the impacts of climate change on the nation with a short video titled A Call to the World (<http://climate.gov.ki/>).

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Image adapted from [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)



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## HISTORY

The Carteret Islands are named after the British navigator Philip Carteret, the first European to discover the Islands (1767). A brief expedition was led by American captain Benjamin Morrell to the Carteret Islands in 1830, and the Dutch, British and Germans colonized various parts of New Guinea in the late 19th century. In the early and mid-20th century, Australia assumed control of the British and German colonies on the eastern side of the island of New Guinea. This area became known as Papua New Guinea (PNG), which gained its independence from Australia in 1975. Since that time, the Carteret Islands have been a part of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND ECONOMICS

The population of the Carteret Islands is approximately 2,500. The major economic activity of the Islands is staple farming of mainly of taro and coconut. The Carteret Islanders also engage in subsistence fishing.

## POLITICS

The Carteret Islands are part of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Between 1989 and 1998, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) sought independence from Papua New Guinea. A peace agreement was first brokered by New Zealand in 1997, and in 2001 a comprehensive Bougainville Peace Agreement was signed. According to the Australian government, "The Agreement included a weapons disposal plan and provided for elections for the establishment of an autonomous government on Bougainville. It also provided for a referendum, 10 to 15 years after the election of an Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG), on the question of Bougainvillean independence" ([http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/png/bougainville\\_peace\\_process.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/png/bougainville_peace_process.html)).

## RELOCATION EFFORT (from <http://www.tulelepeisa.org/about/>)

In late 2006 the Council of Elders (CoE) of the Carterets Islands held a series of meetings to discuss the worsening effects of sea surges on their islands. The CoE were concerned that progress in establishing a relocation program for the Carterets people was going very slowly, while the erosion of their islands and the destruction of food gardens as a result of sea water surges was increasing at a very fast pace.

In December 2006, following a series of community meetings, the CoE decided to form the local NGO Tulele Peisa Inc. It was decided that the Carterets people needed their own indigenous organisation to plan and implement a voluntary relocation program for the next 5-10 years. Tulele Peisa therefore was set up to organise a well planned, staged program of moving Carterets people from their home atolls to the Bougainville mainland, where they could be safe and secure with access to economic opportunities as well as health and education services.

TP's aim is to facilitate an ecologically and culturally sustainable relocation and resettlement of the Tulun/ Carterets Atoll community who are facing threats from climate change. The organisation focuses on three key program areas; Research and Advocacy; Building Linkages; and Training and Capacity Building.

### TULELE PEISA WILL ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS THROUGH:

- Research, capacity building and networking with the community, Council of Elders (CoE), churches, Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) and other stakeholders who share its vision
- Active promotion and emphasis on community self-reliance to empower community to organise and mobilise to strive for a secure and sustainable future.

## CATHOLIC AID AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The relocation effort documented in the film is being led by the Islanders themselves, mainly through Tulele Peisa. This work is supported by the Catholic Diocese of Bougainville, as well as the Mission Office of the Catholic Archdioceses in Sydney and Melbourne. To read more, visit [http://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest\\_news/2009/2009116\\_304.shtml](http://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest_news/2009/2009116_304.shtml).

Caritas New Zealand and Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) have been “documenting the movement of people from Papua New Guinea atolls to the mainland as a consequence of environmental degradation, climate change and food insecurity. The research will enable JRS to monitor 1,400 people in the Carteret Islands, Bougainville who are either moving to the mainland or staying behind. Impacts on individuals and families will be documented, to guide future JRS policy, planning and advocacy with regard to environmental migrants in Papua New Guinea” ([http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Caritas%20AR%2010\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Caritas%20AR%2010_final_web.pdf)).

Caritas Australia has similarly been focusing on the impacts of climate change on poor island nations. The Just Climate (<http://www.caritas.org.au/act/a-just-climate>) program addresses the impacts on small island nations such as Kiribati, and collaborates with Caritas Bangladesh to consider the consequences of climate change on the people of that nation.

In November 2011, Dr Maryanne Loughry, RSM, Associate Director of Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, gave an interview updating the situation of climate change impacts on the Carteret Islands, as well as Kiribati and Bangladesh: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lawreport/climate-change-the-pacific/3684242#transcript>.