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Up to USD 23.8 billion: Fijian island takes the true cost of loss and damage to COP31

Pacific researchers and lawyers take new evidence from Fiji to COP31 in Antalya, with two side events on Friday 13 November

ANTALYA, TÜRKIYE / SUVA, FIJI: Two new studies from the University of Melbourne, supported by the Fairground Foundation, put numbers on what climate change is taking from the people of Ovalau, Fiji. Some of the losses can be priced. Many, including culture and heritage losses, cannot.

The research findings will be presented at two COP31 side events on Friday 13 November. The Fiji Environmental Law Association (FELA) and the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) along with researchers from the University of Melbourne and University of the South Pacific, will host the first, *Counting the cost of climate change*, at the Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion. Dr Anca Hanea (University of Melbourne) and Dr Rosiana Lagi (University of the South Pacific) will then join communities and lawyers from Vanuatu, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh at a second official UNFCCC side event, *Loss and Damage in Practice: From Climate Litigation to Community-Led Solutions*. The second event is a partnership with other organisations around the world and focused on how affected communities are shaping responses to loss and damage, from transnational litigation to community-led initiatives that preserve culture and livelihoods.

Loss and damage is happening now

In six iTaukei villages on Ovalau, community members say their harvests, fish catches, water supply and cultural life have fallen by around 40% in the past decade, and by around 60% over twenty years. The losses include food sharing (*veiwasei*), ceremonial offerings, traditional medicines and the bond to the land itself (*Vanua*). Villagers name extreme heat, heavy rain and rising seas as the main causes.

The cost is staggering

By 2100, sea-level rise and storm surge could reach up to 56% of Ovalau's homes, along with its hospital, its airport and the UNESCO-listed town of Levuka. On one island of about 9,000 people, losses could total USD 9.9 to 23.8 billion (cumulative losses to 2100 under high emissions). Most of that is reefs, mangroves and heritage, which market-based assessments miss entirely. The average annual possible losses for an island of 9,100 people under high emissions are estimated to be $321.7mn.

Adaptation can't wait

Nearly a quarter of participants have already been displaced, mostly after Cyclone Winston. Two in three expect to be asked to move within ten years, and most estimate a move would cost more than FJD 30,000. Yet even with every cost paid, a third would not leave at all. For iTaukei communities, land is identity, not just property.

The message to COP31

Support for the Pacific must cover cultural as well as economic loss. It must fund nature-based protection and heritage conservation alongside seawalls and roads. **Overshoot is locked in.** UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2026 (21 October) finds 1.5°C can no longer be held without overshoot. It is important that countries keep the ambition towards minimising warming to 1.5% alive and support climate finance and just transition initiatives for small island developing states.

Quotes:

Dr Rosiana Lagi "On Ovalau, what people are losing is not only crops and houses. It is the knowledge, the culture, heritage and the connection to *Vanua* that make us who we are. Any loss and damage support that ignores these, is only paying for half the loss." *Dr Rosiana Lagi, Associate Professor, School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education, University of the South Pacific*

Dr Anca Hanea "When we count reefs, mangroves and heritage alongside buildings and roads, the cost to Ovalau rises to as much as USD 23.8 billion. Leave them out and most of the loss disappears from the books." *Dr Anca Hanea, Principle Researcher Fellow, Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis, University of Melbourne*

Dr Sharyn Goldstien "This research shows what is possible when scientists, Pacific researchers and communities work together. It captures the losses that never appear in a damage report: culture, traditional knowledge and connection to Vanua. Evidence of non-economic loss and damage is vital, not only for negotiators at COP31 but in the courts, as communities increasingly turn to the law to hold those responsible for climate harm to account." *Dr Sharyn Goldstien, Director of Science & Expert Advisory, Environmental Defenders Office*

Kiji Vukikomoala " The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform stronger legal and policy responses, including climate finance, just transition and accountability. Ultimately the true measure of climate justice is not what is promised at international negotiations but what changes for communities living with the consequences of climate change." *Kiji Vukikomoala, Executive Director, Fiji Environmental Law Association*

Two events at COP31, Friday 13 November 2026

Event 1: Counting the cost of climate change: Loss and damage in Ovalau, Fiji

New research and Pacific voices on what Ovalau communities are losing.

When: Friday 13 November 2026, 10:00–10:50am Türkiye time (7:00–7:50pm Fiji; 6:00–6:50pm Sydney AEDT) **Where:** Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion, Blue Zone **Speakers:** Dr Sharyn Goldstien (Environmental Defenders Office); Dr Anca Hanea (University of Melbourne); Dr Rosiana Lagi (University of the South

Pacific) **Organisers:** Hosted by the Fiji Environmental Law Association and the Environmental Defenders Office; research partners the University of Melbourne and the University of the South Pacific; supported by the Fairground Foundation

Event 2: Loss and Damage in Practice: From Climate Litigation to Community-Led Solutions

How affected communities are shaping responses to loss and damage, from transnational litigation to community-led initiatives that preserve culture and livelihoods.

When: Friday 13 November 2026, 1:15–2:45pm Türkiye time (10:15–11:45pm Fiji; 9:15–10:45pm Sydney AEDT) **Where:** Side Event Room 1 – Gordiyon **Speakers:** Brian Maltera (Vanuatu Government); Nusrat Naushin (The Asia Foundation); Miriam Saage-Maaß (ECCHR); Boy Jerry Even Sembiring (WALHI); Abdul Khaliq Laghari (farmer, Pakistan); Dr Rosiana Lagi (University of the South Pacific); Dr Anca Hanea (University of Melbourne); Rabeya Begum (Shariatpur Development Society); Danity Laukon (Jo-Jikum, Pacific Rising) **Partners include:** ECCHR, the Environmental Defenders Office, WALHI, Pacific Rising, medico international, UUSC, NTUF, HANDS, Sustainera, the University of Melbourne and the University of the South Pacific

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Notes to editors

- **The research:**
    - Moran et al. 2026, *Ecology and Society* 31(1):38, doi.org/10.5751/ES-16933-310138.
    - Kompas et al. The severe economic impact of sea level rise, storm surge and ocean warming in the Pacific: evidence from Ovalau, Fiji , https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23661673

  The studies were led by the University of Melbourne with communities in six iTaukei villages on Ovalau, and were supported by the Fairground Foundation.
- **Interviews:** Speakers are available for interviews in Antalya, and by phone or video for Pacific and Australian outlets, before and after the events.
- **Images and video:** Photos and video of Ovalau, interviews with community members on climate impacts, speaker headshots and the event flyers are available on request. We have a professional 3 minute video and a longer 10 minute video featuring drone footage of Ovalau and interviews with community members telling their story of loss and damage from their land.
- **About FELA:** The Fiji Environmental Law Association works to protect Fiji's environment and communities through law.
- **About EDO:** The Environmental Defenders Office is a public interest environmental law organisation that works with Pacific partners on climate, ocean and environmental law.

Media contact

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