

Written by Administrator
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NADI, Fiji -The first Joint Meeting of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management and Pacific Climate Change Roundtable is being held 8–11 July at the Sofitel Hotel in Denarau, Nadi, Fiji.

Michael Petterson, Director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Applied Geoscience and Technology Division, says the joint meeting demonstrates the fact that the region is now leading on the integration of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation efforts.

‘For several years our Disaster Reduction Programme has been working in close collaboration with regional partners, such the UNDP Pacific Centre and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, to help Pacific Island countries develop joint national action plans for disaster risk management and climate change adaptation,’ he says

Petterson says joint national action plans (JNAPs) integrating climate change and disaster risk management provide countries with a powerful planning tool to help them consider disaster and risk across a range of ministries.

‘At the end of the day, if your house falls down because of a climatic or another type of disaster, you don't care initially about the cause – you just want help. Experts in climate change and disaster risk management are seeking ways to work together to make the Pacific a safer place. The JNAP offers a roadway for deciding priorities, actions and partnerships, and several [country representatives] have shared their personal satisfaction with how this tool is now supporting a whole raft of government thinking,’ he says.

Charles Carlson, Director of Emergency Management in Cook Islands, says disaster risk management and climate change are now managed under the Office of the Prime Minister, reflecting the priority now placed on disaster risk management and climate change in Cook Islands. Mr Carlson says the country is now looking to develop joint legislation to cover all future climate change and disaster risk management activities.

‘There is no template for developing this legislation, so we've got to create the template ourselves, and that's what we are currently doing with the support from SPC's Disaster Reduction Programme,’ he says.

He says that the objectives of the JNAP are to ensure that the people of Cook Islands are prepared for disasters and climate change impacts, and to reduce these impacts.

‘The plan itself states that it is designed to provide a roadmap to achieve “a resilient and sustainable Cook Islands where our people are resilient to disasters and climate change and able to achieve sustainable livelihoods”,’ he says.

Mr Carlson says recovery costs from the cyclones that hit Cook Islands in 2005 amounted to NZD 20 million. Given the economically debilitating costs of natural disasters, Cook Islands is likely to gain substantial economic benefits from investing in the implementation of the JNAP.

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'I think it's a better approach because you're actually sharing resources, which is critical in small countries like ours. By bringing climate change and disaster risk management together, our approach can be much more focused and concentrated,' he says.

Carlson says that disaster risk and climate change management are now seen as a core responsibility across all government sectors in Cook Islands.

'In the past, anything to do with disaster management – people would look at us and say it was our responsibility, but what we're saying now is that it's everybody's responsibility. For example, if you look at our Ministry of Infrastructure, it is clearly their job to make sure that our infrastructure is climate or disaster proof,' he says.

Across the Cook Islands Government, he says efforts are being made to include JNAP implementation as a core function of not only the Office of the Prime Minister but of each implementing agency.

'This includes providing criteria for disaster risk reduction, climate change, environmental risks and resilience in each of our agencies' business plans, and establishing policy and legislative frameworks that recognise these linkages,' he says.

Carlson says that the SPC Disaster Reduction Programme has already provided support for Pacific Island countries to shift disaster management efforts toward towards a greater focus on prevention rather than response.

'SPC has been the backbone in developing disaster risk management within the region. I've been to a couple of the global conferences, and I can see that the region is quite advanced compared to other regions, and I think that is largely due to the support provided by SPC's Disaster Reduction Programme,' he says.

For more information, contact:

Michael Petterson at: michaelp@spc.int

Steve Menzies at: callingstevemenzies@gmail.com