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## CLIMATE SCIENTISTS WARN ON SEA LEVELS

# Pollution at top of PM's ocean plan

GRAHAM LLOYD DENNIS SHANAHAN

Scott Morrison has declared plastic pollution and illegal fishing to be the “clear and present dangers” to ocean health, as scientists yesterday revised up their largest forecasts about sea level rises.

In his first address to the UN general assembly in New York, the Prime Minister said efforts to tackle immediate ocean pollution concerns of Pacific Island nations should be led by industry.

His comments coincided with the release of a special report on the ocean and cryosphere for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that said major uncertainties remained on how much melting ice, particularly in Antarctica, would lift sea levels over coming centuries.

The worst-case scenario for sea level rise by 2100 was increased by 10cm to between 60cm and 110cm if greenhouse gas emissions were left unchecked.

As seas rose, what were now once-in-a-century extreme coastal floods could be expected at least once a year by the middle of this century, the report said.

The focus of Mr Morrison's UN address early on Thursday (AEDT) was on Australia's action on environmental challenges.

He said that, although action was needed on climate change, industry must address plastic pollution and recycling, more so

than governments, to deliver a commercial solution that not only helped the environment but also created jobs.

Although he did not attend the UN's climate summit at the start of the week and missed Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg's scathing address to world leaders, Mr Morrison has identified environmental threats in the Pacific as a “clear and present danger” that is not only climate change.

The Prime Minister said he would focus “very much on Australia's policy action in relation to key environmental challenges which don't just include climate change”.

“The issue of our oceans, the management of our oceans, the impact of plastics on our oceans, waste management, and illegal fishing are important issues for Australia,” Mr Morrison said after attending the opening of the sum-

mit by Donald Trump. “We need to take action on climate change, but there are actually issues like plastics in our oceans which present even more immediate threats ... they have quite significant impacts on health, particularly in the Pacific Island communities.”

The future of low-lying Pacific nations has been a key focus for the IPCC. The new report, released on Wednesday night (AEST), outlined the latest science on sea level rises, ice melt and the potential impact on extreme weather events and coastal areas.

On sea levels, the best case was for a rise of between 30cm and 60cm by 2100 if greenhouse gas emissions were sharply reduced and global warming limited to less than 2C.

The IPCC report said the rate of sea level rise had accelerated in recent decades due to melting ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica as well as meltwater from glaciers and the expansion of warmer sea waters. IPCC working group co-chair Valerie Masson-Delmotte said the range of sea level projections for 2100 and beyond was related to how ice sheets would react to warming, es-



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pecially in Antarctica, “with major uncertainties still remaining”.

Debra Roberts, co-chair of the IPCC working group that prepared the report, said drastic action was needed to limit sea

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AAP

Scott Morrison at the UN

# Pollution at top of Morrison ocean plan

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level rises that would have an impact on millions of people worldwide. “We will only be able to keep global warming to well below 2C above pre-industrial levels if we effect unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society, including energy, land and ecosystems, urban and infrastructure as well as industry,” she said.

Earlier IPCC reports have called for the early phase-out of fossil fuels and a change to diets away from meat. The new report said all people on Earth depended directly or indirectly on the ocean and cryosphere.

Most of the findings in the report are well known and include the impact of warmer temperatures on coral reefs and rising sea levels on coastal development.

The report said that, over the 21st century, the ocean would experience increased temperatures, greater upper ocean stratification and further acidification. Marine heatwaves and extreme El Nino and La Nina events were projected to become more frequent.

Global-scale glacier mass loss, permafrost thaw, and decline in snow cover and Arctic sea ice extent were projected to continue in the near-term (2031—50).

The Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are projected to lose mass at an increasing rate throughout the century and beyond. Professor Steven Sherwood from the University of NSW said: “One new thing is that we can now say with some confidence that Arctic sea-ice decline is unprecedented in at least 1000 years, which is some of the clearest evidence yet that human impacts on climate already dominate over anything natural. Also, this report examines expected changes out to the year 2300, when sea level rise is projected to be 3-4 metres without mitigation efforts, but could be kept under 1m with strong mitigation efforts.”

Co-lead author of the report, Nerilie Abram from ANU said that if greenhouse gas emissions were cut, Australia could gain more than an extra decade to prepare parts of Australia’s coastal infrastructure against damaging

events. “But even if we act now, some changes are already locked in and our ocean and frozen regions will continue to change for decades to centuries to come, so we need to also make plans to adapt,” Professor Abram said.

She said there was a range of options, from building barriers to planned relocation, to protecting the coral reefs and mangroves that provide natural coastal defences.

Australian Conservation Foundation chief executive Kelly O’Shanassy said 21 million Australians lived within 50km of the

coast. “This is a stark warning from the world’s best scientific minds that climate change is harming our oceans, meaning more coral bleaching, more storms that lead to flooding and more bushfire-fuelling El Nino’s if our pollution keeps rising,” Mr O’Shanassy said.

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia said the report increased pressure to increase the number of protected areas in Antarctica. “The UN report warns that iconic polar species are at risk of decline and possibly extinction, with whales, penguins and Antarc-



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tic krill in danger as their homes change forever,” said WWF chief executive Dermot O’Gorman.

Stepping up his push to tackle ocean pollution, Mr Morrison sought to put greater responsibility on industry to address the problem. When it came to plastics and recycling “it needs to be commercially sustainable as a model”, he said. “We don’t want to see, you know, taxes and large levels of state intervention, and massive summits, and these sorts of things. What we want to see is industry leadership, and support for that

leadership, and research, and design, and the identification of new products and markets, and how we can facilitate that, so you get a commercially sustainable waste management operation.”

Mr Morrison said the Australian-owned Pratt Industries paper plant that the US President opened in Ohio on the weekend was an example of successful, commercially led cardboard recycling. “We want to see that same sort of model be successful in the plastics recycling industry, and Australia has an enormous amount to offer here,” he said. “It’s not only going to make our environment cleaner and the world’s oceans cleaner, but I think it’s going to be a real jobs opportunity for Australia.

Iron ore magnate Andrew Forrest’s Minderoo Foundation on Wednesday committed \$US300m (\$442m) to a new industry-focused effort to reduce worldwide plastic waste. Mr Forrest’s Sea for the Future program aims to raise \$US20bn a year through a voluntary levy on plastics resin based on its carbon footprint.

## SEA LEVEL FORECASTS

Change relative to 1986-2005

