

King tide, Funafuti, Tuvalu, February 2024



Science says Tuvalu will drown within decades; the reality is worse

By Niuone Eliuta
15 February 2024

Tuvalu, a picturesque island nation nestled in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, is currently grappling with a relentless onslaught of storm surges and towering waves, wreaking havoc on coastal communities. While spring or king tides always come around in February, this year's king tide is like nothing we have witnessed before. This week, the island's one main road has succumbed to the fury of nature, submerged beneath torrents of seawater, exacerbating the already dire situation faced by Tuvaluans.

With this year's storm surges and the rising sea inundating vital transportation routes, many Tuvaluans are questioning their future in the face of the unyielding climate crisis. On the main island, connecting both ends, there is only one main road and it's normally the lifeline connecting communities and providing for the flow of essential services. On the night of Sunday 11 February 2024, that one lifeline was an impassable river, not only filled with water but also with displaced rocks and coastal waste.

The flooding of the main road in Tuvalu has taken its toll on underground electricity generation. Some homes, businesses, and essential services are now grappling with the harsh reality of life without electricity for hours and even days. This not only disrupts daily lives but also poses significant risks to public health and safety. Regular and sudden power cuts are now becoming the norm for Tuvaluans, and many have had to adapt to these uncertainties.



Residents clearing the main road toward Lofeagai, Funafuti, Tuvalu (Wahasi Photography)

The current situation in Tuvalu serves as a stark reminder of the existential threat posed by the climate crisis. Scientists have [predicted](#) that Tuvalu might be submerged within 50 to 100 years, but to many Tuvaluans this seems optimistic. For young Tuvaluans, pressing questions arise: is it worthwhile to continue living in Tuvalu, and what does the future hold for them and their families? The spectre of displacement and the ever-present threat of climate-related devastation loom large, provoking deep-seated concerns about the sustainability of life on the island.

One response to these existential uncertainties is the [Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union](#), a bilateral agreement offering opportunities for Tuvaluans to move to and work in Australia under special visa conditions. For young Tuvaluans grappling with the daunting realities of their homeland's climate crisis, this treaty represents a potential lifeline - a chance to escape the precariousness of their current situation and seek new opportunities abroad.



Commuting on the flooded main road, Funafuti, Tuvalu (Tuvalu Meteorological Service)

Rising sea levels and increasingly severe weather patterns have made island nations like Tuvalu particularly susceptible to the devastating consequences of global warming. As the international community grapples with the urgency of addressing the climate crisis, the plight of Tuvalu underscores the critical need for urgent and decisive action. Tuvalu is literally sinking, and people are scared; many think the country could be uninhabitable within the next five to ten years. There is a lot at stake here for Tuvalu: we are bearing the brunt of the actions and omissions of big carbon emitters.

Following the [2024 Tuvalu general election](#), the island nation finds itself grappling with the practical realities of the climate crisis. The country is at the same time grappling with the complexities of forming a new government, impeding critical decision-making processes – including [renewed discussion](#) on the Falepili Union – at a time when climate impacts demand immediate attention.

Amidst the current political uncertainty, voices on social media platforms like Facebook are growing more strident, reflecting the frustration and impatience of Tuvaluans who demand

not just rhetoric but immediate action. One recent Facebook post captures the sentiment prevalent among many Tuvaluans, saying that the time for talking is over and that what is needed now are tangible and effective measures to mitigate Tuvalu's acute national challenges.



Main road, Funafuti, Tuvalu, inundated by sea water (Wahasi Photography)

One popular concern revolves around the setting of priorities for adaptation projects. Many argue that certain areas, such as Lofeagai and Kavatoetoe at both ends of Funafuti which have been severely disrupted by the rising sea and sea swells, are more vulnerable than other areas that have recently undergone protective works, including elevation.

The new government will immediately have to face these challenges: determining priorities for adaptation work, and addressing regular power outages. With rising sea levels, increasingly severe weather events and infrastructure damage looming large, the urgency of action cannot be overstated. Yet adaptation projects come with a hefty price tag.

Now is the moment for swift and collective action, and less debate. The fate of Tuvalu hangs

in the balance and the world must heed its call for justice and solidarity. Only through collective action can we hope to confront the existential threat of the climate crisis and build a more equitable and sustainable Tuvalu.

About the author/s

Niuone Eliuta

Niuone Eliuta is an independent researcher and works as a First Secretary at the Tuvalu High Commission in Wellington, New Zealand.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/science-says-tuvalu-will-drown-within-decades-the-reality-is-worse-20240215/>

Date downloaded: 19 May 2024



Australian
National
University

The Devpolicy Blog is based at the Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.