

Climate change the hot topic as Pacific Islands Forum kicks off

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The 44th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting [began today](#) in Marshall Islands, and climate change is expected to dominate the discussions.

The theme for this year's forum is 'Marshalling the Pacific Response to the Climate Challenge' and one of the goals is for leaders to agree to on a [Majuro Declaration for climate leadership](#).

'Our theme speaks partly to the frustrations we have all felt in the past of being overlooked, of being ignored and of being undervalued,' said outgoing Chairman of the Forum, Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna.

Discussions on the Majuro Declaration could be tricky, given that Australia and New Zealand are being asked to join island leaders in signing on to a declaration which 'recognises the complete insufficiency of current efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and ... confirms the Pacific Island Forum's climate leadership in the form of their ambitious commitments, targets and actions to reduce emissions'.

Because of the elections, Senator Jacinta Collins, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, will be [representing](#) Australia. Foreign Minister Bob Carr is currently in Russia for the G20 and Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs Matt Thistlethwaite is facing a tough race in the [Kingford Smith](#) electorate. Minister for Trade Richard Marles also appears to have stayed behind to campaign, even though he holds his seat of [Corio](#) by a safe margin.

In the absence of a high-level Australian delegation, New Zealand's climate commitments are expected to be under the most scrutiny at the meet.

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Polynesian Leaders Group in Auckland on Friday, and the Smaller Islands States Leaders Meeting yesterday.