

Environmental Overview

Environmental Issues

Current Issues:

-soil erosion

-deforestation

-invasive species

-over fishing

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mtc):

0.0

Country Rank (GHG output):

180th

Natural Hazards:

-

occasional typhoons

-active volcanism

Editor's Note:

Like so many small island nations in the world, Samoa is vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and climate change, derived from carbon emissions, and resulting in the rise in sea level. Political policy in the country is often connected to ecological issues, which have over time morphed into an existential crisis of sorts.

Please see the special section titled "Climate change talks in Qatar extend life of Kyoto Protocol" located in the entry titled "Global Environmental Agreements" in this Country Review for information on the December 2012 summit climate talks in the Qatari city of Doha. There, representatives from countries across the world gathered to discuss the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The summit yielded results with decisions made (1) to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, and (2) for wealthier countries to compensate poorer countries for the losses and damage incurred as a result of climate change.

There was, in fact, little progress made on the central issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Had those emissions been reduced, there would have been less of a need to financially deal with the devastation caused by climate change. One interpretation was that the global community was accepting the fact that industrialization was contributing to global warming, which had deleterious effects on the polar ice caps and concomitantly on the rise of sea level, with devastating effects for small island nations. Thus, wealthier countries were willing to pay around \$10 billion a year through 2020, effectively in "damages," to the poor countries that could be viewed as the "collateral damage" of industrial progress. But damages today could potentially be destruction tomorrow, leaving in place the existential challenges and burdens to be born by some of the world's smallest and least wealthy island countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the representative for the small island nation states at the Doha summit responded with ire, characterizing the lack of progress on reducing emissions as follows: "We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands. There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) -- only promises that something might materialize in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

Indeed, in most small island countries not just in the Pacific, but also the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have been dominant themes with dire life and death consequences looming in the background for their people. Small island nations in these region are already at risk from the rise of sea-level, tropical cyclones, floods. But their very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming were also at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Increasingly high storm surges can wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Accordingly, the very existence of island are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map. Yet even with the existential threat of being wiped off the map in the offing, the international community has been either slow or restrictive in its efforts to deal with global warming, climate change, economic and ecological damage, as well as the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees.

A 2012 report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program underlined the concerns of small island nations and their people as it concluded that the livelihoods of approximately 10 million people in Pacific island communities were increasingly vulnerable to climate change. In fact, low-lying islands in that region would likely confront losses of up to 18 percent of gross domestic product due to climate change, according to the report. The report covers 21 countries and territories, including Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga, and recommended environmental legislation intended to deal with the climate crisis facing the small island countries particularly. As noted by David Sheppard, the director general of the Pacific Regional Environment Program that co-sponsored this study: "The findings... emphasize the need more than ever to raise the bar through collective actions that address the region's environmental needs at all levels."

For more information on the threats faced in small island nations by climate change and the measures being undertaken to lobby for international action, please see the Alliance for Small Island States available online at the URL: <http://aosis.org/>

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Environmental Policy

Regulation and Jurisdiction:

The regulation and protection of the environment in Samoa is under the jurisdiction of the following:

The Lands Survey and Environment Department

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Major Non-Governmental Organizations:

N/A

International Environmental Accords:

Party to:

Biodiversity

Climate Change

Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol

Desertification

Hazardous Wastes

Law of the Sea

Ozone Layer Protection

Signed but not ratified:

None

Kyoto Protocol Status (year ratified):

2000

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Greenhouse Gas Ranking

GHG Emissions Rankings

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