

# WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?



**There are big changes happening on our islands because of climate change.** Our land is being taken by the sea through erosion on our beaches and coastlines. Sacred sites on low lying islands are being damaged and could be washed away.

This is why Uncle Pabai Pabai, from Boigu, and Uncle Paul Kabai, from Saibai, are taking the Australian Government to Court.

## WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

Climate change is a problem for the whole world. Many Torres Strait Islander and Pasifika leaders are worried about it.

Climate change is caused by gases like carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide comes from burning fossil fuels, like coal, oil and gas.

These gases form a blanket around the earth and make it harder for the heat from the sun to escape back into space. This makes the earth hotter.

The heat causes ice caps to melt and causes sea levels to rise and makes storms and cyclones get worse. It also causes extreme heat, bushfires and changes rainfall patterns in different places around the world.



Flooding near Saibai Community Centre  
Photo: TSIRC



Damage caused by Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2006. Warming caused by climate change is making tropical cyclones more severe. Photo: Josephine Prasad



Bushfire on Gosper's Mountain in Australia in 2019. Climate change causes bad droughts which is making bushfires much more dangerous. Photo: Gena Dray

## CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE TORRES STRAIT

Climate change is a big threat to the Torres Strait. Floods and erosion are already doing a lot of damage. Roads, gardens and cemeteries are being flooded by sea water. The government is building sea walls but they will not protect the islands forever.

Our way of life is under threat, the turtles and dugongs we have hunted are moving because of the sand covering the seagrass where they feed. We can't grow fresh food like taro and cassava because our gardens are inundated with salt. If emissions are not reduced, climate change could force us off our islands and make us Australia's first climate refugees.

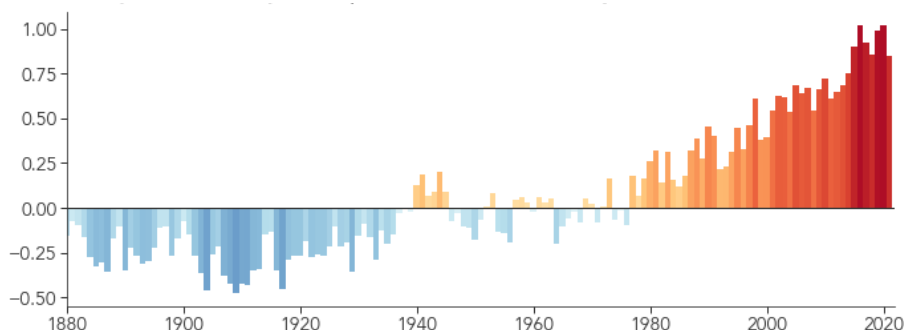


## WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN WE SAY '1.5°C'?

There is lots of discussion in the media and between politicians about climate change and different numbers like 1.2, 1.5 or 2 degrees of warming. This is the number that refers to how much the earth's temperature has risen or will rise because of the fossil fuels in the atmosphere.

This number is very important because just a small rise can cause big problems. **It's similar to a person having a fever** - if your temperature goes up just 1 degree it will have a big effect on all the different systems in your body. It is like the earth is sick with a fever.

This graph shows how global temperatures have increased since 1880. Scientists at the Climate Council say Australia has already warmed by around 1.4 degrees which has already caused a lot of damage like floods, bushfires, storms and changing weather patterns.



Scientists say that to prevent the worst harm from climate change, **we have to keep the temperature rise below 1.5 degrees.**

However, most countries, including Australia, are not stopping emissions fast enough and the UN says the world is on track for a temperature rise of 2.8 degrees.

The current Australian Government has said it will reduce emissions by 43% by 2030. **Scientists say this is not enough** to keep warming below 1.5°C - and that we will need to reduce emission by at least 75% by 2030. That is why Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul are taking the Government to court to argue that they have a duty of care to stop making the earth hotter and causing more climate harm to our communities.

If you have any questions or want to find out more about the case you can head to the Australian Climate Case website: [australianclimatecase.org.au](http://australianclimatecase.org.au).