

Kiribati to show the world effects of climate change

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About 40 officials from around the world will fly to the tiny atoll nation of Kiribati this week to take a look at the immediate impact climate change is having on the Pacific nation.

Representatives from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, along with AusAid senior officials, will join delegates from 19 nations including New Zealand, the US, Canada, the UK, Cuba, the European Union and various Asian countries, at a three-day talkfest in the nation's capital Tarawa.

The Tarawa Climate Change Conference (TCCC), starting Tuesday, hopes to amplify the need to address climate change concerns immediately, said Andrew Teem, a senior policy adviser to the Kiribati President. Kiribati is a collection of atolls scattered around the central Pacific, none more than three metres above the average sea level.

"It is that physical situation that makes us much more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change," Mr Teem said on Friday.

Rising sea levels, salt water inundation and severe coastal erosion is forcing the 100,000 people who live on the islands to move further inland - "if there is such a thing", he said.

"A change in direction of prevailing winds over a prolonged period causes so much change to the coastline."
And a "pretty severe" La Nina forecast for the future means rainfall will be rare.

"It is a combination of all these factors that make climate change a very real threat to our existence," Mr Teem said.

"If agreements in addressing the causes of climate change keep being delayed, the impact will only get worse and, for countries like Kiribati, there really is no option but to have that agreement, in order to ensure the survival of the nation.

"Kiribati, being one of the most vulnerable nations facing the threat of climate change, is worried that the pace of the negotiations ... is very slow.

"The conference is held by Kiribati in the hope that ... those major countries that hold the key to unlocking the decisions ... getting progress happening sooner rather than later, can come to Kiribati and see for themselves the reality of the situation and experience what is for us something that we have to live with on a daily basis.

"We are hoping that our voice will be heard."

Kiribati President Anote Tong made the call to host a meeting ahead of December's global change summit in Cancun, Mexico, in a bid to push for a

legally binding treaty to promote long-term action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Such an agreement was snubbed at last year's summit in Denmark in favour of the Copenhagen Accord.

More than 120 nations signed the three-page statement out of Copenhagen, voluntarily pledging \$US30 billion to help poor countries cope with the short-term effects of climate change.

While things appear grim for Kiribati, Mr Teem was optimistic.

"We will never give up, we will always think that we will continue to exist."

SOURCE: AAP/SMH/PACNEWS