



## Climate change may create new wave of asylum seekers

By Online Editor

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The effects of climate change on small Pacific Island nations could eventually lead to a new wave of boat arrivals to Australia, experts say.

The Australian government needs to focus on migration planning now before Pacific Island nation people are forced to flee their homes to avoid disaster, Professor Jane McAdam, Director of the International Refugee and

Migration Law Project at the University of NSW, told AAP today.

International legal and policy experts are due to discuss issues around people displaced by climate change at a Sydney conference today and tomorrow.

The conference will hear from experts on two small Pacific Island nations, Tuvalu and Kiribati, which are experiencing climate change threats including coastal erosion, drought, increased tropical cyclones and king tides.

Climate change in itself may not force people to leave their homes, but "it might be the straw that breaks the camel's back," Prof McAdam said.

Australia had no planned response to climate change migration issues and its current response to Pacific Island nations tended to focus on aid, Prof McAdam said.

"While I think that's really important, you can't turn a blind eye to the fact that there are these underlying pressures," she said.

"If we don't plan for it, then we may well find that we do get a different kind of wave of boat people.

"And we know how that plays out."

Planned migration responses would give people who may need to leave their homes in 10 or 20 years the option to plan, she said.

“It gives people certainty that if and when they need to go, they can, instead of waiting until they literally have to flee,” she said.

“If you allow some of the population to leave now, that may relieve some of the pressure in their home country.”

Kiribati's government is eager to develop programs that will allow some people to migrate to Australia.

“But these people don't want to be seen as refugees,” Prof McAdam said.

“They want to be seen as active, valued participants in a new country, not recipients of aid.”

Developing migration programmes would not lead to huge numbers of migrants looking to come to Australia, Prof McAdam said.

“What we find is that most people don't want to go anywhere. It's quite a traumatic thing to contemplate.

“But certainly among the younger generation there is a sense that this is going to be inevitable.

“We need to be thinking about how we should respond to that.”.

SOURCE: AAP/PACNEWS