

Church to advocate for climate change refugees

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand will call for the New Zealand Government to assist climate change refugees after Assembly accepted a recommendation by the Pacific Islands Synod to 'advocate for climate change refugees by strongly encouraging the Aotearoa New Zealand government to establish relocation strategies with the governments of those Pacific Island nations whose natural island habitats are no longer tenable due to the effects of climate change'.

The Rev Asora Amosa, clerk of the Pacific Islands Synod, spoke on the need for the Church to support "our brothers and sisters in the Pacific, our neighbours".

There was unanimous support for the recommendation with the only objection voiced coming from the moderator of Te Aka Puaho, the Rev Wayne Te Kaawa, who said, "Before you invite people to come live in our country, ask us first". Asora replied that the Pacific Island Synod did not consult with Te Aka Puaho as, "with due respect to our tangata whenua, we thought we are in the same house, in the same family."

The acceptance of the recommendation continues the Presbyterian Church's advocacy for its Pacific island neighbours and its commitment to caring for creation. Last year the Church called on the New Zealand Government to give Tuvaluans NZ citizenship so it could accept Tuvalu people displaced by rising sea levels due to climate change. And as a member of the Council for World Mission Pacific the Church criticised the NZ government for making changes to New Zealand's aid that could have devastating consequences for poor economically depressed island nations.

The Church's 2004 General Assembly saw 'Caring for Creation' adopted as part of the Church's mission statement, and at General Assembly 2008, the Church endorsed a declaration on climate change which has seen many of its churches commit to becoming 'greener'.