



The Center for Pacific Islands Studies; Pacific RISA and the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center; and Loli Aniaiu, Maka'ala Aniaiu (LAMA) present

Vulnerable Islands: Climate Change, Tectonic Change, and Changing Livelihoods in the Western Pacific

by John Connell, School of Geosciences, University of Sydney

Chaired by Malia Nobrega-Olivera, LAMA

Friday, 8 November 2013

12:00 pm – 1:15 pm

John Burns Hall room 3021

Professor Connell will discuss the ways that small Pacific islands, especially atolls, have been widely argued to be the “canaries in the coalmine” of climate change. Recent degradation of island environments has been apparent proof of the impact of sea-level rise. Physical changes to several small islands can also be attributed to tectonic change and human modification. La Niña events and cyclones have caused localized flooding and storm damage. Islands experienced broadly similar environmental problems in earlier times, now accentuated by human pressures on scarce land areas and resources. Most atoll islands have not significantly changed in size. Local human factors, tectonic subsidence, and La Niña events have created some iconic sites that have become symbols of sea-level rise. Multiple factors have contributed to physical changes to islands that are sometimes erroneously attributed solely to global warming. A culture of migration has become established in many small islands in order to diversify impoverished livelihoods; this also has some impact on interpretations of environmental changes. Contemporary climate change will exacerbate present environmental changes and stimulate further migration.

John Connell's principal research interests are concerned with political, economic, and social development in less-developed countries, especially in the South Pacific region and in other small island states. Much of this research is currently oriented toward issues of rural development, migration, and inequality. A second research theme is on decolonization and nationalism. More recently he has worked on the cultural geography of music and food. He has written books on migration and development issues, especially concerning Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia and urbanization in the Third World.

Malia Nobrega-Olivera, Director of Strategic Partnerships for Loli Aniaiu, Maka'ala Aniaiu (LAMA), is a Native Hawaiian educator, community organizer, and advocate of indigenous rights at all levels—local, regional, and international. She received a bachelor's degree in Hawaiian language and a master's degree in educational technology from UH Mānoa. Malia's advocacy work has taken her to United Nations meetings, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, UN World Summit on the Information Society, the UN Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). She works closely with the indigenous caucus at these meetings and is currently the international coordinator for the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), as well as the coordinator of Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific who participate at the CBD and UNFCCC meetings.

