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BLAIR SLAMS SHAMEFUL AUSTRALIA AT CHOGM

PACIFIC ISLANDS THREATEN TO SUE

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's defiant promise to raise environment issues at CHOGM despite Australia's efforts to sweep them under the carpet was welcomed today by Australia Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

Dr Hamilton said Australia's role had been nothing less than shameful. Australia had sought to keep the climate change issue off the CHOGM agenda and has attempted to bully Pacific leaders into quiescence. Mr Blair announced yesterday he would raise the issue at CHOGM this weekend.

"The London Guardian reported yesterday that some Pacific Island nations are threatening to sue Australia for its failure to act on climate change," Dr Hamilton said. "At least four island countries – Tuvalu, the Maldives, Kiribati and Tokelau – face extinction from rising sea levels due to climate change.

"Other Commonwealth countries such as Bangladesh and Nigeria are threatened with huge crop losses, loss of productive land and the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. In other words, it is not an exaggeration to say that millions of Commonwealth citizens face life-threatening hazards.

"These concerns are overwhelmingly endorsed by the world's leading scientists. Australia has not only refused to acknowledge the facts but has actively sought to ensure they are not even discussed. "

Dr Hamilton said Mr Blair had also promised to challenge Australia for tying itself to US President George Bush's already discredited anti-Kyoto agenda.

The indecent haste with which the Howard Government signed an agreement with the US Bush Administration allying Australia to the US policy of refusing to sign the Kyoto Protocol was an affront to threatened Commonwealth nations.

"The so-called Australian/US Climate Action Partnership is the kind of vacuous package governments cobble together when they want to pretend they are doing something whilst actually doing nothing. And to sign it on the eve of a meeting at which countries with profound concerns have been discouraged from speaking out is an insult," he said.