

More Than 80% Of Tuvalu Seeks Australian Climate Visa

AFP:: More than 80 percent of Pacific nation Tuvalu's population is seeking a landmark climate visa to live in Australia as rising seas lap at its shores, official figures showed Wednesday.

Australia is offering visas to Tuvalu citizens each year under a climate migration deal Canberra has billed as "the first agreement of its kind anywhere in the world".

"We received extremely high levels of interest in the ballot with 8,750 registrations, which includes family members of primary registrants," the Australian high commission in Tuvalu said in a statement.

The figure is equal to 82 percent of the country's 10,643 population, according to census figures collected in 2022.

"With 280 visas offered this program year, it means that many will miss out," the commission said.

One of the most climate-threatened corners of the planet, scientists fear Tuvalu will be uninhabitable within the next 80 years.

Two of the archipelago's nine coral atolls have already largely disappeared under the waves.

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The figures were released hours before a landmark decision by the world's top court in The Hague laying out what legal obligations countries have to prevent climate change and whether polluters should pay up for the consequences.

The case, which has been brought by Pacific nations, could reshape climate justice, with major impacts on laws around the

world.

Australia and Tuvalu signed the groundbreaking Falepili Union in 2024, part of Canberra's efforts to blunt China's expanding reach in the region.

Under that pact, Australia opened a new visa category specially set aside for citizens of Tuvalu who will be selected at random.

"Australia recognises the devastating impact climate change is having on the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of climate vulnerable countries and people, particularly in the Pacific region," Australia's foreign affairs department told AFP last month.

"This is the first agreement of its kind anywhere in the world, providing a pathway for mobility with dignity as climate impacts worsen."

It will also provide Tuvaluans the choice to live, study and work in Australia.

Tuvalu citizens, including those living outside the country, were eligible to be included in the ballot if they are aged over 18 and pay a Aus\$25 fee (US\$16).

The visa deal has been hailed as a landmark response to the looming challenge of climate-forced migration.

The Falepili pact commits Australia to defending Tuvalu in the face of natural disasters, health pandemics and "military aggression".

"For the first time, there is a country that has committed legally to come to the aid of Tuvalu, upon request, when Tuvalu encounters a major natural disaster, a health pandemic or military aggression," Tuvalu Prime Minister Feleti Teo said at the time.

“Again, for the first time there is a country that has committed legally to recognise the future statehood and sovereignty of Tuvalu despite the detrimental impact of climate changed-induced sea level rise.”

The agreement also gives Australia a say in any other defence pacts Tuvalu signs with other countries, raising concerns at the time that the Pacific nation was handing over its sovereignty.

Tuvalu is one of just 12 states that still have formal diplomatic relations with Taipei rather than Beijing.

AFP