

## EDITORIAL: An investigative legacy

IN APRIL this year, a one-day seminar was held at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) to celebrate more than 25 years of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ). The ACIJ produced, researched and promoted discussion of journalism from 1991 until it was closed by UTS in early 2017. Although no clear explanation was given for the university's decision, observers generally agreed that the closure reflected the contemporary pressure on independent public interest activities in Australian universities, which are increasingly driven by financial and corporate needs as a consequence of decades of underfunding.

For past and present staff and students who attended the seminar, it was time to reflect on the Centre's contributions. They included numerous investigative reports published under the ACIJ mastheads of *Scoop*, *Reportage* and one-off special publications; scholarly books, articles and the annual Public Right to Know (PR2K) conferences; public seminars hosted around Australia and broadcast on ABC Radio National; and the annual awarding of the George Munster Award for Independent Journalism. One theme that emerged was that for more than 20 years the ACIJ had a strong working relationship with Professor David Robie in Fiji and Papua New Guinea and later the Pacific Media Centre (which now publishes this journal), focused on reporting and researching media in our own Pacific region. This relationship began when Professor Wendy Bacon travelled to Port Moresby to collaborate with Robie on developing investigative journalism in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. During the 2000 coup in Fiji, the ACIJ played a crucial role in continuing to publish reports by University of the South Pacific (USP) journalism students after the programme's *Pacific Journalism Online* server was deliberately disabled to censor the intensive student reporting of the coup (Robie, 2001; 2010).

Reflecting the approach of both centres, the body of work that emerged out of the relationship emphasised the practice of journalism in parallel with the study of journalism, which in turn led to the development of the *Frontline* section of this journal. There was a related priority placed on critical research about the way Australian and New Zealand media report the region.

In 2003 and 2004, the ACIJ published the results of a study funded by AusAID of coverage of development and humanitarian issues by the Australian media (Bacon & Nash, 2003; 2004). This was a broad study covering all regions of the world and across print, radio and TV. We found that only a low proportion (5 percent) of stories referred to the Pacific region, and that most Pacific Island nations were receiving nil or hardly any coverage. What coverage did exist tended to be concentrated on political conflict and a very narrow range of issues. The research also demonstrated a stark information gap, with wealthier audiences

concentrated in the biggest cities of Melbourne and Sydney being supplied with more in-depth media about Pacific Island nations than the rest of Australia. This was a direct consequence of the fact that all other capital city newspaper markets in Australia were serviced by News Corporation only.

It is disappointing to report that over the last 14 years, the situation has not improved. Recently, a team of researchers, including freelance journalist Jo Chandler (who has reported extensively in the Pacific), noted in their submission to an Australian Senate Inquiry into the Future of Public Interest Journalism that, as a result of thousands of job losses and cuts to revenue in Australia's mainstream media, and cuts to ABC positions, coverage of the Pacific by Australian media has deteriorated even further (Chandler & Morton, 2014). Even allowing for the internet, these cuts and job losses mean that 'conditions of daily life in many parts of our nation and neighbourhood are increasingly invisible to Australian audiences' and were also impacting on the flow of information available to the public in Pacific Islands nations. These researchers, and many others, have used their submissions to the Senate Inquiry to urge the Australian government to invest in public interest journalism through mechanisms designed to protect the independence of reporters. We endorse these suggestions (Nolan, 2017).

No contemporary story or issue is of more significance than climate change, the focus of this journal issue. The impact of climate change is no longer a case of merely future threat. Extreme weather events including droughts, ocean acidification, and the impacts of rising sea levels and sea-surface temperatures are already having terrible consequences on the region.

A number of ACIJ research reports documented a disappointing lack of coverage of the impact and challenge of climate change confronting Pacific Island nations (Nash & Bacon, 2013). Although Pacific Island nations played a significant role in both public and behind the scenes negotiations at COP13, the same information gaps that have been revealed in the earlier studies of humanitarian coverage were again confirmed. There was almost no reporting of stories about the role of small island states in News Corporation newspapers, and some of what was reported came from a mocking, overtly climate-denialist or -sceptic position.

In 2011 and 2013, the ACIJ published two further reports on the coverage of climate change and climate science by 11 major Australian news outlets. The first report (on climate change policy) found overwhelmingly negative coverage by News Corporation of the then Labour government's handling of carbon pricing legislation. The second found a decline in climate science reporting, and that linked to the findings of negative bias in the first study. News Corporation outlets were increasingly less likely to reflect the climate change consensus position of more than 97 percent of the world's climate scientists.

While the ACIJ has now passed into history, the Pacific Media Centre, *Pacific*

*Journalism Review* and the activities they support in the Pacific and Australia, as well as New Zealand, go from strength to strength (Duffield, 2015). And in both countries it is important that the sense of crisis in the journalism profession and the threat of increasing concentration of mainstream media ownership does not overwhelm the many worthwhile initiatives and projects that continue to be undertaken. While multiple award-winning New Zealand investigative journalist Melanie Reid recently expressed fears for the future of journalism in her country, she also demonstrated that new online start-ups can show mainstream media the way—as with her own exposé of the biggest scandal of election year, which scooped the parliamentary press gallery (RNZ Mediawatch, 2017).

**T**HE COMBINATION of independent journalism production along with scholarly work about journalism has been the hallmark of both the ACIJ and this journal. In this edition, *Frontline* critically evaluates **Bearing Witness**, an initiative of the Pacific Media Centre through which two neophyte journalists, Ami Dhabuwala and TJ Aumua, visited Fiji after the terrible tropical cyclone Winston that left 44 people dead, 45,000 people displaced and 350,000 indirectly affected in 2016. David Robie examines the first year of this project and its influence by new approaches to journalism, including Peace and Human Rights journalism, which seek to change fundamentally the conflict frame in which most reporting occurs.

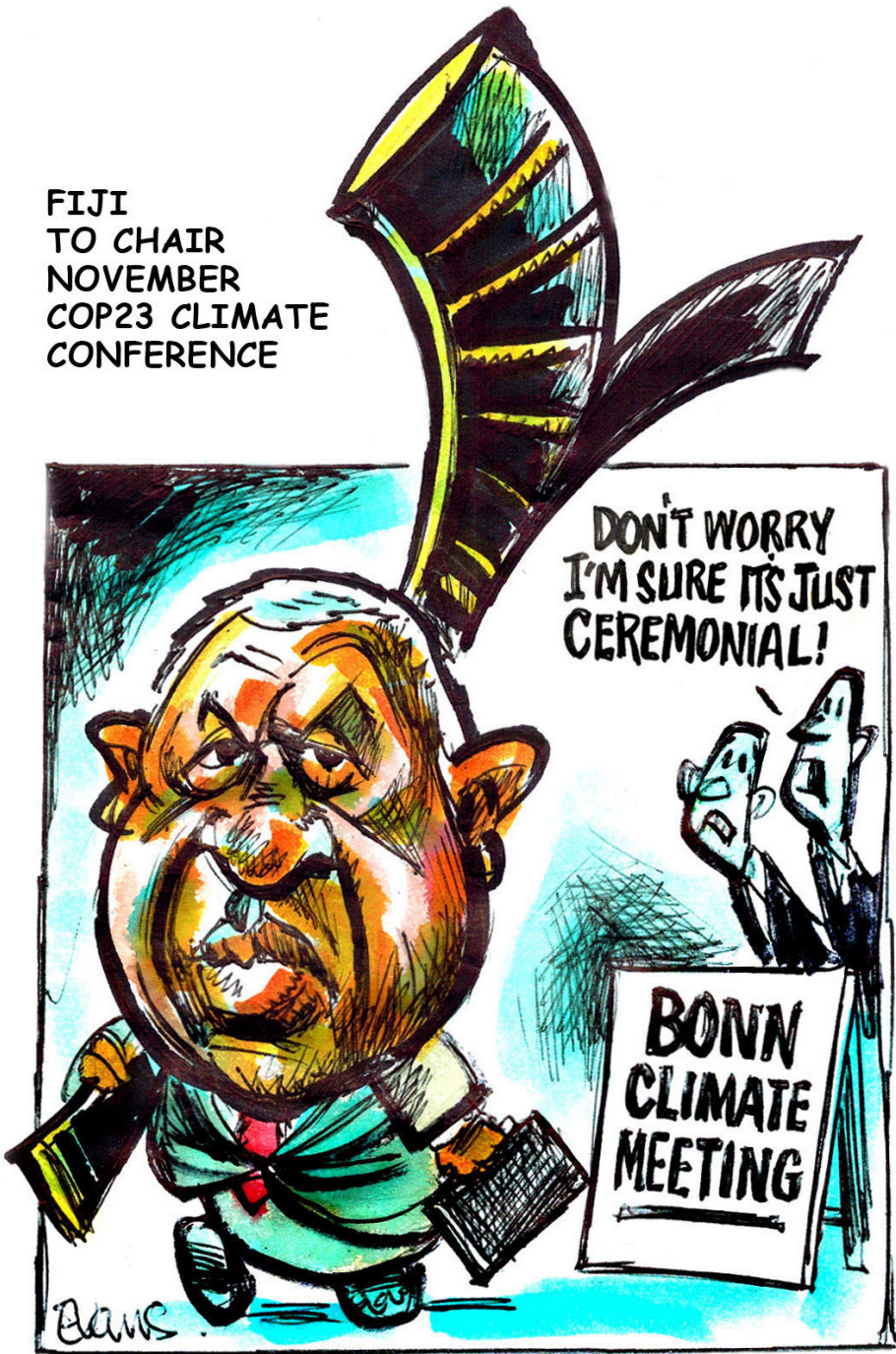
The edition theme is introduced by **Robert Hackett**, who outlines in a commentary the characteristics of Peace Journalism (PJ), and then summarises ways that PJ could inspire justice and crisis-oriented climate journalism, including ethical moorings, audience orientation, journalism practices, self-reflexivity and scepticism of the practices of ‘objectivity’.

**Wesley Morgan** critically examines Fiji’s role as co-host of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in November 2017 and the significance of this Pacific initiative, while veteran communication studies scholar and commentator **Crispin Maslog** questions the preparedness of Asia-Pacific media programmes for their vitally important challenge faced over environmental reporting.

Investigative journalist **Phil Vine** with 25 years of New Zealand broadcast experience, who has come under fire from former colleagues after joining the environmental campaigning organisation Greenpeace, offers a thought-provoking commentary on how the mainstream media views itself. He opens up an argument about what constitutes a ‘journalist’ in a contemporary context.

German television journalist **Ulrich P. Weissbach** provides a case study based on his documentary, *The Solar Nation of Tokelau*, about how the tiny New Zealand-administered Pacific territory of Tokelau became the first ‘national’ area to become totally powered by a solar system grid.

FIJI  
TO CHAIR  
NOVEMBER  
COP23 CLIMATE  
CONFERENCE



**Binh Duong Pham** and **Chris Nash** examine the way that government, NGOs and journalists interact in the reporting of climate change in Vietnam. This research, part of a larger doctoral study on environmental journalism in relation to governmental media control in Vietnam, demonstrates that there is nuance and dynamism that belies conventional stereotypes in the way the two spheres of journalism and politics interact in authoritarian states. One key factor that affects the relative latitude accorded to journalists is whether or not there is political conflict within ruling party and government on the environmental issue being reported, and so far on climate change there is not.

Other articles in this issue report on other community based initiatives. **Usha Sundar Harris** explains how participatory forms of media, including social media, can enable communities to ‘share knowledge, create awareness and provide their own perspectives on environmental issues’, especially when mainstream media may be excluded in times of crisis.

**Aaron Inamara** and **Verena Thomas** also focus on how participatory community media can be used to promote indigenous knowledge in Pacific Island communities experiencing the impacts of climate change. Their article highlights how natural and cultural processes interact on a project undertaken with a community on Andra Island, Manus Province, Papua New Guinea. The project explores responses to climate change through photo essays. The authors argue that this project has created a space for reflective dialogue about challenges posed by climate change as well as to promote Indigenous knowledge as a tool for community-based adaptation (CBA). They consider the possibility that such projects could be linked into a larger hub or network and feed into Pacific mainstream media coverage of climate change.

A team of researchers from the University of the South Pacific, **Jason Titifanue**, **Romitesh Kant**, **Glen Finau** and **Joep Tirai** explore how online activists are working with Pacific Islander communities to reach across borders to meet the urgent climate change threat. Acknowledging that online activism is currently mainly an urban phenomenon, they make suggestions for future developments in activism and research.

**Sarika Chand** offers a content analysis of climate change reportage in *The Fiji Times* between January 2004 and December 2010. *The Fiji Times* is Fiji’s oldest and most influential national daily newspaper. Published reports showed a trend of event-based reporting with more than 80 percent of articles being generated out of, or following up on, a climate change convention, meeting or report launch. She argues that reporting of climate change issues needs to be prioritised in a Pacific context.

**Hermin Indah Wahyuni** examines the challenges of journalism education mainstreaming climate change in her country. As the world’s largest archipelago, Indonesia must deal with some climate change impacts such as rising sea levels,

extreme weather, floods, drought and forest fires. However, although it is a serious threat, public awareness is low.

In Australia, **Guy Healy** and **Paul Williams** explore the patterns of political communication surrounding the environmental regulation of major resource projects during the Business Advisory Forum of April 2012. Finding news stories on so-called ‘green tape’ environmental regulation were saturated with metaphor clusters, the authors argue that journalistic metaphor use has made the complex issue of environmental regulation accessible to mass audiences.

Among unthemed papers, **Joseph M. Fernandez** critiques defamatory meanings and the hazards of relying on ‘ordinary, reasonable person’ fiction, **Jean M. Allen** and **Toni Bruce** examine representations of a predominantly ‘brown’ community in New Zealand, and Chang Sup Park unpacks the roles of citizen news broadcasts of South Korea, based on two unique concepts—*carnivalism* and *engaging journalism*.

To conclude, as this journal and the Pacific Media Centre bid goodbye across the water to a strong institutional supporter in the ACIJ at UTS, both its contributors and readers can celebrate the pursuit of critical scholarship *through* rigorous journalism as well as *about* journalism that is the hallmark of this collaboration. The urgent threat posed by climate change to this part of the world makes it imperative that fearless, rigorous journalism continues to find an intellectual home and support within universities.

**PROFESSOR WENDY BACON**

*Former director of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ), and a board member of the Pacific Media Centre.*

[www.wendybacon.com](http://www.wendybacon.com)

**PROFESSOR CHRIS NASH**

*Former director of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ), and Professor of Journalism, Monash University, Melbourne.*

[profiles.arts.monash.edu.au/chris-nash/](http://profiles.arts.monash.edu.au/chris-nash/)

**References**

- Bacon, W. (2011). *A sceptical climate: Media coverage of climate change in Australia. Part one—climate change policy*. Australian Centre for Independent Journalism. Retrieved in June 2017, from <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/sceptical-climate-part1.pdf>
- Bacon, W. (2013). *A sceptical climate: Media coverage of climate change in Australia: Part two—climate science in Australian newspapers*. Australian Centre for Independent Journalism. Retrieved in June 2017, from <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Sceptical-Climate-Part-2-Climate-Science-in-Australian-Newspapers.pdf>
- Bacon, W. & Nash, C. (2003). How the media cover humanitarian issues. *Australian Journalism Review*, 25(2), 5-30.

- Chandler, J. & Morton, T. (2014). Interview: Jo Chandler: Gender, human rights and power investigations in Papua New Guinea. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 20(1), 139-156.
- Duffield, L. (2015). Pacific Journalism Review: Twenty years on the front line of regional identity and freedom. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 21(1), 18-33.
- Nash, C. & Bacon, W. (2013). 'That sinking feeling.' Climate change, journalism and small island states. In Libby Lester and Brett Hutchins (Eds.), *Environmental conflict and the media* (pp. 245-259). New York: Peter Lang.
- Nolan, D., Chandler, J., Brookes, S. & Imison, M. (2017). On the map: Challenges and change in Australian humanitarian journalism's coverage of the Asia-Pacific. Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Future of Public Interest Journalism. Retrieved in June 2017. [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Future\\_of\\_Public\\_Interest\\_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Submissions](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Submissions)
- RNZ *Mediawatch* (2017, June 25). Start-up scores a scoop and a scalp. Retrieved in June 2017, from [www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/201848470/start-up-scores-a-scoop-and-a-scalp](http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/201848470/start-up-scores-a-scoop-and-a-scalp)
- Robie, D. (2001). Frontline reporters: A students' internet coup. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 7(1), 47-56.
- Robie, D. (2010). Pacific freedom of the press: Case studies in independent campus-based media models. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 16(2), 99-126.