



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE



UNIVERSITAS  
GADJAH MADA

# Australia-Indonesia in Conversation



**Managing Environmental and Resource Challenges  
and Thinking about Climate Futures**

**20 & 21 July 2022**



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Australia and Indonesia have long enjoyed a strong, stable bilateral relationship as close neighbours in the Asia Pacific, with many shared political, economic and social interests. As resource-rich countries, both face challenges related to sustainability, managing the environment and natural resources, and planning for climate futures. Further, both countries are grappling with how to respond to climate change and at the same time build climate resilience in communities, cities and regions, and nationally. Even so, there are many innovations emerging to respond to these challenges. The University of Melbourne, in partnership with Universitas Gadjah Mada, will host a mini-conference on July 20-21, 2022, consisting of a series of round table panel discussions for Indonesian and Australian academic, policymaker and practitioner audiences.

The Australia-Indonesia in Conversation conference seeks to further enhance bilateral partnerships and shared knowledge, experiences and insights into each country's efforts to manage environmental and resource challenges and to protect the Anthropocene through a range of policies, actions and innovations. The hosts of the conference have strong ties and an ongoing history of collaboration as well as being partners in the Australia-Indonesia Centre and many other initiatives. Five sequential panels involving diplomats, researchers, and other representatives from government, the private sector, and civil society organisation representatives, as well as Q&A from audiences, were held online over two half-day sessions.

## Panel 3

# Social Inclusion and Local Knowledge in Environmental Management and Sustainability

Communities, indigenous groups, and disadvantaged groups are frequently impacted by environmental degradation and pollution from natural resource extraction, large-scale agribusiness, plastic pollution, and the growing impacts of climate change, often with limited avenues for protest or redress. Many that live in and around forested areas, or in coastal areas have significant knowledge on how to sustainably draw from and protect the environment. Community groups have used significant innovations to repair or improve the environment, or adapt to challenges. Further, activists have used the creative arts in innovative ways to address sustainability and draw attention to the urgent climate crisis. Bringing together examples from both Australia and Indonesia, this panel will explore how to ensure planning for environmental management, sustainable resource use and climate futures incorporates the concerns and needs of more vulnerable and often marginalised groups, as well as drawing from local and indigenous knowledge. It will also highlight innovative grassroots responses to raise awareness about, and to address, environmental degradation, pollution and climate futures.

### Chairs

- **Mr Kevin Evans (Australia-Indonesia Research Centre)**
- **Dr Fina Itriyati (UGM)**

### Speakers

- **Dr Virginia Marshall**, Inaugural Indigenous Postdoctoral Fellow, RegNet & Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, and Water Expert Member, World Economic Forum
- **Ms Ewa Wojkowska**, Chief Operating Officer and Co-Founder, Kopernik
- **Dr Lara Stevens**, Arts Researcher at The University of Melbourne, and artist and activist
- **Mr Gregorius Ragil Wibawanto**, Environmental activist & Lecturer, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada and **Professor Pam Nilan**, Conjoint Professor in Sociology and Anthropology, The University of Newcastle
- **Ms Yuyun Ismawati**, Senior Advisor and Co-founder Nexus for Health, Environment, and Development Foundation
- **Dr Stibniati Atmadja**, Scientist, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Forest, Climate Change and Livelihood Interactions in Tropical Countries

## Dr Lara Stevens



**Dr Lara Stevens** is an arts researcher at The University of Melbourne. Her research looks at how the performing arts is involved in responding to the climate emergency. Her work as an artist and advocate shows why women and girls are leading the world in climate action. Lara has taught theatre, performance, Gender Studies and the Environmental Humanities at Parkville and the Victorian College of the Arts since 2009. She was previously a Fellow in the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute (2018-2019) and the Australian Centre (2014) at The University of Melbourne. Lara is an author of several books and is currently a Research Associate in the Discovery Project 'Towards an Australian Ecological Theatre' at The University of Melbourne.

In her presentation, Dr Stevens:

- Emphasised the significance of involving every industry in resolving the climate and resource crises
- Examined what performing arts can or should do to communicate alternative modes of thinking about and interacting with the non-human world and to raise awareness about the intersectional injustices of climate change
- Explained that the conventional climate communication effort has been undermined by an overabundance of information from the scientific community and argued that performing arts can be an alternative effort to communicate climate and environmental issues.

### The roles of performing arts in addressing the climate crisis

**Generating and mediating climate conversations:** Dr Stevens emphasised that art has the potential to play a significant role in initiating and mediating climate conversations due to the emotional and affective register at which art operates when it is effective, the centrality of the human body in performance, and its ability to evoke emotions such as empathy, fear, anger, and grief.

**An alternative avenue for climate communication:** Dr Stevens cited a report from Columbia University's Center for Research on Environmental Decisions to argue that climate change data has failed as a communication tool because it has failed to instil a sense of urgency among its audiences. For climate-related information to appeal to the public and inspire action, it must first emphasise the experiential processing system of the brain. This is the part of the brain that controls survival behaviour, such as the fight-or-flight instinct. Dr Stevens hypothesised that the performing arts activate this experiential processing system by judiciously employing metaphors of narrative storytelling that incorporate visual imagery and experiential scenarios.

### Latai Taumoepeau's performance: Raising awareness of climate crisis and mobilise spectators

***i-Land X-isle (2012)* was created by Taumoepeau in response to Australia's lack of action in climate leadership:** Dr Stevens explained that Tongan-Australian artist Latai Taumoepeau was a delegate at the 13th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP13), which was also attended by Kevin Rudd, the then-recently elected Australian prime minister, who refused to take significant action to address the climate challenge. Consequently, this performance was created out of frustration and with the intention of drawing attention to the complacency of most people in wealthy developed nations such as Australia, who have been significant contributors to climate change but find it extremely difficult to act when confronted with the inconvenient effects of the crisis on other nations.

***i-Land X-isle* represents the suffering of vulnerable communities and groups caused by climate change:** Dr Stevens described Taumoepeau's *i-Land X-isle* as a durational performance in which Taumoepeau hangs horizontally, suspended by shipping ropes that are strapped to a large steel structure atop which is a two-ton ice block. She was suspended for four hours per day for two days, during which the ice melted and dripped onto Taumoepeau's body as she writhed in agony, a slow endurance of water torture. Dr Stevens also emphasised the significance of this performance as described by Taumoepeau. The melting ice was a clear representation of the effects of rising sea levels on the bodies of those living in low-lying islands and the pain and suffering inflicted on climate refugees, as well as a reference to the effects of melting ice on Inuit people in cold climates.

**The performance at Circular Quay:** She contrasted this vulnerable suffering of a brown-skinned body immobilised in the ropes with the privilege of the harbourside setting, its affluent locals, and the tourist observers. Dr Stevens emphasised that the uniqueness of Taumoepeau's body demonstrated that while rising sea levels affect most human and non-human bodies in various negative ways, not everyone is in imminent danger of losing their homeland, ancestral burial grounds, food sources, growing areas, and culture.

**A body of work targeting white audiences:** Dr Stevens also touched on another similar work of Taumoepeau known as *Repatriate*, where she performs a traditional dance in a tank filled with water where the water level continually rises, ultimately restricting her movement. She stressed that Taumoepeau's performances of works like *i-Land X-isle* and *Repatriate* are, in the artist's own words, geared towards white audiences despite representing brown bodies. Dr Stevens explained that this was an interesting form of provocation, as white people are generally perceived to be more apathetic to issues surrounding climate change, yet often contribute the greatest to carbon pollution and sea-level rise.