

A Vision for Oceania Shaped by Faith and Responsibility

President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) and Bishop of Broken Bay, Most Rev Anthony Randazzo, has called for stronger collaboration with governments, regional organisations, and civil society to protect the homelands and livelihoods of people in Oceania.

Bishop Randazzo said it is essential policy frameworks combined with pastoral strategies are needed in a region where whole communities are at risk.

This was his key message to a gathering of the Migrants and Refugees Oceania Network (MRON) in Sydney last night.

Oceania is a vast geographical region in the southwestern Pacific composed of thousands of islands divided into four culturally distinct subregions: Australia and New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

“Our vision is simple, yet ambitious,” Bishop Randazzo said.

“We desire a region where every person on the move is treated with dignity, protected from harm, and accompanied with genuine Christian care.

“We want Oceania to be a place where people who are displaced or vulnerable encounter, through us, the face of Christ. We want our Church to speak clearly and act courageously for justice, mercy, and the common good. And we want the Migrants and Refugees Oceania Network to be a catalyst that strengthens advocacy, cooperation, and connection across all our islands and nations.”

The Network was officially announced last year in Rome with leaders from the four episcopal conferences of Oceania, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC), Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PNGSI), and the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC).

The initiative provides unified support, advocacy, and services for migrants, refugees, and climate-displaced people across the Pacific region. It addresses unique challenges like climate change impacts and labour mobility, and is supported by the ACBC, international groups like the International Catholic Migration Commission and the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Many of their representatives also attended the gathering at Mary MacKillop Place.

“The work ahead of us focuses on three major areas of concern: people displaced or affected by climate change; seasonal workers; and the plight of West Papua refugees and others seeking sanctuary in Oceania” Bishop Randazzo said.

“Across Oceania, climate change is already shaping the movement of peoples. Rising seas, soil salinity, and extreme weather patterns are placing whole communities at risk.”

Bishop Randazzo said cooperation with scientists and disaster-response experts is essential, so that pastoral strategies are grounded in sound data and shared understanding.

“By establishing regional knowledge-sharing systems and hosting ongoing forums, the Migrants and Refugees Oceania Network can become a vital space where communities, policymakers, and Church partners work together,” he said.

While seasonal labour mobility programmes in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have brought significant economic benefits to seasonal workers, their families, and communities throughout the Pacific, Bishop Randazzo said many workers face challenges that touch not only their finances, but also their wellbeing, dignity, and family life.

“The Federation (FCBCO) hopes that the Network will advocate for fair working conditions, transparent recruitment, safe accommodation, and genuine protection for workers, including portability of entitlements. We want to work closely with governments, unions, employers, and Pacific embassies so that seasonal workers are treated with the honour and respect that their labour deserves.”

Bishop Randazzo also spoke of the region being home to thousands who have fled violence, hardship, or insecurity. Among them West Papua refugees, whose situation is often marked by uncertainty.

“There are also many from other nations who seek refuge in our part of the world.

“The Migrants and Refugees Oceania Network has an important role in advocating for access to asylum procedures, humanitarian visas, and pathways that allow families to rebuild their lives in safety. We must also encourage governments to recognise long-standing refugee communities whose status remains unclear. Here too, cooperation and connection are vital.”

Bishop Randazzo called on all in Oceania to renew their mission of welcome so that everyone, but especially young people, may find community instead of loneliness, hope rather than despair; and a future that knows and honours dignity.

“The great waters that lie between us do not divide us. They connect us. They unite us. They teach us to navigate by the stars of the Southern Cross in our night sky, to trust in Providence, and to respect the fragility and beauty of creation.,” he said.

“In the same way, the Body of Christ binds us together across distance and diversity. “It calls us to unity in purpose, unity in compassion, and unity in love.

“I encourage each member of the Migrants and Refugees Oceania Network to continue building this unity. Share your wisdom. Support one another. Pray for one another. And let your work be a beacon of hope for all who journey across our region in search of safety, opportunity, and peace.”