

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# A call to action

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there is a tiny nation called Tuvalu — an archipelago of nine islands that 11,000 people call home. As is true of many islands in that part of the world, Tuvalu is the picture of paradise, bordered by turquoise ocean and sugary white sand. Seen from above, its largest island — though dotted with close-quartered buildings — is lush with greenery, and the isle is so slender that most properties have stunning views of the Pacific.

The beach-lovers among us may dream of living so intimately with the ocean, but for Tuvalu, the sea's embrace is beginning to suffocate, as sea levels have been slowly rising due to climate change. The impact on the local population has been devastating and is getting progressively worse. Already, the coastlines are receding, and saltwater has seeped into the soils and groundwater reserves. Staple crops like cassava can no longer be grown, and the yield of fruits and vegetables has fallen. Most food must be imported, at a heavy price. Locals are now completely dependent on rainwater, but droughts are increasingly common. With sea levels rising in this region two to three times faster than the global average, some forecasters warn that the entire nation could become uninhabitable within the century. This was a point driven home at COP26, when one of Tuvalu's Ministers delivered his address standing in the ocean.



The very real story of Tuvalu is a cautionary tale for the rest of us who live on small island developing states. Everything that the country is experiencing now could become a reality for the Caribbean in years to come if climate change is not addressed urgently and effectively. In fact, we have already seen previews of the possibilities before us. We have been experiencing intense dry spells and droughts. In the past few years, historic floods have engulfed communities and highways here in Trinidad, swallowing property and agricultural produce. Critical infrastructure has been compromised — just last year, the Manzanilla Mayaro Road on Trinidad's east coast collapsed, when severe flooding undermined the roadway.

### **The need for action**

Without question, we need to give climate change and broader sustainability issues our full attention.

Hearteningly, these are matters that our government and others across the region have acknowledged and are committed to addressing. A considerable share of the responsibility, however, lies with us as citizens. The choices we make on a daily basis in terms of what and how we consume, and how we manage our shared resources, can make a huge difference — for better or for worse.

In this issue of *GASCO News*, we focus heavily on opportunities for action on the sustainability front. As a point of departure, in appreciation of the need for a holistic understanding of the problems we are facing, we explore how climate change is affecting our oceans, and what that means for our planet. The case study of Tuvalu is just a précis of a larger narrative of impact.

From there, we consider the many simple adjustments we as citizens can make to help reduce our environmental footprint and support sustainability goals. Energy efficiency, more mindful use of shared resources, and more responsible consumer behaviours can all add up to big wins.

Our hope, as always, is to spread the message about the reasons for action and the small steps we can take to help bring about positive change.

**Mark Loquan**  
President