




Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

Tonga Volcano, Pasifika TV and Radio

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (8.23 pm): On 15 January, a volcano erupted off the islands of Tonga that sent shock waves around the world and defied scientific expectations. Most of this volcano lies under the water. It rises more than 2,000 metres from the sea floor. The volcano took everyone by surprise when it spewed forth fresh magma which had risen quickly from the buried underwater magma chamber. The volcano sent a plume of ash soaring into the upper atmosphere and triggered a tsunami that destroyed homes on Tonga's nearby islands. Reverberations from the eruption circled the globe multiple times.

Here in a small neighbourhood Brisbane street, the community Pasifika TV and Radio station's team were about to become known across the world as well. The Pasifika TV and Radio station was set up to create an online Tongan media platform for the local and global community so they could tell their stories from a Tongan perspective. The station is affiliated with a sister station in the Kingdom of Tonga.

At the time of Tonga's volcanic eruption and tsunami, there were an estimated 150,000 Tongans living overseas. Of these, close to 5,000 Tongan workers were employed across Australia and New Zealand, not counting the Tongans who now call Australia home. For Tongans who were living offshore as well as those at home, the volcano eruption and tsunami were devastating and heartbreaking.

Communications with Tonga broke down after damage was done to the sole optic fibre carrying all of the communication channels that service Tonga. This left many Tongans living overseas in the dark and not knowing whether or not families were safe. For those Tongans living away from Tonga was the added burden of not being able to provide physical or emotional support to their families or be able to fulfil their social obligations. Even as communication lines slowly resumed, news from families still in Tonga was difficult with many family members not having mobile phones or phones being lost or damaged in the disaster.

The Pasifika community radio and TV station was overwhelmed with callers and messages from around the world from Tongans wanting information and also sharing their thoughts, prayers and hopes for family back home in Tonga. In the weeks leading up to the volcano eruption, Mr Suli Layt, who is the founder and executive director of Pasifika TV and Radio, had been in contact with my office and invited me to attend their 2020 Pasifika TV and Radio Awards evening. I have known Suli for a while, so he kept me informed on what the community radio and TV station was doing and the concerns of the families back in Tonga. The Pasifika TV and Radio provided ongoing tsunami coverage in the Tongan language to the large global Tongan diaspora.