

## UN Human Rights Council Raises Alarm Over Human Rights Risks Tied to Fukushima Wastewater Release

(MEDIA RELEASE)

**GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, 18 May 2025** – In a landmark move for Ocean justice and Human Rights, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council has issued a formal communication to the Government of Japan regarding serious concerns raised by Pacific communities about the discharge of nuclear-contaminated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean.

This follows a [complaint](#) submitted in August 2023 by [Ocean Vision Legal](#) on behalf of the [Pacific Network on Globalisation \(PANG\)](#), endorsed by over 50 civil society organisations from the Pacific and beyond. The complaint highlighted the long-term environmental, health, and human rights risks posed by Japan's planned discharge of over 1.3 million metric tonnes of radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean over the next 30 years. The discharge began in 2023 with twelve releases to date.

The UN communication is now publicly available through the UN Human Rights Council's [online portal](#),<sup>1</sup> and signals that the release into the Ocean may pose "major environmental and human rights risks", including risks to the rights to life, health, food, and clean drinking water. It highlights increased risks of radiation exposure and related health impacts, particularly for children and vulnerable populations, and raises issues around inadequate radiation impact assessments and limited healthcare access. The Special Rapporteurs also underscore the lack of transparency, limited public participation, and absence of meaningful consultation, all of which are essential to free and democratic societies.

The UN Human Rights Council draws attention to allegations that Japan failed to properly assess the health impacts of the wastewater release in accordance with the best available scientific evidence. Professor Robert Richmond from the University of Hawai'i, and former panelist of the Pacific Islands Forum Commissioned Expert Panel, describes Japan's decision to release the treated, radioactively contaminated water as disappointing:

*"It is well known that radionuclides can be taken-up, accumulated and biomagnified by marine life, negatively affecting marine ecosystems and people who consume contaminated seafood," says Professor Richmond and "better and safer alternatives exist, including using the accumulating contaminated water for concrete for needed on-site structures."*

The UN Human Rights Council further draws special attention to long standing international obligations and laws, such as the prohibition of transboundary environmental harm, the importance of conducting environmental impact assessments and applying the precautionary

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<sup>1</sup> A response from Japan has been received, however, is currently still being processed, available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/SearchCode?code=JPN%201/2021;JPN%202/2025>.

principle, as well as the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). As the communication from the UN Human Rights Council notes, States have the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction: "That is what Japan would be doing if it were to discharge the million tons of pollution into the Pacific Ocean."

*"We remind Japan of its international obligations to prevent exposure to hazardous substances, to conduct environmental impact assessments of the risks that the discharge of water may have, to prevent transboundary environmental harms, and to protect the marine environment."* – Marcos Ornella, UN Special Rapporteur

For island nations and coastal communities that have long shouldered the burden of Ocean degradation, the communication affirms what Pacific peoples have asserted for generations: the Pacific is not a dumping ground.

The destructive legacy of nuclear contamination through nuclear testing is still strongly felt across the region. This legacy is marked by severe health impacts across generations and the ongoing failure to properly clean up test sites, which continue to contaminate the islands and waterways that Pacific peoples depend on.

*"As Pacific groups, we remain disappointed in the Japanese Government and TEPCO's shameless disregard of the calls by numerous Pacific Leaders and civil society groups to hold off on any further release. Their ignorance constitutes a brazen threat to Pacific peoples' livelihoods, safety, health and well-being, and the sovereignty of Pacific nations."* – Joey Tau, Coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation

This communication sends a clear message: Ocean issues must be understood as human rights issues, requiring precautionary and informed action aligned with international environmental law to safeguard both people and the marine environment. Dr. Anna von Rebay, CEO & founder of Ocean Vision Legal emphasised,

*"Although not legally binding, this communication is a crucial milestone. It informs the interpretation of human rights and environmental law in response to contemporary threats, contributing to the development of customary international law and strengthens accountability for any actor harming the Ocean. Ultimately, it paves the way towards a future where the Ocean's health is fully recognised as fundamental to human dignity, justice, and intergenerational equity."*

The Pacific Network on Globalisation, Ocean Vision Legal, and the endorsing organisations listed below strongly urge Japan to uphold human rights by halting further wastewater discharges and pursuing alternative solutions.



**About Ocean Vision Legal:** Ocean Vision Legal is an international law firm dedicated to strategically using law to protect the Ocean and uphold Human Rights, representing communities and advocates worldwide. [www.oceanvisionlegal.com](http://www.oceanvisionlegal.com).

**About PANG:** The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) is a regional watchdog set up to ensure Pacific peoples' right to be self-determining, self-reliant and self-sufficient are recognized and upheld. <https://pang.org.fj/>

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**Endorsed by:**





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