

# USAWC experts lead discussion at Pacific Environmental Security Conference

*Public Affairs staff report*

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March 28, 2011 -- Japan was struggling with the cascading effects of the Great Tohoku Earthquake of March 11 when Australia's John Owens said to an international group: "Environmental issues don't respect natural boundaries and because of this we must deal with them together... and the military is uniquely poised to lead in this most important issue, Environmental Security."

Owens, Head of Infrastructure for the Australian Department of Defence addressed an international group during the three-day Pacific Environmental Security Conference, March 15-17, in Honolulu. The Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership partnered with the Pacific Command and the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations & Environment for the conference.

"Continued support of the Geographical Combatant Commanders' theater security cooperation initiatives allows the Army War College to share its wellspring of talent. At the same time, this allows the faculty to return to the classroom with the latest information from the operational force," said USAWC Prof. Bernard Griffard.

"It established a forum that promotes unity of effort in addressing the environmental security challenges within the USAPACOM area of responsibility." said Griffard, who joined Dr. Kent Butts, Col. Phil Jones and Col. Doug Charney on the USAWC team that helped develop and execute the conference. "This inaugural conference was highly successful," said Griffard.

Civilian and military leaders represented 16 regional countries, Canada and the United States, international organizations, the private sector, and the academic community. The major environmental security issues facing the region were explored in depth: Environmental Security and Sustainability, Water Resources Management, Adaptation to Climate Change, and Seismic Disaster Preparedness.

Butts, an internationally recognized advocate for environmental security issues, addressed the conference about the history of PACOM's environmental security history, and moderated several panels on environmental security and sustainability. Brig. Gen. Kevin O'Connell, PACOM's director of Logistics, Engineering, and Security Assistance; and Brig. Gen. Marty Wong, director of PACOM's Engineering Division, played lead roles in bringing the PESC to life. Both are graduates of the USAWC Class of 2005.

The "elephant in the room" was the ongoing complex crisis in Japan. The cascading impacts put in motion by the reinforced Owens' opening remarks, and called attention to the seismic disasters that pose the region's leading environmental security threat.

"As we face the increasing impacts of climate change within the Pacific Region's Ring of Fire, the importance of civil-military cooperation in all phases of disaster management is obvious," said Griffard.

The importance of Japan as a strong and viable partner in achieving environmental security goals in the region was emphasized by Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, in her keynote speech. She called attention to USPACOM's key role in providing humanitarian and disaster response aid to the stricken areas, and recognized the additional support from the regional countries represented at the PESC.