

An aerial photograph of turquoise water with white foam from waves crashing against dark rocks. A large, semi-transparent green rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing white text. The text is centered and reads: "Renewal of the Whole of Creation". Below this, a large black quotation mark is followed by the text "Our Vision:" and a paragraph of text. The bottom of the image shows a dense green forest bordering the rocky coastline.

# Renewal of the Whole of Creation

## “Our Vision:

We seek the flourishing of the whole of God's Creation and all its creatures. We act to renew the earth from the damage done and stand in solidarity with people most impacted by human-induced climate change. Government, churches, businesses and the wider community work together for a sustainable future.

## Our hopes

- People in Australia feel deeply connected to our natural environment. We recognise the gift of living amongst all this unique diversity and seek to protect it.
- We affirm and seek the guiding wisdom of First Peoples and cultures who have lived as part of this place for countless generations.
- First Peoples have regular direct involvement in the management of land and waters, and in environmental practices.
- We have thought deeply about our place in the world and our responsibilities to the web of life. We value nature for its own sake, not only for its material benefits to humans.
- We have a carbon neutral economy and fully renewable energy, including equitable access and a just transition process for communities currently dependent on fossil fuel activities. We are a net exporter of renewable energy.
- We have acted quickly to achieve a decarbonisation of our economy and supported other nations to act similarly.
- We live sustainable lifestyles and aim to reverse the legacy of further human impacts on our ecosystems.
- The abundance of the earth's resources, food and water, are managed in a just, participatory and sustainable manner for the benefit of current and future generations.
- 'Waste' products are seen as resources, and products are built to last. We recognise that we are responsible for all the items we use.
- We live within and are part of an abundant natural world with a rich plant and animal life and protect the rights of nature – animate and inanimate – to preservation and appropriate development.

## Witness from the Bible

- The earth is God's (Psalm 24: 1 – 2; 89: 11) and while humanity has been entrusted with care of God's creation (Genesis 1: 26 – 31), we are only stewards, not owners (see for example Leviticus 25: 1 – 28, especially vs 23).
- The earth itself suffers "in bondage to decay" and "groans in labour pains", awaiting the

freedom promised by the first fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8: 19 – 23).

- This suffering of the creation is regularly linked with human sin and culpability (e.g. Jeremiah 2: 7; Hosea 4: 1 – 3).
- The exploitation of the earth, which often sees the poorest disproportionately suffering the results of damage and climate change is a manifestation of the sin of greed against which the biblical witnesses strongly warn (see for example Job 20: 12 – 29; Proverbs 1: 10 – 19; Matthew 23: 25 – 26; Luke 12: 15 – 21).
- The earth itself is a witness to the glory of God (Psalm 19: 1 – 4) and the Lordship of Christ (Luke 19: 38 – 40) and it is important for Christians to ensure that this witness is enhanced and not undercut by our actions and approaches.

## What the UCA has said

### **Basis of Union (1992 edition, Paragraph 3)**

"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end."

### **Statement to the Nation (1977)**

"We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment."

### **The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations (1991)**

"We express the conviction that those who live today share responsibility for the ability of future generations to live in dignity, we support the attribution of rights not only to humans but also to nature, God's creation, and we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human."

### **For the Sake of the Planet and All its People (2006)**

"We renew our commitment to move towards sustainable non-exploitative living, believing that God's creation—the earth itself and all the life that it supports—is precious and the earth's resources exist for the good of all now as well as future generations."

“The Uniting Church regards climate change as a serious threat to the future and integrity of life on earth... therefore challenges the way we live in a fundamental way.”

### For the whole creation (2018)

Among a list of resolutions, the Assembly resolved:

- d) To work with First Peoples in Australia and our church partners in the Pacific, Africa and Asia and other faiths to together understand the impacts of climate change on traditional, spiritual and contemporary ways of life;
- e) To encourage Uniting Church members, synods, presbyteries, congregations, agencies and schools to:
  - i. Continue to inform themselves and their communities about the causes and consequences of climate change and appropriate responses;
  - ii. Advocate for government policies and political action to address climate change;
  - iii. Listen to and learn from the voices of vulnerable people across the world who are experiencing firsthand the impact of climate change;
  - iv. Consider ways we can reduce our contribution to climate change, individually and in our communities, set meaningful targets and be transparent with our efforts and outcomes; and
  - v. Tell stories of best practice across remote, rural and urban areas.

## The State of the Nation

- Global temperatures are rising as human activity pollutes the atmosphere with greenhouse gases.
- Australia faces significant climate change impacts: rising sea levels, extreme heat and storms, longer droughts and bushfire seasons and the loss of coral reef<sup>9</sup>.
- Our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere are suffering with the impacts of climate change.
- Most of Australia’s energy relies on traditional sources—non-renewable fossil fuels. Coal and gas account for about 79% of electricity generation<sup>10</sup>.  
However, the chair of the government’s Energy Security Board has pointed out that coal-fired

power stations will close, as they can no longer compete with renewable energy generation<sup>11</sup>.

- Unless the Commonwealth Government adopts more ambitious and rapid transition policies, Australia will not meet our international commitments and will undermine collective efforts to prevent a rapid and dangerous escalation of climate change. Our 2030 emissions reduction target should be much higher (45-60% is recommended) to do our fair share toward the Paris target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius<sup>12</sup>.
- Commonwealth Government policies are failing to support the necessary transition to renewables, especially for communities who are currently reliant on coal and other carbon intensive industries and sources of employment.
- There is a growing fossil fuel divestment movement<sup>13</sup> and significant private investment in solar panels<sup>14</sup> and renewable energy.
- There is a strong public appetite for, and uptake of renewables. Over 2 million Australian households have now installed solar panels<sup>15</sup> but there is a need for more equitable access for all people in Australia<sup>16</sup>.
- Climate change, and policy responses to it, often affect low-income and vulnerable people more than others, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. People experiencing poverty and other vulnerabilities often live in areas more susceptible to climate change and in housing that is less resistant; lose more when affected by climate disasters; have fewer resources to mitigate the effects; and have less assets and financial resources to rebuild and recover from the impacts<sup>17</sup>.
- The Australian Energy Market Operator has outlined a 20-year transition plan towards renewable energy generation. They have assessed that the lowest cost and least regret future is a transition to renewable energy and the closure of coal-fired power stations<sup>18</sup>. While there will be both costs and benefits as we transition to a clean economy, the burden on low-income and vulnerable households will be greatest without a carefully planned and managed approach.
- The Federal Government has committed to a “gas-fired recovery” from the economic impacts of COVID-19. Yet, according to the International

Energy Agency, if the world is to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, it requires immediate and massive deployment of all available clean and efficient energy technologies<sup>19</sup>.

- At least 90 species have become extinct in Australia over the past two centuries. Australia now has the most mammalian extinctions in the world, including the first mammal declared extinct from climate change — the Bramble Cay melomys<sup>20</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. A national climate policy and plan for a just, equitable and rapid transition to a low-carbon economy, that drives down greenhouse gas pollution, including no new coal or gas mining in Australia and investment in renewable energy.
2. Just and sustainable transition for communities currently dependent on carbon intensive industries for employment, towards more environmentally sustainable sources of income.
3. Equitable access to renewables and energy efficient upgrades for all people in Australia.
4. Policies which support people, nations and ecosystems that are most vulnerable to climate change, including measures to strengthen the resilience of communities and support people and the services they rely on to adapt to the effects of climate change.

### *Our natural environment is in a state of decline*

- Australia is a land of amazing biodiversity however we are failing to protect it.
- According to the last State of the Environment Report, the main pressures facing the Australian environment were: climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation, invasive species and multiple overlapping pressures on the same ecosystems<sup>21</sup>.
- Additional pressures on species and habitats, biodiversity, and pollution in our coastal and marine environments<sup>22</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. More natural and marine protected areas, better land care and water management and improved environmental laws.
2. Policies which support farmers who have already or want to transition to more sustainable agricultural techniques.
3. Strong environmental laws with independent assessment processes and strict enforcement of both protections and rehabilitation requirements.

### *We are a throw-away society*

- People in Australia are overconsuming and creating more waste<sup>23</sup>.
- There is a move towards greener and 'eco' products.

### Key actions:

1. Creating a culture where the desire to protect, sustain and restore our environment overrides the desire to consume.
2. A new approach to design and waste management where products are built to last and to re-enter the environment.
3. All levels of government to implement laws, regulations and system-level approaches to minimise environmental waste, improve waste management systems, and promote sustainability across production and consumption processes.

## Discussion starters

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What emissions targets should Australia have in place?
2. How will you support and invest in the transition to renewable energy?
3. How will you support just transitions and retraining for people moving into more environmentally sustainable industries?

4. How will you help Australia contribute to international efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change?
5. What provision should Australia make for people displaced by climate change?
6. What policies do you have to protect Australia's natural environment, water bodies and plant and animal life?
7. How will you help people in Australia move away from a throw-away culture?
8. What household and local community approaches are being/could be considered in your church and wider community?
9. Climate change is a complex area for people to engage in. How can you help inform and motivate your community for action?

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Uniting Church members are encouraged to visit the websites of all the above groups to further explore the issues and questions that arise as we consider what it means to live and act justly.