



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

Synod Climate Action Plan: 2022-2030

1. Preamble

Since its inauguration the Uniting Church in Australia has been concerned about the environment. These prescient words were part of its first public declaration in 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.¹

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment and concern over climate change, arises from understanding itself as an agent of God's mission, described in the Basis of Union as 'that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end.'² Our church believes that God's will for the earth is reconciliation and renewal, not destruction by human beings. We also believe that God, as Creator, calls us into harmonious relationship with the creation. This includes our God given responsibility to care for the earth and its creatures, but goes beyond this to recognise our fundamental mutuality and interdependence with all of life and the earth itself.³ – all of life is in some way our neighbour whom we are to love as we love ourselves. We are to love God, our human neighbours and God's non-human creation as well.

Concern for all God's creation and our earthly home is a result of our faith and theology, but it is informed by science. As the Basis of Union states, "...the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiryand gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith"⁴. The overwhelming scientific consensus is that global warming, if not adequately addressed, poses very significant threats to

¹ Uniting Church in Australia. Statement to the Nation: Inaugural Assembly, June 1977

² Uniting Church in Australia. Basis of Union (1992 edition) in Constitution and Regulations Uniting Church Assembly, 2018, p 22

³ Uniting Church in Australia. For a World Reconciled: Justice Statements from the Uniting Church in Australia 1977-2015, C Coghill & E Poulos (Eds) For the Sake of the Planet, UCA Assembly, 2016

⁴ Uniting Church in Australia. Basis of Union.

human beings and other life on the planet⁵. An urgent response is required by these circumstances. Such action is consistent with Christian hope, by which we are called to be active participants in God's mission and purpose.

2. 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.⁶

3. Goals

The Church accepts the science of climate change and acknowledges that a climate emergency exists due to excessive emission of greenhouse gases caused by human activity which will produce massive and catastrophic environmental consequences as global average temperatures increase. In response to the imminent dire consequences of climate change attributable to human activity, the SA Synod Climate Action Plan aims at reducing carbon emissions across all activities of the Uniting Church and its agencies to achieve a targeted reduction of 50% by 2030 and net zero by 2040. At the same time the Church commits to advocacy for decisive steps by government, industry and the community-at-large to reduce carbon emissions by a similar amount.

4. Summary of the Action Plan

To achieve these goals the following steps are proposed:

1. The Synod Standing Committee will invite the Environmental Action Group to coordinate the establishment of the Working Group in consultation with the UAICC, Public Theology and Mission Subcommittee, appropriate Synod boards, and the Presbytery leadership.
2. The Working Group membership will be drawn from boards, agencies, and the wider church.
3. The Working Group will identify and facilitate actions to decarbonise Synod operations at 5.5% per annum from 2020-2021 levels to net zero by 2040.
4. The Working Group will develop a Synod Climate Action Platform for congregations, agencies, and communities to offer pathways to

⁵ Climate Council. Aim High, Go Fast: Why emissions need to plummet this decade. Climate Council 2021

⁶ Uniting Church in Australia. Our Vision for a Just Australia, 2020

decarbonisation, practical guidance on ways to take action, and resources to develop missional communities of Creation Care.

5. The Working Group will encourage and resource congregations to establish their own Climate Action Plans with a view to reducing their environmental impact in accordance with the overall goal

This will be achieved by:

(a) Making available information, resources and encouragement through the Environmental Action Group website at <http://environmentalaction.org.au/>

(b) Consulting with requesting congregations to assist them to get started

(c) Offering access to eco-theology courses to help people appreciate the theological basis for action to care for God's creation

(d) Providing information about how others have succeeded, for example the Uniting Communities' Net Zero by 2035 program

(e) Assisting congregations to identify possible funding sources to undertake emissions reduction work

(f) Commending a new Climate Change Video resource, 'Lessons from COVID-19 for the Climate Emergency', produced by Uniting Church Fellowship and Mission Support (UCFAMS) in collaboration with the Environmental Action Group and endorsed by the SA Synod as a means of raising awareness among members of the church

(g) Establishing programs to help the church understand and share First Nations peoples' values, aspirations and actions for restoration of country

(h) Encouraging support for peaceful advocacy programs and organisations such as the Schools' Strike4Climate demonstrations and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.

6. The Working Group will coordinate wider Synod advocacy to the Australian Federal and State Governments to bring about urgent and just climate action:

6.1. Advocate to the Australian federal government to:

(a) Show leadership in acting to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5° C above preindustrial levels;

(b) Commit to a target of at least 45% reduction of emissions from 2005 levels by 2030;

(c) Provide support for communities currently dependent on employment in coal mines and gas industries and associated power stations to facilitate a just transition away from financial dependence on fossil fuel production and consumption;

(d) Cease financial support to new natural gas developments; assist businesses to reduce or eliminate any dependence on natural gas, and ensure Australia's natural gas requirements are met by reserving a portion of existing production, as is already the case in Western Australia;

(e) Cease all financial or other support for new coal-fired power stations, including fossil fuel subsidies;

(f) Deny approval for any new coal mines or expansions of existing coal mines;

(g) Increase support for the uptake of renewable energy sources to enable Australia to become a net exporter of renewable energy;

(h) Commit to supporting those communities most affected by climate change including marginal farming areas, those displaced by the switch to renewable energy, remote area communities, and First Nations communities, and fund such initiatives promptly to allow due preparation for this transition.

(i) Encourage the speedy uptake of electric vehicles, including through establishing a national web of recharging stations

6.2. COMMEND the South Australian Government for the Climate Change Action Plan 2021-2025 that sets a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 50% of the 2005 level by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 and urge them to go further to make SA a renewable energy powerhouse model for the world and bring forward the date for achieving net zero emissions.

6.3. REQUEST the Moderator write to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy, the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow minister for Climate Change and Energy, the Leader of the Greens, the Premier of South Australia, the South Australian Minister for Environment and Water and the Leader of the SA Opposition informing them of this resolution.

6.4. ENCOURGE and resource Uniting Church members to engage and communicate with their local Federal and State members of Parliament to call for stronger climate action.

7. The Working Group will report on progress to the Synod Standing Committee and to each full meeting of Synod as required.