



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

21-23 July 2023

DOCUMENT 10

Title	Project Possum Report
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Information
Assembly or ASC Minute	23.41.01 Note that the President, the General Secretary, the National Director Strategic Finance & Admin; and elected Assembly Standing Committee members Stuart Woodward, Charissa Suli and Nicole Mugford will attend the national meeting. 23.41.02 Authorise the members of the Assembly Standing Committee appointed to the meeting, to make decisions at the meeting based on the information they are provided with. (By Agreement) 23.41.03 Request the General Secretary to provide a written report regarding the outcomes of the national meeting, as soon as possible after the meeting.
Consultation	
Purpose	To provide an overview of the meeting held in Sydney in April, including decisions that were reached at that meeting.
Rationale & Findings Summary	See the report
Attachments	Nil
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Receive the report
Submitted by	Colleen Geyer Assembly General Secretary colleeng@nat.uca.org.au ; 0411 333 167

PROJECT POSSUM REPORT

The national Project Possum meeting (national meeting) to consider potentially sharing liabilities between Synods and the Assembly, (particularly liabilities of the Synod of Western Australia, the Northern Synod, and the Assembly) was held on 21-22 April 2023.

Representatives from all Synod Standing Committees and the Assembly Standing Committee were present. A UAICC representative was to be present, however, owing to that person's ill health this did not occur.

The meeting was facilitated by an external consultant: Ann Porcino from RPR Consulting. Ann has worked with the NSW/ACT Synod on a number of occasions and therefore is aware of UCA structures and processes. Ann is also very supportive of the Church's ethos and presence within the Australian community, expressing her keenness on a number of occasions to assist the Church with facilitating the national meeting.

The ASC was represented by the President, Stuart Woodward, Charissa Suli and Nicole Mugford. The General Secretary was unable to attend due to having Covid.

This was a first-of-its-kind meeting, with authorised representatives of the Synods and Assembly Standing Committees gathering to share sometimes very challenging financial information. The meeting was frank and honest, and essentially became a learning community for understanding how to grow in and work together in this new way of working together within the life of the UCA.

The meeting was imbued with a sense of the national Church gathering to address significant issues impacting on the Church by some Synods and the Assembly. The vision of being a body of Christ, where all parts of the body are connected was a theme that permeated the two days together. Nevertheless, there were some points of tension, particularly where some Synods, as requested, offered reflections and potential solutions for other Synods issues, that, in some ways, were not heard as the commenting Synods had intended.

Overwhelmingly, the meeting was a very important sharing across the councils of the Church seeking to support each other as councils of the Church, bearing one another's burdens and building up the whole, in the hope and faith of striving to be a body through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

The President provided to ASC members the list of draft decisions made at the meeting. As not all Synods had a delegation to decide, actions from the decisions are still being finalised. Any further work and information will be provided to the ASC.

As there were no further decisions needing to be made by the ASC, a special Standing Committee meeting was not called.

ASC members are reminded that information from the meeting, and concerning the decisions are still strictly confidential, and not to be shared with anyone.

LIST OF DECISIONS:

(a) Creation of a National Redress Recovery Scheme. This will be led by Queensland Synod, with all Synod being involved. Key points include:

- (i) This will be a shared scheme where all Synods contribute via a formula to paying for redress claims for which councils of the Church, not institutions of the Church, as responsible.
- (ii) Once the formula is resolved, each Synod will determine the source of funding from its own context.
- (iii) Forensic and actuarial work will need to be undertaken by some Synods/Assembly to have clarity about the potential call for redress payments.
- (iv) Insurance arrangements for each Synod/Assembly will also need further investigation.

(v) The National Redress Recovery Scheme will be both retrospective and prospective, with all already-expended costs for the WA Synod, Northern Synod, and the Assembly being 'netted off' as much as possible.

(vi) VicTas Synod will provide up to \$2.0M to assist with addressing redress funding challenges for the WA Synod and the Assembly prior to the Redress Recovery Scheme being established.

(vii) The scheme will be operational by the start of calendar year 2024.

(viii) The basis of the draft work for a National Redress Recovery Scheme and formula is:

- Approx. \$27.4M has been provided thus far for redress (each Synod will need to work out the councils of the Church share of this for their context)
- The cut-off date to consider retrospective payments will 30 June 2023.
- Planning for prospective sharing will be done from 1 July 2023.
- Actuarial work for prospective redress claims will need to be done by the same entity across all Synods and the Assembly.
- The proposed formula is:
 - Assembly – 0%
 - NSW/ACT – 25% - Qld – 17.5%
 - SA – 17.5%
 - VicTas – 25%
 - WA – 10%
 - Northern – 5%

(ix) Consideration will need to be given to 'funder of last resort matters', whereby Synods are seen as 'parent bodies' for most Uniting/UnitingCare agencies. This is particularly the case for the WA Synod in that it was reported that Uniting WA currently has a number of stresses in paying for its redress claims.

(b) Queensland Synod will support the Northern Synod with a strategy review program to clarify the Synod's directions, consideration of referring/transferring powers, etc to assist in addressing a range of operational matters that are being impacted by lack of financing.

(Note: the Queensland Synod had already commenced an exercise with the Northern Synod that could easily be expanded to a broader review.)

(c) NSW/ACT Synod to provide a grant to the Northern Synod to address a fund that the Synod owes to the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC).

(d) Queensland Synod to be the lead Synod for the three 'east coast' Synods to assist with supporting a Northern Synod \$3.8M operational shortfall over the medium term. \$2.8M of this will be covered by the

NSW/ACT Synod re point (b) above, and all three Synods will also contribute in some way to the remaining \$1.0M.