



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

10-12 Nov 2023

**DOCUMENT 12**

Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Information
Title	Progress Report from Net Zero Emissions Working Group
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	ARU
Purpose	Progress report to ASC.
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	Appendix 1 – 16 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Resolution Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference Appendix 3 - Commitments to reducing emissions by various parts of the Assembly
Recommendations	That the ASC receive the report.
Submitted by	Richard Arnold

# Progress Report from the Assembly Net Zero Emissions Working Group

## 1. Terms of Reference

The Working Group was established by the Assembly Standing Committee as part of Assembly Resolution 32 which was affirmed at the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly in May 2022. The relevant paragraph is Part 7 of the Resolution (see Appendix 1)

Terms of Reference were developed (see Appendix 2), with the key tasks required being:

1. Gather data on commitments to greenhouse gas emission reduction made across the life of the church, and progress towards those commitments
2. Share stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples
3. Consider how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040

## 2. Membership of the Working Group

Standing Committee appointed Lindsay Cullen, Catherine Pepper, Yuko Tonai-Moore, Jamie Thom and Richard Arnold. In August 2023 Richard was asked to become Convenor of the Working Group. In October Raul Sugunananthan joined the group.

The Working Group has met online on four occasions during 2023 – 19 May, 23 June, 11 August, 6 October. The Working Group also organised an Assembly Round Table which took place on 30 June.

## 3. Actions taken so far:

### 3.1 Round Table

A Round Table of interested people from across the Assembly was held by Zoom on Friday 30 June. Twenty-two participants (22) from all over the country attended. All states were represented and all Synods except for the Northern Synod.

The Round Table was able to contribute some information about what commitments are being made to reduce emission (see Appendix 3). To date this includes some general statements from Synods, some agencies and a small number of congregations. Further development of this list of commitments will be needed, especially considering that Synod resolutions rely on Presbyteries, agencies and congregations to implement actions.

Short stories of hope from the participants were also shared. These are included in a separate pdf which has been sent with this report (see the second part of the Mentimeter).

The Round Table also provided a list of contacts for follow-up and hopefully assistance to the Working Group. It is probable that a further Round Table will be held in 2024. One interesting fact which emerged from discussion with Rev Dr Ji Zhang was that agencies possibly account for up to 80% of the emissions!

### 3.2 Survey

A survey has been designed to discover more about what is happening across the Uniting Church in Australia including information about commitments, targets, reporting emissions, actions being taken and good news stories. It is planned to distribute the survey to the Act2 mailing list in October.

Key councils and agencies of the Uniting Church across the country will be followed up by telephone.

It is also planned to distribute the survey directly to participants who came to the Round Table and follow them up with telephone contact.

#### 4. Preliminary recommendations

##### 4.1 Continuation of the Working Group

The Working Group has only just commenced its work. Ideally it would be helpful to have representation from Queensland and South Australian Synods, as well as one or two members who are actively involved in reducing emissions in Uniting Church agencies and someone with a First People's wisdom perspective.

##### 4.2 Resourcing the Working Group

Most of the members of the Working Group are volunteers. Administration support has been facilitated by Lindsay Cullen and Anna Catliffe. We are pleased to have Raul Sugunananthan, who has just been appointed the Assembly Policy and Advocacy Officer, join the Working Group. Raul has indicated that he may be able to offer the Working Group some of his time.

On-going support will also be needed from the Assembly's media team to mobilise the whole church toward the goal of zero emissions. One key strategy will be "Sharing Good News Stories", so regular opportunities to do this will be required as the Working Group begins to gather these stories.

In addition to the support listed above, it will be necessary to obtain some technical support to update the Measuring Tools developed by Rev Dr Ji Zhang (see discussion on Measurement below).

##### 4.3 Measuring and Reporting

A key task will be to encourage all parts of the Uniting Church to measure and report emissions. This will establish baseline emissions and then indicate how effective the various parts are progressing toward their commitments. Rev Dr Ji Zhang developed some valuable Measurement Tools during his time with the Assembly. These are tailored to be used by congregations, agencies, and households. They calculate the quantity of greenhouse gases emitted each year and use available data such as electricity bills, gas bills, water bills and kilometres travelled. The Measurement Tools need updating, and this needs some understanding of the mathematics behind the tools. Hence some technical support will be needed to update them and train people in their use.

To date the Working Group does not have much specific data on measurements of emissions from various councils and agencies within the Uniting Church. This means we do not have baseline measurements and we are not able to measure and report on progress toward implementing whether commitments.

The Working Group does have some estimates of emissions.

The National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (NGER) requirement is operated by Clean Energy Regulator (CER) and is a Federal Government requirement for organisations with emissions above set thresholds. Organisations emitting over a certain threshold need to report annually under NGER. Recently several Synods across Australia (Victoria, NSW, Queensland) have audited their overall emissions to determine whether they need to report under this legal requirement.

In Victoria Tasmania Synod the total reportable emissions were 15,000 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum for financial year 2022-2023. This is under the threshold for annual reporting. This figure did not include the 490 congregations which were below a reportable threshold.

From a recent study at Brunswick Uniting Church, considered to be a medium-sized, active congregation with a regular worshipping congregation of around 100 people, the annual emissions were calculated to be around 25 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum. A conservative estimate for the 490 smaller congregations could therefore be around 10 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum.

Therefore the total emissions for the Victoria Tasmania Synod could be estimated at say 20,000 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum.

The Working Group believes that in both NSW/ACT and Queensland Synods there is a requirement to

report annually so this would indicate that emissions in both states exceed the threshold of 50,000 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum (this statement needs to be verified).

To put these emissions into context, an average home in Australia emits around 15 (tonnes CO2 equivalent) per annum. So, if this is compared to Victoria Tasmania Synod emissions it would indicate that the whole Synod is equivalent to 1300 households. Given that there are an estimated 60,000 members in the Synod, this would indicate that encouraging individual members to act on reducing emissions in their own households would also be a very worthwhile strategy.

#### 4.4 Purchasing Renewable Energy and/or Green Power

It was interesting to learn from the Round Table that in both NSW/ACT and VicTas Synods, efforts are being made to provide all parts of the church with Renewable and/or Green Power. The efforts aim to source electricity from renewable sources or to source electricity which has been certified “Green” (where money is invested to further the production of renewable electricity).

In Victoria, the Synod now has a Board member on CoPower and is promoting CoPower as its recommended supplier of electricity. CoPower rates in the top 5 electricity distributors in the Greenpeace Green Electricity Guide.

In NSW/ACT a group of Uniting Church members (more specifically Sydney & Central Coast Presbytery) has established “Uniting Energy” (see Uniting Insights Magazine for 19 May 2022). At the recent Round Table, it was reported that in its pilot scheme, Uniting Energy had supplied 9 NSW churches with Green Power for the past year, greatly reducing their carbon footprint. These approaches to reducing emissions should be encouraged.

#### 4.5 Report for Assembly in July 2024

This report is a progress report for the November Standing Committee. The Working Group has been informed that a report for the Assembly meeting in July will need to be provided to the March Standing Committee prior to 15 March to meet Assembly timelines.

Richard Arnold on behalf of the Working Group: Lindsay Cullen, Catherine Pepper, Yuko Tonai-Moore, Jamie Thom, Raul Sugunanathan.

## Appendix 1

Part 7 Request the Assembly Standing Committee to:

- a) establish a national zero emissions church working group to:
  - gather data on commitments to greenhouse gas emission reduction made across the life of the church, and progress towards those commitments
  - share stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples
  - consider how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040;  
and
- b) bring a report on findings and recommended next steps to the 17th Assembly

## Appendix 2

### Net Zero Emissions Working Group TERMS OF REFERENCE

[Date of approval]

- Purpose: To undertake work to address the Assembly resolution A call to action for climate justice: listening to First Peoples wisdom, bringing a report on findings, activities and next steps to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly.
- Reporting Arrangements: Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) and 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly
- Period: This Terms of Reference is from November 2022 until July 2024 (the convening of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly)
- Membership: As determined by the ASC on the recommendation of a group consisting of the Associate General Secretary and interested ASC members
- Background:  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly Reconvened resolved:

A call to action for climate justice: listening to First Peoples wisdom

1. To acknowledge that since time immemorial the Creator gifted First Peoples to be the timeless caretakers of country and the natural environment.
2. To confess that as Second Peoples we have heard the wisdom of First Peoples, the call of our Partner Churches, and stories of communities already affected by climate change, but we have not listened. We have failed to act as a whole Church with the level of urgency needed, and have not made the fundamental behavioural changes needed to care for creation. We confess that while effort has been made to change from ways that destroy the Creator's good creation, carbon pollution continues as a direct result of our activities individually and as a Church, and global carbon pollution is now causing irreversible harm.
3. To commit anew to listen to First Peoples wisdom and knowledge, and to take practical climate action including changing our own behaviour.
4. To call on all Councils of the church, agencies and schools who have not already done so to join with the Assembly in committing to net zero emissions by 2040 at the latest, so that together we can become a zero emissions Church. We further urge all Councils to make use of the resources, stories and carbon accounting tools made available online.
5. To request the Standards for Ministry Committee to identify the most appropriate way to embed learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into formation, education and training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church and report back to the November 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.
6. To request the Assembly Circles, Advocates and Panels to include learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into their work for the remainder of this triennium.
7. To request the Assembly Standing Committee to:
  - a. establish a national zero emissions church working group to:
    - gather data on commitments to greenhouse gas emission reduction made across the life of the church, and progress towards those commitments
    - share stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples

- consider how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040; and:
- b. to bring a report on findings and recommended next steps to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

**Task Required:**

- Gather data on commitments to greenhouse gas emission reduction made across the life of the church, and progress towards those commitments
- Share stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples
- Consider how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040

**Expected Outcomes:**

Through communication by the GS to all Synods, the Assembly will call on all Councils of the church, agencies and schools who have not already done so to join with the Assembly in committing to net zero emissions by 2040 at the latest, so that together we can become a zero emissions Church. The call will further urge all Councils to make use of the resources, stories and carbon accounting tools made available online.

**The Task Group will:**

1. Follow up this call, gathering data on commitments and progress towards these commitments.
2. Seek out stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples and work with Assembly communication to disseminate this material widely.
3. Based on the data gathered, develop concrete next steps for how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040

At the conclusion of its work the Task Group will present a Report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly via the Assembly Standing Committee outlining activities undertaken, the findings and proposed next steps.

**How the task group will work:**

1. Be grounded in the gospel and build upon the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia.
2. Live out our covenant as First and Second Peoples.
3. Live out our commitment to being a multicultural church, oriented towards justice.
4. Embody an inclusive church where those of differing ability, age, race, sexual orientation and gender identity are welcomed.
5. Ensure that the activities of the Task Group are consistent with the Basis of Union of the UCA, the Constitution and Regulations, and align with the current strategic priorities of the Assembly.
6. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other councils, agencies and groups within the UCA, and work collaboratively wherever possible.
7. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other bodies ecumenically and with other civil society organisation and work collaboratively wherever possible.
8. Where appropriate, conduct its work on the basis of rigorous, contemporary research and analysis.

**Membership:**

The Convenor will be appointed by the ASC guided by input from a group consisting of the Associate General Secretary and interested ASC members.

The appropriate number of members and the composition of the membership of the Task Group will be determined by the Assembly Standing Committee guided by input from the same group.

Casual vacancies will be filled as required by the Assembly General Secretary and communicated to ASC.

The selection process will consider the skills and expertise required to undertake the work of the Task Group.

The Task Group will be dismissed at the conclusion of the work it has been given. In the event that the period given to a Task Group has elapsed and the work of the group is not yet completed the Assembly General Secretary may choose to:

1. Extend the period of the Task Group and communicate this to ASC
2. Dismiss the Task Group and request that ASC appoint a new Task Group.



### Appendix 3

#### Commitments to reducing emissions by various parts of the Assembly

Arising out of the Round Table the Working Group believes that the current commitments across the church in Australia are as follows. Further work will need to be done to fully verify these.

#### The Assembly

The Assembly office and its agencies - net zero by 2040 (adopted 2020)

#### The Synods

WA - Direct WA Synod Operations to be Net Zero emissions by 2030. - Resource the Presbytery, congregations, schools and agencies to reach net zero emissions by 2040

QLD - Net zero by 2040 (adopted 2022)

SA - net zero by 2040 (adopted 2022)

VicTas – A proposal will be presented at the November 2023 Synod meeting to encourage all parts of the Synod, its institutions and other councils of the Church, to aim to reach zero emissions by 2040, covering their Scope 1 and 2 emissions.

NSW.ACT - "reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions right across the church" (not sure if there will be a new proposal at the next Synod)

Northern Synod - no capacity to consider.

#### Major Agencies

Uniting Communities SA - net zero by 2035 (adopted 2021)

Uniting NSW.ACT - net zero by 2040 (adopted 2021)

Wesley Mission Queensland, broad commitment to reduce emissions, currently working on setting targets and KPI's.

UnitingCare Queensland has a strategic plan to reduce 70% emissions in 2025

#### Various Schools

No information to date

#### Various Congregations

A few congregations have reported setting emission targets including:

Victoria - St Andrews Gardiner, Glen Waverley, Heatherton Dingley – already zero emissions

A larger number of congregations are taking action to reduce emissions by making physical changes on their properties. For example:

Victoria – Brunswick Uniting Church, St Luke's Highton (Geelong), St Leonards, Wesley Church (Geelong)