



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

15 – 17 March 2024

DOCUMENT 20

Title	Climate Action Plan Annual Report
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Information and Decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	Assembly Agencies
Purpose	To receive a progress report and recommendations on a way forward.
Rationale & Findings Summary	Assembly's ability to utilise the tools previously used has been impacted by changes in personnel as well as COVID wrought changes to work practices. Additionally, further exploration with Agencies suggests that a more tailored approach to our goals could be both more useful and enable a better view by ASC of the contributions being made by individual parts of the Assembly.
Attachments	
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receives the report;2. Requests the Toward Net Zero Steering Group to consult with each Agency and the Secretariat/ARU to enable a better understanding of appropriate targets and best practice measurement and recording tools for tracking these goals;3. Requests each Board and the General Secretary to work individually on a tailored Climate Action Plan for that part of the Assembly;4. Requests the General Secretary to bring a report detailing the outcomes of this process to the November 2024 ASC.
Submitted by	Lindsay Cullen, General Secretary (Interim), gensec@nat.uca.org.au , 0408 000 165

Introduction

The Assembly has been faithfully continuing to gather the emissions data in categories previously set up. Our capacity to interpret and evaluate the effectiveness of this program of tracking however has been adversely impacted by changes in personnel, in particular the conclusion of the Rev Dr Ji Zhang, who set up the tools we have been using to collect data, and to a lesser extent by the conclusion of Rob Floyd who exercised a management oversight of the this area of work. This has meant that some aspects of the measurement tool we have had, have not been brought up to date with emission factors relevant to the 21/22 or 22/23 financial years.

Additionally, the inherited tool and the previous measurement regime has some simplifications which are being made evident as we move forward into the resumption of some patterns of work post-COVID, but the significant changes to other patterns of work. Thus, it seems problematic to compare assumptions made about measuring of home offices and provided workspaces in pre-COVID, during COVID and post-COVID times. Similarly assumptions about the measurement of transport options to and from work may need to be revisited. Finally, one of the clear limitations of the current measurements is that they do not take into consideration the actual level of activity and subsequent headcount of parts of the organization. For example, in the summary table listed below, there is no explanatory commentary enabling the ASC to consider that Frontier Services over the past few years has been increasing the number of Bush Chaplains supporting rural and remote people and families and as a result doing many more miles of travel. Similarly, UnitingWorld is in the time of focused reconnection with overseas partners following the difficulties and limitations of the COVID era. On the other hand, the significant drop in emissions from FY22 to FY23 for the Assembly probably has far more to do with the fact that the Assembly was understaffed in that period than (despite our commitment to continued improvements) any huge change in our practices.

Financial Year 2022-2023 Summary Figures

As a result of the above, I share the following Summary Table with the ASC, but without a large degree of confidence that the data for the most recent Financial Year is entirely trustworthy, or that conclusions can be drawn from it as to the efforts or commitment of the Assembly and its Agencies to doing their part in our Church's desire to contribute to a good climate outcome for our world.

Tonnes of Carbon Emitted					
Office/Agency	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
Assembly	111	123	72	141	118
Frontier Services	27	39	37	63	74
UnitingCare Australia	29	43	37	37	53
UnitingWorld	93	86	53	75	101

Conclusion

Ultimately, one of the drawbacks of our current strategy is that it attempts to find a 'one size fits all' answer to the question of how the diverse parts of the Assembly, let alone the wider UCA, are to best live out the commitments we have to a sustainable and appropriate response to the world's climate emergency. In particular, it is worth considering whether the particular efforts required by a part of the Church tasked with a national and indeed international focus and scope of work are the same as those relevant to a local congregation or faith community.

At a recent Executive retreat, the National Directors of our Agencies, the General Secretary (Interim) and the National Director of Strategic Finance and Admin had a long and constructive conversation about how we might move forward, and I am bringing the results of that conversation to the ASC as proposals 2 and 3 above. Firstly, we would like to draw on the expanding pool of technical knowledge that we have within the Assembly within the Toward Net Zero Steering Group. We believe that the expertise in that group may allow us to better understand the current best practice in setting and achieving emissions reduction, taking into account a more nuanced understanding of what is meant by 'net zero'; how the different parts of the (whole church) may be required to play different parts depending on their work focus, contribution to overall emissions and resources for tackling this issues; how we should approach scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 emissions in our goals; what might be the appropriate use of offsets and how do we ensure the quality of such offsets, including exploration of whether we might find offset projects within work with First Nations partners or overseas partners.

Secondly we recognized that the current measurement regime has not been developed in concert with the Boards of our Agencies, in alignment with their strategic plans and with the particular objectives of that Agency in the life of the Church. We would like to encourage the Boards to actively participate in setting appropriate targets, based on an understanding of the areas of work that are most critical to the ongoing functioning of that Agency, on the parts of their work that might be most amenable to strategic changes in behaviour or approach resulting in a lessening of emissions, and on the activity cycles of that Agency – are they currently expanding their work, stable or in a period of tightening.

Lindsay Cullen, General Secretary (Interim)