



RENEWAL OF THE WHOLE CREATION

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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

- That we affirm and seek the guiding wisdom of First Peoples and cultures who have lived as part of this place for countless generations.
- That First Peoples have direct involvement in the management of land and waters, and in all environmental practices. That we recognise connection to Country is of central importance to First Peoples and that the recognition of Indigenous rights in land and sea and sky is fundamental to a healthy and sustainable environment.
- That all people in Australia are given - and will embrace - the opportunity to feel deeply connected to our natural environment. That all will recognise the gift of living amongst all this unique diversity and seek to protect it — thinking deeply about our place in the world and our responsibilities to the web of life.
- That we will see the whole of creation as interdependent, and learn to live in harmony with the whole created order. That we recognize old definitions of sentience and non-sentience are being theologically challenged. That we become open to the growing scientific edges which understand that all biology is ecology and that we are part of an interconnected community.
- That we believe in the good news that enables all people to understand themselves as inter-related participants in an evolving journey of the Universe. On this journey every being has the opportunity to contribute their unique gifts.
- That we create a culture where the desire to protect, sustain and restore our environment overrides the desire to consume and our “throw-away” society. That we take a new approach to design and waste management where products are built to last and to re-enter the environment.
- That all levels of government would implement laws, regulations and system-level approaches to minimising environmental waste, improving waste management systems, and promoting sustainability across production and consumption processes.

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 World Heritage coral reefs and forests.
- First Nations leaders from remote islands are facing rising sea levels threatening to displace their communities. There will be more and more legal cases against the Australian government over climate inaction.
- Our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere are suffering with the impacts of climate and while Australia is providing migration pathways for people from Tuvalu facing the existential threat of climate change-which is the world’s first bilateral agreement on climate mobility-at the same time our Government is failing to reduce the export of fossil fuels and the is continuing to allow new coal and gas projects across Australia.
- Regional and remote Aboriginal housing is not able to withstand climate change and will be unsuitable for future living, forcing people to consider migrating away from their traditional lands if nothing is done. But even the best-kept housing will not be enough to protect people from the worst impacts of climate change, according to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).¹
- Currently a majority of Australia’s energy relies on traditional sources—non-renewable fossil fuels. Coal and gas account for about 63% of electricity generation² 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.
- 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 will not enable us to contribute our fair

share toward the Paris target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (a 45-60% reduction is recommended).

- 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.
- We have an opportunity to decarbonise transport and support Australia's goal of reaching net zero by 2050. The deployment of existing technologies will need to accelerate and developing technologies will need to be taken up quickly as they mature. There will need to be changes in the vehicles Australians purchase and the way Australians travel, electrification of other transport types where possible and new liquid fuels or hydrogen where it is not, and new supporting infrastructure. Technologies are available now to reduce emissions, from light vehicles in the form of battery electric vehicles and active and public transport options. These technologies must be made more affordable and accessible to all not just the wealthy
- There is a growing fossil fuel divestment movement and significant private investment in solar panels, renewable energy and electric vehicles.
- There is a strong public appetite for, and uptake of renewables. Over 2 million Australian households have now installed solar panels but there is a need for more equitable access for all people.
- 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 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.
- The Australian Energy Market Operator has outlined a 20-year transition plan³ 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. 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.

- Such careful planning is being undermined by a renewed discussion around impractical, costly nuclear solutions which Australia's Climate Change Authority has demonstrated will further delay Australia's reduction of emissions.
- 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 anthropogenic climate change — the Bramble Cay melomys.
- Our natural environment is in a state of radical 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 are: climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation, invasive species and multiple overlapping pressures on the same ecosystems.

WITNESS FROM THE BIBLE

- **We call** upon people to recognise that, fundamentally, creation is God's outpouring of incarnational love in which we are invited to participate. That inter-relationship of creator and creation is seen in passages such as in the Gospel of John (John 15:1 – 7), where Jesus tells us that "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."
- **We name** that 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. 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. (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. (Job 20: 12 – 29; Proverbs 1: 10 – 19; Matthew 23: 25 – 26; Luke 12: 15 – 21)

The destruction of our environment is the greatest theological, spiritual and moral problem of our time and it is our urgent work to call ourselves to account and action. To put it bluntly, the ecological crises we face are grounded in the centuries-long spread of colonisation. Exploitation of the earth has been justified by conquest theologies and conquest spiritualities. This must be recognized, and this must be stopped.

- **We confess** that our Second Peoples have heard the wisdom of the First Peoples, the call of our Partner Churches, and the 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.
- **We recognise** that younger people know that as a species and as a planet, we are in trouble. They know it in their hearts, their minds, and in their nervous systems. There are alarmingly high rates of "eco-anxiety" among our young people, and the countries with the highest proportion of people who are suffering from this worry are those most hard hit by catastrophic climate change fuelled natural disasters.

The most common emotions named by young people are sadness, anxiousness, anger, powerlessness, and a prevailing sense that their urgent environmental concerns are being ignored by older generations. In the scriptures (Matthew 18:6), Jesus tells us that if we cause our little ones to sin (to break, fall apart, lose hope) it would be better for us to have a great millstone fastened around our necks and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Jesus calls for us to care for the most vulnerable amongst us and right now the 'most vulnerable' is our natural world and those who will inherit it. We rejoice that the earth itself is a witness to the glory of God (Psalm 19:1 – 4) and the Leadership of Christ (Luke 19: 38 – 40) and it is important for Christians to ensure that this witness is enhanced and not destroyed by our actions and approaches.

WHAT THE UCA AFFIRMS

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."

Resolution 36 from the 16th Assembly (2022)⁴

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 the climate catastrophe.
- iii. Listen to and learn from the voices of vulnerable people across the world who are experiencing firsthand the impact of the climate catastrophe
- 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;

Resolution from the 17th Assembly

The UCA recognised Laudato Si as a document of continuing witness.⁵ This document written by Pope Francis calls for climate justice, care for all beings, and action on climate to protect the most vulnerable of Earth's community.

OUR ASKS:

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.

5. Increased natural and marine protection zones, better land care and water management and radically improved environmental laws.
6. On-going support for a Climate Trigger to assess all future projects (such as new mines or high emission industrial plants) on the climate harms they'd potentially cause.
7. Policies which support farmers who have already or want to transition to more sustainable agricultural techniques.
8. Strong environmental laws with independent assessment processes and strict enforcement of both protections and rehabilitation requirements.
9. Protection of old-growth forests from logging. These forests are some of the most important habitats on Earth and are vital for climate change mitigation and biodiversity.
10. Greater funding to control invasive species.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

You may like to select one or more of these questions 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?

References:

1. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/brief/Climate-change-and-low-income-housing>
2. <https://www.energy.gov.au/energy-data/australian-energy-statistics/data-charts/australian-electricity-generation-fuel-mix>
3. <https://aemo.com.au/energy-systems/major-publications/integrated-system-plan-isp>
4. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/1148>
5. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/1149>