



FOR THE SAKE OF THE PLANET AND ALL ITS PEOPLE:

A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change Assembly Standing Committee, Uniting Church in Australia

Resolution:

06.101 It was resolved to:

- 06.101.01 adopt the statement "For the Sake of the Planet and all its People: A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change" (Attachment B);
- 06.101.02 encourage Uniting Church members, congregations, groups, agencies and councils to
- a) model ways of living and working that minimise the production of greenhouse gas emissions;
 - b) seriously and regularly include matters of environment and lifestyle change in prayer and worship, study, and communal decision making; and
- 06.101.03 encourage Uniting Church members to
- a) advocate for government to implement policies that significantly reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and increase our use of non-nuclear renewable energy sources;
 - b) engage in dialogues, shared learning and action with non-government environment action groups.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE PLANET AND ALL ITS PEOPLE: A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change

In its first public statement in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia expressed what would be an abiding concern with the wellbeing of the planet for the rights of future generations:

*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 natural environment is, however, not merely a resource for the benefit of human beings but has intrinsic value as part of God's good creation. In 1991 the Uniting Church declared that, "Nature has a right to the protection of its eco-systems, species, and populations in their inter-connectedness".²

¹ *Statement to the Nation*, Inaugural Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia, 1977

² *The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations*, Sixth Assembly 1991, Resolution 91.14.18, Uniting Church in Australia

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God.³ We believe that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings. The foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, the *Basis of Union*, expressed this as the very heart of the Church's mission:

*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.*⁴

Since its inauguration the Uniting Church in Australia has been concerned about the continued existence of all creatures and plant life and believes that nature is not to be plundered and abused. We must acknowledge, however, that the church has been complicit in the abuse of creation. We have lived out a doctrine of the domination of nature by accepting and engaging in practices that have failed to safeguard the integrity of creation. We have supported systems and structures that exploit the natural environment in the service of human greed. We make this confession and 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. The scientific evidence on global warming and its potentially disastrous impacts is now indisputable. Also beyond dispute is that the burning of fossil fuels and subsequent creation of greenhouse gas emissions and our worldwide failure to plan for a sustainable future is seriously exacerbating the problems we face. The threat posed by climate change therefore challenges the way we live in a fundamental way. If we are to meet and overcome the challenge we must think creatively about the organisation of our social and economic institutions, our relationship with each other across national and cultural boundaries and our relationship with the environment.

It is increasingly the case that some humans consume the earth's resources whilst other humans pay the price. As one of the world's major producers of greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis, Australia must acknowledge that it has a responsibility to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. As long as we remain prepared to abuse the atmosphere and entire ecosystems for the sake of short-term economic gain for a few, we undermine our own future. It is important that Australia's social, economic and environmental policies begin to reflect that social justice and ecological justice are not competing interests, but have shared solutions.⁵ It makes good economic and political sense to spend money ensuring the long-term well-being of our natural world – there can be no security for humanity without a healthy ecosystem.

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that it is important for the Australian Government to set and commit to meeting serious targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions primarily through the promotion of renewable energy sources, measures to reduce energy demand and promotion of energy efficient measures. It is essential that this work be done in partnership with state and local government, business, industry and civil society.

³ Submission to the Federal Environment and Heritage Committee Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter, UnitingCare NSW.ACT, May 2006

⁴ *Basis of Union* (1992 edition), paragraph 3, Uniting Church in Australia

⁵ *No Security Without Justice*, a resource for Uniting Church members for the Federal Election 2004, Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly

The Church has a long history of concern with the nuclear fuel cycle⁶ and remains unconvinced about the use of nuclear power as a solution to global warming. We believe that the continued research, development and implementation of renewable energy are absolute priorities for governments and industry in order to minimise greenhouse gas production. As a matter of urgency we must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

The impact of climate change will affect some of the world's poorest people first. The Uniting Church is particularly concerned with the fate of some of our most vulnerable Pacific neighbours. Our partner churches in the Pacific have called on their sisters and brothers in the Church throughout the world to act in solidarity to reduce the causes of human induced climate change by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, reducing energy use and developing clean, renewable energy sources.⁷ Lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and ecosystems of the Pacific Islands have already been affected by rising sea levels, diminishing agricultural space, diminishing reserves of fresh water and changing weather patterns including more frequent and unpredictable storms. The Uniting Church has called on the Australian Government to prepare to provide assistance for the peoples of the Pacific as they are forced to leave their homes and their land.⁸ Solutions must be found which ensure that the unique cultural and linguistic heritages of the various Pacific Island nations are not lost.

The situation in the Pacific is a clear signal to us that in order to secure our future, we must change how we live as nations, communities and individuals. Now is the time that governments, business, community and faith-based organisations must commit to working together to address the impacts of climate change for the sake of our planet and all its people.

⁶ *Nuclear Fuel Cycle Policy*, Assembly Standing Committee, Resolution 00.22, Uniting Church in Australia, March 2000

⁷ *The Otin Taai Declaration*, The Pacific Churches' Consultations in Climate Change, March 2004

⁸ *Tuvalu and the Impact of Global Warming*, Tenth Assembly 2003, Resolution 03.18.01, Uniting Church in Australia; *Global Warming and its Impact on Pacific Nations*, Eleventh Assembly 2003, unconfirmed minute, Uniting Church in Australia