

National Climate Action Plan



**Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY**



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.

Acting to make this vision a reality, we will work with all parts of the Uniting Church to reduce emissions by 5% per annum and aim to become a net zero emissions church by 2040.

The Challenge

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 coral reefs¹. We recognise that the impacts of climate change fall disproportionately on those who have contributed least to human-induced greenhouse emissions, including our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere.

Despite this, most of Australia's energy continues to rely on fossil fuel sources. In 2019, coal and gas still accounted for about 85% of electricity generation. We acknowledge that in 2019 most of the energy used for Uniting Church Assembly, Synod, Presbytery, Congregation, and Agency needs and activities was also sourced from fossil fuel.

Under the Paris Agreement, the Australian Federal Government has committed to an emissions reduction target of 26-28% by 2030 on 2005 levels. This is a very low target, however despite this, Australia's emission levels are rising². A much higher target of 45-60% is recommended to do our fair share toward the Paris target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius³. Federal Government policies are failing to support the necessary transition to renewables, especially for communities who are currently reliant on coal and other fossil fuels as their main industry and source of employment.

Despite the lack of leadership at a national level, Australian local and state governments have committed to greenhouse emission reductions within their jurisdictions. The states of South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory have committed to net zero emissions by 2050, while the Australian Capital Territory has committed to net zero emissions by 2045. Western Australia remains the only state not to have

commenced a review of the net zero emissions target. However, during early 2019, 21 local governments called upon the Western Australian Government to implement a state level emissions reduction target. Australian local governments are also committing to local action, with over 115 local governments, representing 13 million people, signing up to the Cities Power Partnership, which connects cities and towns who are making the switch to clean energy.

Large Australian companies and universities are also making zero carbon or 100% renewable energy commitments as a part of their corporate social responsibility programs. From 2019, the Uniting Church in Australia added its commitment to a net zero emissions target.

The Uniting Church has also been part of a growing fossil fuel divestment movement in Australia⁴. The UCA Assembly took steps to divest from fossil fuels in 2014, following the lead from the NSW/ACT Synod. At the same time, there is significant private investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives⁵. Over 2 million Australian households have now installed solar panels⁶, but there is a need for more equitable access for all Australians⁷.

1 Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, Understanding Climate Change <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science-data/climate-science/understanding-climate-change>

2 Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, Quarterly Update of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory: March 2018

3 Climate Council: Weather Gone Wild, Climate Change Fuelled Extreme Weather in 2018

4 Climate Council, What you need to know about fossil fuel divestment, 17/05/17

5 Over 2 million Australian households now have solar panels: Clean Energy Council, Number of Australian Homes with Rooftop Solar tops 2 million... and counting, 03/12/18 <https://arena.gov.au/renewable-energy/solar/>

6 <https://arena.gov.au/renewable-energy/solar/>

7 McLoughlin, Chris, Solar panels not benefiting poor who can't afford them, SACOSS, ABC News

Purpose

For many years, the Uniting Church has spoken out about the need for greater action on climate change and to care for God's creation. Our statements in 1977, 1991, 2006 and 2018 have outlined the genuine desire of the Uniting Church in Australia to see more done to protect our environment. We also acknowledge that our words are not enough. It is time to move from resolutions to urgent, church-wide action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

from our own activities and build credibility in our continuing advocacy work. This Climate Action Plan is intended to drive that action.

This Plan is intended to apply directly to the Assembly including Assembly Agencies, and by invitation, encouragement and resourcing to all other parts of the Uniting Church including Synods, Church Schools, Agencies, Presbyteries and Congregations.

Alignment

Our action plan has been prepared to ensure strategic alignment between the statements of the Uniting Church and other national and international plans.

UCA Statements and Resolutions:

- Statement to the Nation 1977
- The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations 1991
- For the Sake of the Planet and all its People: A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change 2006¹
- For the Whole of Creation 2018

These Assembly statements have called on the Australian Government and the Australian community to commit to the wise use of energy and the protection of the environment.

In 2018, the Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to address climate change and called on the church to consider ways we can reduce our contribution to climate change, individually and in our communities.

This Action Plan sets out practical and meaningful actions for change. It includes a single, clear target for emission reduction, and commits to the development of a reporting framework.

International Agreements:

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

SDG 13 is to take action to combat climate change and its impacts. We have incorporated this goal into our plan through the inclusion of an emission reduction target and practical action to achieve this goal, advocacy to government to show leadership in this area, prioritisation of First Peoples voices and the voice of those most affected by climate change, and commitment to ongoing educational and pastoral actions to support the community in making changes to both mitigate and adapt to human-induced climate change.

Australian State Commitments:

The states of South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory have committed to net zero emissions by 2050, while the Australian Capital Territory has committed to net zero emissions by 2045.

This plan makes a more ambitious commitment to net zero emissions from Assembly operations by 2040. We feel it is important to show leadership to the Australian community. Further we seek to work with all parts of the Uniting Church to encourage and support this commitment across the whole church.

1 Coghill, C. and Poulos E. 2016 (eds) For a World Reconciled: Justice Statements from the Uniting Church in Australia 1977-2015

Principles for Climate Action

Spiritual and Theological Grounding

Care for creation is a spiritual and theological imperative embodied in Christ in whom all things live and move and have their being. Our climate action will be grounded in and connected at all times to this theological context.

Prioritising the voices of First Peoples and those most affected by climate change

We acknowledge that First Peoples, our Pacific and Asian neighbours and other vulnerable groups across the world are disproportionately affected by climate change, despite contributing little to human-induced greenhouse emissions. We recognise that Indigenous knowledge plays a significant part in understanding and responding to climate change. We also acknowledge that the voices of First Peoples and those most affected by climate change are marginalised. In prioritising those voices we will work towards relational and inclusive justice for all.

Whole of Church responses

While the unique structure of the Uniting Church in Australia can make whole of church responses challenging, we believe our polity is a gift given by God to allow us to work in ways that are prophetic. We will work across the life of the Uniting Church in respectful dialogue with Synods, Agencies, Schools, Presbyteries, Congregations and members to demonstrate that change is possible, and an enormous opportunity for renewal.

Working in collaboration

The causes of, and responses to, human-induced climate change are many and complex, and we recognise that no single person, organisation or country holds the whole solution. We will take approaches that pool the resources of like-minded organisations and support the work of our international partner churches.

Every member ministry

The Uniting Church has many talented lay and ordained people in ministry within our communities. This includes those who are working in ministries that are not specified by the church such as teaching, social work, disability support, engineering, architecture, science, medicine, law, psychology, urban design, construction and maintenance, the arts and activism to name a few. The gifts and skills of the whole body of Christ are needed to bring about the vision we strive for. We will therefore seek ways to develop and support every member ministry in implementing this action plan.

Supporting Our Rural Farming and Mining Communities

The Uniting Church has many talented and gifted members in regional, rural and remote communities, many of whom are engaged in carbon emitting industries such as agriculture and mining. We recognise their commitment to bringing abundant life to their communities and an economically and environmentally sustainable future for Australia. Many are also feeling the impacts of climate change through extended drought, prolonged fire seasons, higher summer temperatures and increased storminess. We will listen, support and advocate for our rural farming and mining communities to develop and implement long-term, sustainable and just transition plans where this is necessary, and share stories of best practice.

Action Plan

The Uniting Church is a member of the Pacific Conference of Churches with whom we will work closely in implementing this plan. Aligning our strategies with the Churches in the Pacific, we have identified three main areas of focus to achieve our vision, Prophetic, Practical and Pastoral. These areas of focus are supported by achievable actions to be implemented over the next five years.

Focus Area

1

PROPHETIC

Raising our voice for stronger action

We will speak with a prophetic voice, advocating to government and the church to bring about practical and just climate action. This includes the development and dissemination of theological and educational resources that place care for creation in its spiritual and theological context.

Actions:

- Invite, collate and share stories of:
 - » Lived experience from First Peoples and people living with the impacts of climate change
 - » Best practice from rural, regional and remote areas
- Advocate to the Australian federal government to adopt:
 1. A national climate policy 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 planning for communities currently dependent on fossil fuel industries for employment, towards more environmentally sustainable sources of income.
 3. Strategies that ensure equitable access to renewables for all Australians.
 4. Policies which support people and nations that are most vulnerable to climate change
- Engage Councils of the Church and Uniting Church members in ecumenical and other Civil Society initiatives
- Develop and promote theological, educational and worship resources and distribute widely throughout the church
- Include the context for climate change action and reference to the Climate Action Plan as a part of all UCA Assembly conferences and events
- Resource the church through Walking on Country and Pacific Islands awareness trips which include a climate change focus

PRACTICAL

Walking the Talk through Emissions Reduction and Adaptation Responses

We will walk the talk on climate action through emissions reduction and adaptation responses associated with our own Assembly operations and call on all parts of the church to join us in this endeavour. This will allow us to begin to restore our broken relationship with creation and be a credible voice for climate justice nationally and internationally. To support this, we will follow a 'four pillars of decarbonisation' approach as described by ClimateWorks in *Pathways to Deep Decarbonisation in 2050*.

Actions:

- Decarbonise Assembly operations at 5% per annum from 2019-2020 levels to net zero by 2040
- Develop a voluntary, online tool for church agencies, schools, presbyteries, synods and individual members to:
 - » Support them to make a climate action commitment,
 - » Gain access to resources to put their commitment into action, and
 - » Connect with other parts of the church and other organisations who are also engaged in this endeavour.
- Prepare a voluntary scorecard and annual reporting mechanism for consistent greenhouse gas emissions reporting across the life of the church
- Seek commitment to meaningful climate action across the life of the church
- Annual conference - virtual and in person for church climate action
- Share stories of greenhouse gas emission reduction from across the life of the church, including remote, rural and urban contexts via Assembly communication channels.

Four Pillars of Decarbonisation (ClimateWorks et al 2014)



USE ENERGY MORE EFFICIENTLY

Choose assets and equipment that uses less energy to get more out of the energy we do use – in areas such as buildings, industry, transport and infrastructure



PRODUCE LOW CARBON ELECTRICITY

Transition to zero carbon electricity sources such as solar, wind and geothermal



SWITCH TO ELECTRICITY & CLEANER FUELS

Switch every energy-using activity we possibly can to electricity (powered by clean energy), and everything else to low emissions alternatives (eg. coal and oil to biofuels)



NON ENERGY EMISSIONS

These are reduced through process improvements and carbon capture and storage (CCS) in industry and we offset the rest through bio-sequestration

PASTORAL

Walking alongside those most impacted

We will prioritise pastoral care for those within the community who are most affected by the impacts of climate change.

Actions:

- Support and run where possible climate change and mental health awareness courses
- Regional area ministries continue to support farmers affected by ongoing drought
- Solidarity and support for partner churches, especially in the Pacific
- Consider opportunities to support the elderly and other marginalised sections of the community in making changes to their homes and living arrangements to cope with the impacts of climate change relevant to their location
- Consider linking local congregations and agencies with resources to support community adaptation to changing climate (for example making churches available as “heat refuges”)

Monitoring

We will monitor implementation of this action plan on an ongoing basis using set indicators to track our progress. Reporting on the progress will occur annually to Assembly Standing Committee, and to the wider public via the Assembly website.