



Uniting Church
SOUTH PORT

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26th August 2020

Mark Zirnsak
Justice & International Mission Cluster
Centre for Theology & Ministry

Dear Mark,

Re draft climate recommendation to Synod

Thank you for your leadership in preparing the Consultation Paper and draft recommendations to the Synod.

Please see below comments on the draft recommendation and the Questions to Consider from the Consultation Paper.

Draft recommendations:

The Synod resolves:

Recognising the imperative for the Synod to embody its prophetic role in the public sphere and acknowledging our relationship and responsibility within and with God's good creation:

- a. *Acknowledges that God calls us to a particular relationship with the rest of creation. A relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God.*

Agree, interdependence is the basis for the whole of life and climate change is a major factor in tipping the balance and breaking down the relationship between all the parts of creation

- b. *Acknowledges the need for immediate and substantial action by governments, businesses and communities globally to mitigate climate change caused by human activity and the threat it poses to God's creation.*

Agree, this is a crisis, which must be acted on. There has already been too long a delay, which is closing the window for limiting global warming to an average 2°C, let alone limiting to 1.5°C. We need to learn lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences of delayed action are catastrophic and worldwide.

- c. *Thanks the Commonwealth Government for its efforts to promote greater recycling and reduction in waste generation in Australia*

Yes, but would urge the Commonwealth Government to continue in these efforts, along with State governments.



d. *Calls on the Commonwealth Government to commit to:*

- a) *Sufficient actions for Australia to contribute its fair share towards limiting global average temperature rise from human activity to 1.5°C;*

Yes. Implement cradle to grave responsibility so that costs of emissions are counted. This would also lead to reducing waste and pollution.

- b) *Net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest;*

Yes, and support research to find the most effective ways of doing this

- c) *No financial or other support for new coal-fired power stations;*

Agree; instead support development and implementation of reliable renewable energy

- d) *No approval for new coal mines and coal mine expansions of existing mines; and*
e) *Meaningful support for communities currently dependent on coal mines or coal-fired power stations for a just transition away from financial dependence on fossil fuel production and consumption.*

Yes, need these two together;

- f) *To write to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and the Leader of the Greens informing them of this resolution.*

Questions to consider:

1. *After reading this paper, how serious a threat do you think climate change is to global well-being?*

Very serious – climate change is inter-related to everything else (food & agriculture & soil health; disease & well-being; pollution; bio-diversity; planning for cities/transport – just to name a few)

2. *Which theological framework speaks strongest to you when reflecting on climate change? Global justice, stewardship or eco-theology?*

There are elements of all three frameworks that are influential and they are not mutually exclusive. The stewardship framework has been a strong influence to date, but moving towards eco-theology framework that includes the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of the whole of creation.

3. *Should the Synod call a climate emergency? If so, what actions do you believe are necessary for the Synod to take so that the statement has integrity with the Synod's actions?*

Prefer “climate crisis” terminology – need to say this is important and urgent but lean away from the connotations of suspension of democracy in a “climate emergency”. Recent State of Emergency for COVID19 has been seen as either “we’re all in this together” or as an imposition by government. Further declarations of emergencies may be seen as trying to implement an authoritarian state.



Actions Synod should take – re-affirm previous resolutions relating to Synod actions; Set a target for the Synod as a whole and consider how to support congregations and other church bodies to implement practices to achieve this – including purchasing, planning, transport, properties.

4. *Do the actions of other governments impact on how much effort we should call on the Australian Government to take? If so, what do you believe that impact is?*

We should call on the Australian Government to take a leadership role and do as much as possible, especially to support smaller nations, such as Pacific Islands. Other governments will have an impact, but this may be positive or negative. Working with the “middle ground” of nations who can and will take positive action will be more effective than waiting for everyone to act.

5. *Do you agree that the Synod should call for no new coal mines and no expansion of existing coal mines?*

Yes, leave in the ground and transition away from coal.

6. *Do you agree that the Synod should call for no new Government support for coal fired power stations? Should this position be made stronger? If so, in what way?*

Yes to no support for new coal-fired power stations.

Call for investment to be re-directed to reducing the costs of renewable technologies and remove subsidies that distort the relative costs of fossil fuels and renewable technologies.

7. *Should the proposal to the Synod meeting say something about natural gas developments? If so, what should be said?*

Caution the expansion of natural gas. The issue with natural gas is not just as a fossil fuel, but also extraction methods, which can significantly impact groundwater (eg fracking). Clean and reliable water supply is a precious resource and in the long term more valuable than gas supply. Natural gas may be needed short term to support transition from coal to renewables but new investment and expansion of gas supply may lead to longer term reliance on a fossil fuel with consequent emissions and/or wasted expenditure on stranded assets.

8. *Is there anything else that should be added to the proposal taken to the Synod meeting?*

Call for improved planning of communities to encourage active transport and public transport and thus improve health and reduce car trips.

Build on learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic such as use of technologies to enable more work from home and listening to the science / experts for sound advice

Request that post-COVID rebuilding of the economy is based on renewable and regenerative practices.

Call for support to mitigate effects of climate change:

- protection of areas of diminished habitat for vulnerable species
- further research and support for regenerative land management, agriculture and soil rehabilitation, including learning from and working with indigenous land managers
- support for Pacific Island communities to remain on their ancestral islands



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Other Synod actions:

- Include questions about energy efficiency/sustainability practices in the annual Community Life Survey

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