

Endeavour Hills Uniting Church comments on the Climate Change Consultation Paper

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

A very real threat.

Climate change is very serious, which has already been demonstrated through the bushfires last summer, and it will get worse.

2. Which theological frame speaks strongest to you when reflecting on climate change? Global justice, stewardship or ecotheology?

Ecotheology speaks strongest particularly in the way it reflects on the interdependence of humans with the environment.

Ecotheology is normally used to describe all three of these theological frames, so I found the use of 'eco-theology framework' to describe only one of them confusing. I suggest referring to the second option as an 'ecological framework'. I believe that all three theological perspectives are needed, global justice, stewardship and 'ecological'. Like three strands of a cord woven together, or like the Trinity, they bring their own specific focus but are strongest when they work together, addressing the impact on poor people around the world, taking responsibility for our own actions and reimagining the relationship between people and creation so we live in harmony with the earth. I think there should be more equal treatment of all three frames in the executive summary, with the extensive quotes from Moltmann left to the full paper.

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?

It appears that a 'climate emergency' will happen. There is a need to consider the views/input from people who wish to have input.

In the section on 'Should the Synod call a 'climate emergency'?' there needs to be more of a case in favour of declaring an emergency as at the moment it reads quite negatively and is not balanced. One of the primary considerations is that the World Council of Churches (WCC) declared a climate emergency on 19 November 2019, and the Uniting Church is part of the WCC. I think that regardless of whether the Synod calls a 'climate emergency', the Synod should act as if there is a climate emergency. The Synod should commit to developing a Synod-wide Climate Action Strategy to reduce carbon emissions across all councils and agencies of the Church and to advocate to the Federal, State government and local councils to take decisive steps to reduce our emissions (like the NSW/ACT Synod did last year). As part of this plan there needs to be staff resources to provide support to Presbyteries and Congregations in implementing the Climate Action Plan and campaigning and advocating for action on climate change and a commitment to reporting back to the Synod on progress.

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?

The actions of other governments, both internationally and within Australia, may have a motivating impact on the Australian Government. It is important that the Australian Government be called to account for their policies. This is particularly so when the Australian Government is not taking as much action as the individual States or as our Pacific neighbours are asking for.

The Synod also needs to be actively involved in the climate actions of the Victorian and Tasmanian state governments. Where the actions of these governments are helpful they could be promoted to congregations and presbyteries. Where the actions of these governments will contribute to climate change, such as reintroducing extraction of natural gas, they need to be included in campaigning and advocacy.

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

Yes. The decision about coal mines should be based on reliable environmental and economic impact studies that include the environmental and economic impacts of climate change as a result of burning the coal.

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

Yes, the Synod should call for no Government support for new coal-fired power stations. I think it should be strengthened to call for no approval of new coal-fired power stations. In addressing this issue, it is important to include reference to environmentally friendly alternative power options – options that the Government may eventually support the development and costing of.

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

Yes. The Synod should call for no Government support for natural gas developments and a continuation of the previous moratorium in Victoria.

Preference should be expressed for investing in environmentally friendly alternative power options instead which are also viable options that the Government could support.

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

It would be helpful if the proposal contained statements from groups with a specific interest in this area, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Culturally

and Linguistically Diverse communities, such as those with links to the Philippines or Fiji, and children, youth and young adults.

It would also be helpful if the proposal linked action on climate change with the Synod's mission statement.

It would be good to have a recommendation that the Synod will report on progress towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other agreed actions to reduce our contribution towards climate change. UEthical has already divested from fossil fuel companies and is taking an active approach to encourage companies to prevent climate change. They could be used as an example of reporting on progress on taking action to prevent climate change.

The proposal needs to clearly acknowledge that climate change issues of today will impact upon the health and well-being of people of all nations into the future.

On pg 4, part c) of the synod resolution thanks the Commonwealth Government for its efforts to promote greater recycling and reduction in waste generation in Australia. There needs to be some supporting information provided in the paper about this resolution. Are you referring to the National Waste Policy Action Plan agreed in 2019?

The Synod resolution could acknowledge the need for the Commonwealth Government to commit to supporting people who are impacted by current and increasing levels of climate change both in Australia and overseas, particularly in the Pacific, now and in the future. Now that the UN HCR recognises climate refugees, Australia should be considering its position on accepting climate refugees. This is to supplement the previously agreed Synod position requesting the Government to be involved in prevention, adaptation and coping with the impacts. On a moral level this acknowledges our historic contribution to the issue of climate change and our responsibility to care for those who are impacted.

Editorial comments:

Pg 7 In the Executive summary it states that 'there are limited studies of the link between the human influence on the climate and forest fires' and 'the results of these studies have been inconclusive'. In the full report, the same section on pg 20 goes on to say 'In contrast the Climate Council in Australia published a report arguing that climate change fuelled the recent bushfires'. I think this sentence needs to be added to the executive summary to give a balanced and up to date view of the evidence that is available.

Pg 9, spelling error 1st column, last paragraph 'Frome'.

Pg 10, column 2, second paragraph 'creation sign' should be 'creation sigh'. This same error was also made on pg 42.

Pg 16, second column, last paragraph 'the Synod needs to make its words with its actions' probably needs 'match' inserted after 'words'.

Pg 36, first column, under the three dot points, the phrase 'Our relationship with God and the Natural World' looks like a heading but needs to be bold or something.

Pg 38, the footnote numbers 124 and 125 in the text need to be smaller and superscript.

Pg 39, column 1, last paragraph 'social dimension to sin exists beyond individual wrong-doings', insert 'which' after 'sin'.

Submitted by: Andrea Mayes and Kerri Wilkinson from Endeavour Hills Uniting Church