



Justice and International Mission Cluster

Report to the 2022 Synod Meeting

The JIM cluster works with others to create social change and improve people's lives in Australia and overseas through faith-based social justice campaigns and programs. Our faith calls us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. The commitment means ensuring the laws which govern our society are also just and compassionate.

Context

The Cluster focuses on issues and outcomes that have the most significant benefit for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people facing the most significant situations of harm. In addition, outcomes are pursued to address the unsustainable destruction of our natural environment.

Outcomes

The JIM Cluster has resourced its supporters to take actions to achieve reforms that make our society and the world a more just place. Some of the outcomes linked to these campaigning activities since the 2021 Synod report have been:

- The Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have committed to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The outcome aligned with Synod resolution 21.2.16.1.
- In December 2021, the Tasmanian Government committed to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, significantly exceeding the position adopted in Synod resolution 21.2.16.1.
- In January 2021, Australia passed its target of reaching 33,000 GWh of large scale renewable energy generation. The outcome aligned to Synod resolution 07.4.37.4.
- In May 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced it would scrap the discriminatory Community Development Program, resulting in First People being cut off from income support when unemployed. The Commonwealth Government promised to replace it with a program co-designed with First People organisations. The outcome aligned to Synod resolution 19.3.12.2.
- In the May 2021 budget, the Commonwealth Government announced an additional \$1.1 billion to support women and children experiencing family violence over four years. The funding included \$10.3 million to help women on temporary visas that experience family violence. It also had \$29.3 million to improve the safety, social inclusion and economic participation of migrant and refugee women. The outcome aligned with Synod resolution 21.2.19.1.
- The May 2021 Commonwealth Government budget included \$9.3 million over three years to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against women with a disability.
- The May 2021 Commonwealth Government budget included \$146 million to implement a National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse. The outcome aligned to Synod resolutions 11.6.18.2.4 and 21.2.25.1.
- The Commonwealth Parliament passed laws to combat online child sexual abuse and other human rights abuses. The legislation passed was the *Surveillance Legislation Amendment (Identify and Disrupt) Act 2021*, *Online Safety Act 2021* and the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (International Production Orders) Act 2021*. The outcome is in line with Synod resolution 21.2.25.1.
- On 19 February 2021, the Victorian Parliament passed legislation to decriminalise public drunkenness. Removing public drunkenness as an offence was a recommendation of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Only Victoria and Queensland had not implemented the recommendation.
- The Victorian Parliament passed the *Spent Convictions Act*. The Act ensures that a range of minor historical offences will no longer stop people from getting a job, securing housing or fully contributing to society.



- On 11 May 2021, the Victorian Government implemented the *Disability Service Safeguards Amendment Regulations* to better screen people who work with people with disabilities.
- The Commonwealth Government has made it easier for Pacific Island workers on Australian farms to move between employers to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and mistreatment. The Government also implemented a program of inspections to ensure that the accommodation provided to workers from the Pacific Islands working on Australian farms was decent. The checks saw a significant improvement in the quality of accommodation provided to workers. The Commonwealth Government will also introduce a 24-hour helpline workers can call concerning their welfare and well-being. The outcomes aligned with Synod resolution 19.5.5.1.
- The Australian Government committed to donating 60 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to developing countries. They also donated \$753 million to support the vaccine roll-out and the health systems in developing countries in response to the pandemic.
- In the May 2021 budget, the Commonwealth Government increased the rate of Job Seeker payments by \$25 a week, which was the largest increase in the payment since 1986. The outcome aligned to Synod resolutions 80.2.3 and 02.6.4.5.
- The Commonwealth Parliament passed the *Autonomous Sanctions (Magnitsky-style and Other Thematic Sanctions) Amendment Act 2021* in December 2021 to allow the Australian Government to sanction individuals and entities responsible for malicious cyber activity, serious human rights abuses, war crimes and severe corruption. The outcome is in line with Synod resolution 14.7.19.3.3.
- The Commonwealth Parliament passed the *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Economic Disruption) Act 2021* to strengthen Australia's anti-money laundering laws. The outcome aligned with Synod resolution 14.7.19.3.3.
- The Victorian Parliament passed the *Liquor Control Reform Amendment Act 2021*, which provided some reforms to reduce alcohol-related harm. Notably, the law offers some safeguards over alcohol home deliveries.
- Pastor Daniel Balucio of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines was released from detention on 13 August 2021 after a court threw out the trumped-up charges against him.

The JIM Cluster has provided \$15,000 a year to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) to assist their social justice mission work. In 2021, the UCCP used the funding to train 46 of its leaders from ten provinces to conduct para-legal and advocacy work defending human rights. The grant was also used to provide sanctuary to 25 individuals and seven families being subjected to death threats or harassment by security forces in connection with their social justice activities.

Networks

The number of registered supporters on the physical mailing list for the Cluster decreased from 1,372 as of 1 November 2020 to 1,281 at the start of March 2022. The digital mailing list is at 3,692 at the beginning of March 2022. The End Christian Persecution Network was closed down in 2021. Since the 2018 restructuring brought about by the Major Strategic Review, the JIM Cluster has been forced to shut down all of its issue specific supporter networks due to the reduction in Cluster staff numbers from five staff to two.

The Cluster wants to restore the supporter network for refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Cluster actively participates in the Seasonal Worker Support Group. The Group is made up of congregational members in Victoria, NSW and South Australia that provide support to workers on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. The workers come from Pacific Islands to work on Australian farms. The work connects to the Synod priority of culturally diverse mission and ministry. The Cluster feeds back information from the Group to the Commonwealth Government, which has led to some reforms on the Program to improve the situation of workers.



The JIM Cluster was able to employ two part-time, casual workers, Rev Randall Prior and Taau Ritata, to connect Pacific Island workers on the PALM scheme with local community groups and churches. The Commonwealth Government provided the funding to the joint project with the Salvation Army, the Pacific Islands Council of Queensland and the Pacific Islands Council of South Australia.

The Cluster provided secretariat support to the Synod Climate Action Taskforce of interested ministers, congregations members, Synod staff and Uniting Vic.Tas staff to facilitate and encourage a reduction in the Synod's greenhouse gas emissions.

The Cluster ran a '[New Public Squares: Public Good](#)' project that involved students from two Uniting Church-affiliated schools and a congregation.

Resourcing the Synod

The JIM Cluster produces a pack of resources to take social justice actions for its main supporter base five times a year. It also produces an e-mail update at least fortnightly.

The Cluster produced a [Covenanting Guide](#) and other covenanting resources for First and Second Peoples walking together. The Cluster also published a [Statement from the Heart](#) study guide. The National Assembly and other Synods have also used the resources. In addition, they have had good pick up and use by congregations, several of which have used them as the basis for holding forums on the issue.

The Moderator has nominated the Cluster to join the newly formed Synod Walking Together in Covenanting Committee.

In July 2021, the JIM Cluster distributed a booklet developed with the National Assembly and other Synods to assist congregations to consider specific social justice issues and a [Vision for a Just Australia](#) in the lead up to the Federal election.

In November 2021, the Cluster hosted a convention for congregation members on the theme of reforming and renewing democracy titled '[Our Faith in Democracy: How do you have a meaningful Say?](#)'

In February 2022, the Cluster published a [guidance and framework booklet](#) on the theological basis and principles it operates by.

The Cluster produced a [consultation booklet](#) in February 2022 to consult with congregation members on the role of electronic monitoring in the criminal justice system, especially concerning addressing family violence.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 reduced the ability of the Cluster to have active involvement in congregational services. That, in turn, reduced opportunities to recruit new supporters from within congregations. However, the JIM Cluster was still able to engage online with congregations.

Looking ahead to 2022 - 2023

The Cluster will continue to work with other organisations to address the declining trust in the system of democratic government. The declining trust makes it harder for governments to pursue reforms to improve people's lives and prevent human rights abuses. It also makes it harder for governments to raise tax revenue to provide community services and assist the vulnerable in our community and across the globe.

Advances in electronic communication and social media have also made it easier for people to express their opinions to government representatives. However, that has resulted in elected representatives being overwhelmed by a volume of communication they cannot respond to. Thus, for the Synod to have its view properly considered, there is a need to build genuine and meaningful relationships with elected representatives. The Cluster will seek to facilitate congregations establishing such relationships in 2022 -2023.

The future work program of the Cluster will be shaped by which political parties win the Federal and Victorian elections in 2022.