

# JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

OCTOBER 2022



## FEDERAL PARLIAMENT PASSES CLIMATE CHANGE BILL

**We have invited you to take numerous actions to encourage successive Commonwealth Governments to take action to address climate change.**

There was great news that the Federal Parliament passed the *Climate Change Bill 2022*. The new law requires that the Commonwealth Government ensure that it reduces Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 43% by 2030. The target can be increased over time. The independent Climate Change Authority will inform the setting of targets.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action to encourage Australian Governments to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## TASMANIAN AND VICTORIAN PROGRESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

**In October 2021, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government to thank them for the actions they have been taking to address climate change.**

In September 2022, the Victorian Government released a report showing Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions were 30% below 2005 levels in 2020. In 2020, Victoria had the third lowest emissions in Australia after Tasmania and the ACT. However, it remains to be seen if the emissions reduction persisted

as the state moved out of lockdowns related to COVID-19.

The Victorian Government aims to halve the State's 2005 emissions by 2030.

The Tasmanian Government reported in late August that renewable energy projects capable of generating 25,000 GWh were seeking approval in Tasmania to be ready to start operation by 2030. The Tasmanian Government has a legislated target of 150% of its electricity needs to be from renewable energy sources by 2030. The target means electricity produced in Tasmania will be exported to mainland Australia. •



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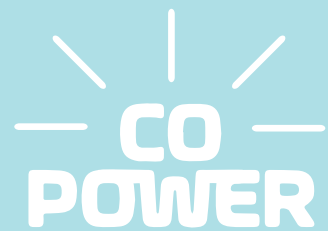
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## **SEEKING A SYNOD REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE COPOWER BOARD. LET US KNOW IF YOU ARE INTERESTED**



**The Synod is seeking expressions of interest from any interested members of the Uniting Church to represent the Synod on the board of CoPower.**

CoPower is a not-for-profit cooperative that focuses on the transition away from fossil fuels and using the funds it generates to fund human rights and social justice projects.

CoPower's first service is offering retail electricity with their product partner Energy Locals.

The Synod was recently accepted as a member organisation of CoPower. The Synod has a place on the board of CoPower as part of its efforts to address its greenhouse gas emissions.

Anyone interested in representing the Synod on the board of CoPower should send an expression of interest by Monday 28 November, to

[mark.zirnsak@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:mark.zirnsak@victas.uca.org.au). Please also contact Mark if you have any questions about the role.

The expression of interest should outline why you wish to represent the Synod on the board of CoPower and any relevant experience. Previous experience on a board or as a director of a corporate entity is an advantage. You should also outline any experience they have in the electricity industry or renewable energy generation. •

## **FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER**

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All of the resources in this mailing can be found on the JIM website.

If you would like to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to either this hardcopy mailing (bi-monthly) or email update (weekly), contact the JIM Cluster.

# REFORMS FOR PACIFIC ISLANDERS COMING TO WORK IN AUSTRALIA

**In the last few years, we have invited you to take action in support of reforms to provide better protection for people coming from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste to work in Australia temporarily.**

In August 2021, we requested you write letters to oppose the development of a new agricultural visa being developed under the Morrison Government, which lacked the safeguards of the scheme involving Pacific Island workers. Thank you to everyone that has taken action in response to these requests.

The new Labor Government has announced that it will introduce further reforms to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. The reforms include:

- That workers on placements for less than a year will no longer

have to repay their employer for the cost of the airfare to get to Australia. They will need to repay the Australian Government, which is likely to result in greater flexibility in the repayment of the debt;

- It will be easier to move workers between work placements. The most significant problem with the PALM scheme at the moment is workers running out of work at one workplace and being left with no income for weeks while the subsequent work placement is sorted out;
- Shifting the agricultural visa proposed by the previous government to be under the PALM scheme; and
- Allowing workers on longer-term placements in Australia to bring their families with them from 2023, provided they have the support of their employer to do so.

The Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Pat Conroy, has stated that the Labor Government will aim to make:

*... sure that the Pacific labour schemes do become the primary source of temporary labour for rural and regional industries in Australia, and that provides huge remittance flows back to the Pacific and deepens the economic sustainability of Pacific Island nations.*

In addition, at the Commonwealth Government Jobs and Skills Summit at the start of September 2022, the Government committed to implementing the recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce to create further safeguards against exploitation for people working in Australia on temporary visas.

The Commonwealth Government plans to bring to Australia 40,000 temporary workers from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste this year to fill worker shortages. •



## FIRST REFUGEE ARRIVALS UNDER THE NEW COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP MODEL

**In April 2022, we invited you to join a mentoring program for refugees arriving in Australia, run by Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia.**

There was a positive development in late August, with the first refugee families participating in the new Commonwealth Government Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) arriving in regional Victoria and NSW. In Victoria, refugees arrived in Wonthaggi. The first arrivals were three families from Syria.

Community groups taking part in CRISP undergo training so they can provide the support refugees need to settle and participate fully in Australian society successfully. •



# REFORMS TO REDUCE HARM AT CROWN CASINO PASSED THE VIC PARLIAMENT

**The JIM Cluster has campaigned for measures to reduce the damage caused by Crown Casino since 2000. In June 2022, we invited you to write letters to the Victorian Government urging implementing the harm minimisation measures that the Victorian Royal Commission into the casino recommended.**

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

On 20 September 2022, the Victorian Parliament passed the *Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill*

2022. The Bill:

- allows people gambling at the casino to set time and loss limits on their gambling on pokies in the casino by the end of 2023. The limit setting system will be consistent with the limit setting system used in pubs and clubs;
- requires the casino to conduct identity checks of people gambling at the casino;
- limits the use of cash to \$1,000 in any 24 hours;
- bans smoking in high roller rooms, which will mean people will need to take a break from their gambling if they wish to have a cigarette; and,
- requires the casino to pay for the regulator that supervises its conduct. •

## LOSS LIMITS TO BE SET ON POKIES IN TASMANIA

**The JIM Cluster has campaigned for gambling reforms in Tasmania since 2010.**

On 15 September 2022, the Tasmanian Government announced it would become the first state in Australia to allow people gambling on pokies to set enforceable limits. The limit will be placed on a card. The default loss limits will be \$100 a day, \$500 a week and \$5,000 a year. If any of these limits are exceeded then the person will be blocked from being able to gamble on pokies anywhere in Tasmania until the relevant period has passed. However, the person gambling can increase or reduce the default limits. Also, the Government has said it will review the default limits once the system has been in place.

People with gambling problems in

Tasmania had a median daily loss of \$200 on the days they did gamble.

As a safeguard, people will only be able to increase their daily loss limit on the pokies to \$500 and their monthly limit to \$5,000. If the person wishes to increase their limit above those levels, they will be required to provide proof that they can sustain the proposed loss level. Evidence of their ability to support those losses will be required every 12 months. If the proof is not provided, the limits will be reset to the default loss limits.

On the negative side, the card itself can be loaded up with cash. Research has shown that when people use money in an electronic form they are more likely to spend more than they would if they had to use notes and coins.

Tasmanian pokie businesses have expressed fierce opposition to the

plan to allow people to set limits on how much they can lose.

The Tasmanian Government had also considered using facial recognition technology to reduce gambling harm. The Christchurch casino in New Zealand effectively uses facial recognition to detect people displaying behaviours indicating they are at risk of gambling harm. However, the Tasmanian Government has rejected implementing facial recognition technology in pokie venues as a harm minimisation tool.

The JIM Cluster will invite Tasmanian supporters to make their voices heard by the Tasmanian Government as the reform details are sorted out. There will be a need to counter the voices of pokies businesses willing to put their profits ahead of the well-being of the people who gamble at their venues. •

# VIC GOV'T PASSES MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY REFORMS

**Over the last few years, we have invited you to take action to seek safeguards for people with disabilities and mental health issues against abuse, exploitation and neglect.**

In April 2022, we requested you write to the Victorian Government seeking several reforms. Thank you to everyone who has written letters on the issue.

There was good news at the end of August with the Victorian Parliament passing the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022*.

The Bill established a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission that will receive complaints about mental health services. It will also be able to initiate its own investigations into mental health services.

Consistent with the April 2022 letter-writing action we sent to you, the Bill sets a target of eliminating the use of seclusion and restraint of people with mental illnesses in the next ten years. The use of such restrictive practices on people with disabilities and mental health issues has caused trauma, re-traumatisation, and, in some cases, led to suicidal ideation. Restrictive practices include physical restraint and the use of medication to keep people sedated. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability heard reports that restrictive practices were sometimes used for “operational convenience”, where inadequate staff numbers were employed to provide care. The Government has stated that further work will be conducted to develop

a plan to achieve the outcome of eliminating the use of seclusion and restraint.

As requested in the letter-writing action we issued, the Bill requires respect for the spiritual beliefs of people with mental health needs:

*Treatment and care are to be appropriate for, and consistent with, the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of a person living with mental illness or psychological distress. Regard is to be given to the views of the person's family and, to the extent that it is practicable and appropriate to do so, the views of significant members of the person's community. Regard is to be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique culture and identity, including connections to family and kinship, community, Country and waters. •*

## TAX LOOPHOLE CLOSED

**We have invited you to be part of campaign actions to close tax loopholes exploited by multinational corporations and wealthy individuals.**

There was good news on 4 August 2022, when the Greens successfully amended a tax Bill in the Senate. The amendment removed a special exemption for Australian-owned private companies to avoid making their tax payments public, as applies to all other corporations operating in Australia that have over \$100 million in revenue.

The amendment will also require over 1,500 large privately owned Australian companies to publicly file financial reports as any other company would be required to do so. They have been exempted from doing so since 1995. The companies in question are owned by families such as the Stokes (Kerry Stokes owns the Seven Network), Rineharts, Lowys and Solomon Lew.

Labor agreed to the amendment and passed it into law. The Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, Stephen Jones, said the “decades-old loophole in the tax code” had “no justifiable reason for existence.” He said, “Today, we make good on our promise to do away with this unjustifiable loophole in our tax system.”

Thank you to everyone who has assisted in the campaign for reforms to make the Australian and global tax systems more just for the benefit of the vast majority of people rather than billionaires and multinational corporations. •

## TAS TO ESTABLISH A DISABILITY COMMISSIONER

**In April 2019, we requested that you write letters to the Tasmanian Government asking for further reforms to protect people with disabilities from abuse, exploitation and neglect.**

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the request.

There was good news on 13 September, with the Tasmanian Government announcing it would establish a Disability Commissioner to promote the rights of people with disabilities. The Disability Commissioner will also “establish and monitor safeguarding mechanisms that address violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.” •

# REFORMING OUR DEMOCRACY TO EMBRACE INCREASING DIVERSITY

**MARK ZIRNSAK** SENIOR SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE

**With the emergence of a growing number of independent and minor party Members of Parliament and Senators, it is time to start having conversations about broader reforms to our democracy to guarantee the ability of the Parliament and government to function.**

Our current system is not structured well to cope with a Parliament where one political party does not have a majority in the Parliament. There is a danger that without reform, Australia could go the way of other countries that have struggled to have a functioning Parliament and government where one party is not the majority. For example, Israel has had five national elections since 2019. Belgium went without an elected government for 589 days.

Why would the Christian community take an interest in questions of political structure? Mainstream Christian understanding today is that God loves all people and desires that all people flourish. In response, the Christian community should seek a society of mutual care in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive. The just structuring of our laws and government contributes to bringing that good news into reality.

The formal government provides

systems that have the potential to express deep care for the common good collectively. Historical experience points to governance systems that allow each person to have a say are better at serving the common good than those that concentrate political power into the hands of the few.

An essential function of government is to pass necessary laws to address problems in our society and develop possible avenues for the social good. A problem with our existing democratic system is that the

the stability of our political system rather than hoping goodwill between parties will always exist. One possible structural reform would be to remove the dependence on having a majority in the Parliament to form an executive. Instead, people could elect the Parliament and Ministers separately. A separate election of the executive would mean it would no longer be necessary for us to worry about who will get a majority in the Parliament. Instead, we can vote for who we want. The greater diversity in our Parliament would hopefully

allow for exploring more paths that serve the common good.

There would still be a lot to sort out. For example, if a conflict emerged between the Parliament and the executive, which body would have the ability to prevail?

I would suggest that in such a conflict, the Parliament should have power over the executive to ensure laws passed by the Parliament are correctly implemented and administered. The US system of government has demonstrated the problems that emerge when the independently elected executive arm, the President and their administration, have more power than the legislative arm, the Congress.

The Parliamentary system we

*Continued on page 7*

“**THE JUST STRUCTURING OF OUR LAWS AND GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTES TO BRINGING THAT GOOD NEWS INTO REALITY**”

arm of government required to implement laws and run the machinery of government, the executive arm, is dependent on having a majority in the law-making arm, the legislative arm of government. Minority governments, made up of political party coalitions, have worked in Australia and other countries. However, they require goodwill or the desire to be in power between those that make up such coalitions for them to last.

Structural reform of our political system would be a way of ensuring

*Continued from page 6*

inherited from England is based on a structure of society that has, fortunately, long since ended and concentrated political power in the hands of the few. As parliamentary authority emerged to restrain the monarch's absolute power, the government was structured around balancing the groups that made up a feudal society, nobility, clergy and commoners. Thus, the commoners were represented by the House of Commons. However, voting was limited to a small number of wealthy men. The House of Lords represented the nobility and the clergy. The

nobility were people who inherited their position and power by birth and from the favour of the monarch, a system of cronyism.

Importing the English system into Australia involved adaption as we did not have a monarch or nobility. The Senate replaced the House of Lords and was a house of review to represent the interests of states.

It is time we moved on from these feudal origins of our democracy. The important thing now is to start the conversation about how we can allow people to vote for who they want without jeopardising the ability of the government to function smoothly.

We should also be exploring options for allowing people to have more active involvement in the decisions government needs to make.

Undoubtedly others will have better proposals for reforms to our government structure to improve our democracy in the service of the common good. Such reforms must serve the common good, not just the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

Hopefully, reinvigorating discussion about improving our democracy and our ability to participate in government decisions will rebuild trust in the system of democracy. •

# PASTORAL CARE IN TIMES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

## REV. DEACON ANDREA MAYES

**On 19 July 2022, Australia's most recent State of the Environment Report was released. It makes for very sobering reading.**

Overall, the state and trend of our environment in Australia is poor and deteriorating as a result of climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction. Over the last few years, the impact of climate change has become tangible through fires and floods. Perhaps you, like me, are having more conversations with friends and family about our environment and what is happening to it.

When we do have these conversations, we have the opportunity to offer pastoral care, which starts with listening carefully. Listening to what is said and listening to how people feel. There can be a whole range of different emotions, including sadness, anger, helplessness and trying to pretend it's not happening.

As we offer pastoral care, we may



also feel deep emotions. Listening to other people's feelings can trigger our grief or anger at the environmental problems and the lack of action to address them. We need to sit gently with our own emotions and share them with our support people.

As we provide pastoral care and really listen and share, we open up a space where the pain and grief of what is happening to the environment becomes a community experience. It is no longer our own individual issue but something shared. A shared problem can then be addressed by shared action.

As we take action, we can draw on the resources of our faith to sustain us as we keep moving through grief, hope and action to address environmental degradation. Our faith reminds us that God loves the whole world. Jesus came to save everything. The Holy Spirit will keep comforting us and challenging us until justice is done and God's new kin-dom is fully visible on planet earth. (Kin-dom emphasises the importance of good relationships between kin, which includes all people, plants, animals, rivers and the whole of nature). •

# COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT PROMISES REFORMS TO ADDRESS EXPLOITATION IN THE GIG ECONOMY

**In the August JustAct, we requested that you write to the Commonwealth Government about reforms to address the exploitation of people working in the on-demand gig economy, such as Uber drivers and delivery riders.**

There was good news at the start of September, with the Commonwealth Government announcing at its Jobs and Skills Summit that it would:

- amend the relevant laws to give workers the right to challenge unfair contractual terms;
- include gender pay equity and job security in the purpose of the *Fair Work Act*;
- introduce legislation to ensure people doing the same job get the same pay;
- extend the powers of the Fair Work Commission to include “employee-like” forms of work, allowing it to make orders for minimum standards for new forms of work, such as gig work;
- consider allowing the Fair Work Commission to set fair minimum

standards to ensure the Road Transport Industry is safe, sustainable and viable; and,

- criminalise wage theft.

The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Tony Burk, said in a speech in late August that “Gig work drives down wages and it has been spreading like a cancer through the economy.” He went on to say:

*Gig work must not become the equivalent of a get-out-of-jail card in Monopoly, where business is able to avoid the minimum standards that Australians hold dear – 21st-century technology must not mean 19th-century working conditions.*

There has been massive churn of workers through Uber since it set itself up illegally in Australia a decade ago. State governments were coerced to change laws to allow Uber to operate legally after the fact. Uber has had 725,000 people in Australia work for it but has only retained 100,000 of them.

In August, the Transport Workers Union launched an appeal against the NSW state workers’ compensation agency iCare. iCare had

rejected applications for compensation by Shimu Paul and Nyoman Suntari. Shimu Paul was the sister of Bijoy Paul. Nyoman Suntari was the widow of Dede Fredy. Bijoy Paul and Dede Fredy had been killed in accidents while working as Uber Eats delivery riders. iCare had upheld Uber’s claim that the two men were not employees. Uber had made undisclosed insurance payments to the families of Dede Fredy and Bijoy Paul.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters to the Commonwealth Government requesting reforms to protect workers in the gig economy. If you did not get a chance to write the letters in August, it is not too late to show the Commonwealth Government that such reforms have community support. This JustAct also has a postcard you can sign and send to the Commonwealth Government to support some of the needed reforms. For our online supporters, you can find the letter at <https://justact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Letter-writing-action-on-Uber-reforms-August-2022.pdf> •