

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND



News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

APRIL 2026



SYNOD AND GREENPEACE SOUTHEAST ASIA LAUNCHED A REPORT ON ALLEGED FORCED LABOUR IN TUNA PRODUCTION FROM INDONESIA TO AUSTRALIA

The Synod JIM Cluster and Greenpeace Southeast Asia recently launched a report of an investigation into alleged forced labour in the production of tuna from Indonesia to Australia.

This took place at Parliament House in Canberra on 3 March. Investigators from Greenpeace Indonesia interviewed 25 Indonesian fishing boat crew members from 17 Indonesian tuna fishing vessels. All of these allegedly supply five Indonesian seafood companies

who send their tuna products to the Australian market. The crew members spoken to reported having experienced forced labour. Among the 11 International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 'forced labour indicators' analysed, the crew most frequently encountered abuse of their vulnerability (56%), debt bondage (56%), and being subjected to deception in their recruitment (40%). The report titled *"Forced to the Bottom: Squeezing Indonesian Fishers and Oceans for Dirty Tuna Profits"* can

be accessed at act.gp/cheaptuna

The crew interviewed in the report alleged indications of forced labour were found throughout all employment stages. Based on the crew members' testimonies, employment brokers (calo) lured them with promises of big salaries and flexible advance loans upon recruitment. But then the calo charged illegal fees and withheld the fishers' identification documents and personal belongings to assert total control over the crew. At sea,

1
Continued page 2

CAMPAIGN UPDATES

From page 1

the crew members reported excessive working hours, up to 21 hours a day, often without proper rest, pay, or access to communication. Some of them were out at sea for 10 to 18 months without a port visit. Salary was paid at the end of each trip, with profit-sharing schemes that are unjustly designed to suppress the crew's income. Under a typical profit-sharing arrangement, the vessel's owner receives 50% of the profits at the end of the trip, the captain receives 25%, and the crew shares the remaining 25%. The crew have almost no way of knowing what the trip's profit was, leaving them easily vulnerable to being ripped off.

There was also evidence of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing practices. Companies allegedly push fishing vessels and crew to engage in banned practices, such as shark finning and deploying illegal fish aggregating devices (FADs). The link between labour abuses and environmental crimes underscores an extractive system that externalises human and ecological costs to sustain profit margins.

A former crew member spoke at the launch in Canberra about his experience working on fishing vessels. He started working on fishing vessels at age 14 and worked on them for 12 years. His last trip departed in June 2024 and set out for 18 months at sea. His trip was cut short due to lung problems caused by the cold climate in the Indian Ocean at

the time. Despite coughing up blood, the vessel captain told him to continue working. When he refused because he could not endure the pain, he was beaten up by the captain and his colleagues.

In August 2024, his captain sent him off the vessel he was on and transferred him to another vessel at sea, where he would be returned to port for being unable to work. On the second vessel, he was forced to sleep on the outside deck, while he still endured the lung problem. He returned to port in September 2024, still coughing up blood. The company that owned the vessels refused to pay him, saying he had not worked hard enough to be paid. He had no money for a bus home to another part of Indonesia. He was forced to sleep in an abandoned, dirty post office at the port, where his bedding was paper.

After a few days at the port, he was lucky enough to meet representatives from Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW), a non-governmental organisation that works for the rights of fishing boat crew members. After

negotiations with the fishing vessel administrator by DWF, they agreed to pay his salary and compensate him for his travel back home. He was also admitted to hospital and diagnosed with pneumonia.

He has a wife, a former domestic migrant worker in Singapore, and two children, aged 2 and 4. He now works on a coffee plantation, renting the land and growing the coffee. In his free time, he likes to write poetry.

The Synod also launched a second report, *"Motivating Ethical Sourcing: Ensuring goods imported into Australia are free from forced labour"*, which examined cases of forced labour in the production of:

- Clothing from Mauritius;
- Palm oil from Malaysia; and,
- Coffee from Brazil.

A summary of the report is included as an insert in this JustAct. The February 2026 JustAct contained a postcard action and a letter-writing action. If you did not get a chance to write letters or send the postcard, it is not too late to do so. You can also order more postcards by emailing jim@victas.uca.org.au ●



FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

Mark Zirnsak – Senior Social Justice Advocate
Tim Molineux – Social Justice Officer

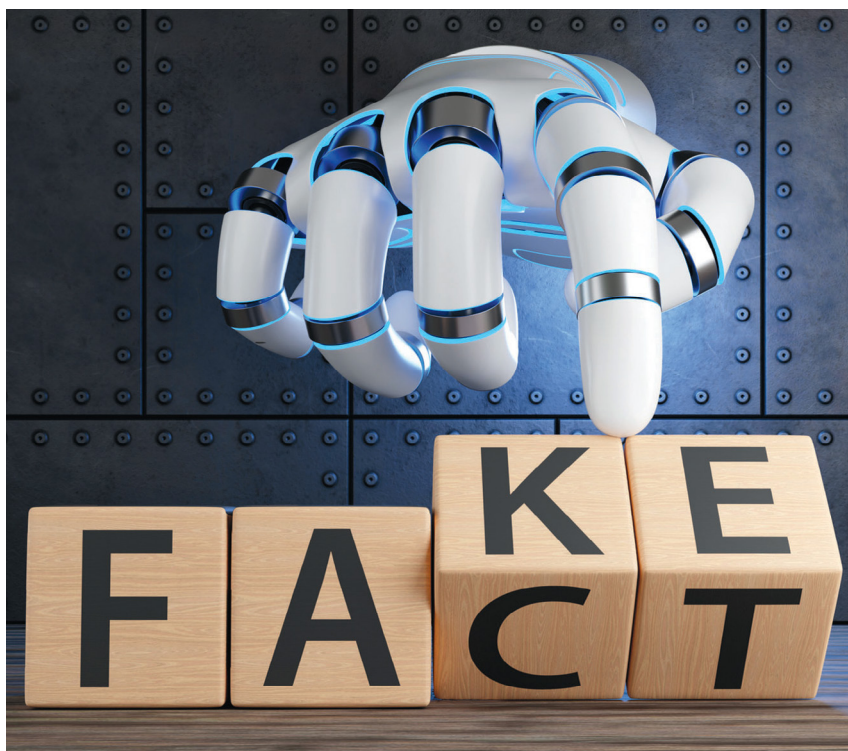
Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Centre for Theology and Ministry
29 College Crescent
Parkville, Victoria 3052

Phone - (03) 9340 8807

jim@victas.uca.org.au
www.justact.org.au

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.



AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ENDORSES GLOBAL AI DECLARATION

In the last year, we have invited you to write letters and send postcards to the Commonwealth Government, urging strong regulation of the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) to minimise the risks of harm. Thank you to everyone who has written letters and sent postcards.

On 19 and 20 February, the Australian Government joined with the governments of over 100 countries in New Delhi, India, for a summit to advance trusted and inclusive AI innovations that benefit people and the planet. The Australian Government endorsed the Declaration from the Summit which supported the idea that wide-scale adoption

of AI and AI-based applications holds unprecedented potential to drive economic and social development. Disappointingly, the Summit left the development of safe AI to industry-led voluntary measures and the adoption of technical solutions.

The World Council of Churches has been opening a global dialogue about AI. Michael Buttrey, the World Council of Churches project officer for Faith and Science, said in an interview in late January:

I think it is fair to say that all the churches are concerned about AI. Everyone wants to learn more. Everyone wants to have more conversations. Everyone thinks we should be discussing AI in a faith-based context. Practically,

our final consultations and positions might differ, but we all want to have that conversation. The second issue is that there are very few churches that have enough people with expertise in this area. Churches can't dedicate many people to these more niche questions. You're lucky if you have one person who does faith and science, or two people who are interested in AI. That's not enough people to have a conversation. •



INTERNATIONAL AI SAFETY ASSESSMENT

In February 2026, the UK Government published the second edition of the *International AI Safety Report*. A diverse group of over 100 AI experts guided its development, including an international expert advisory panel with nominees from over 30 countries and international organisations, including the OECD, the European Union and the UN.

The report found that AI has been adopted faster than previous technologies, such as the personal computer, with at

Continued page 4

From page 3

least 700 million people now using leading AI systems weekly.

The report also assessed that advances in AI scientific capabilities have heightened concerns about misuse in biological weapons development. Multiple AI companies chose to release new models in 2025 with additional safeguards after pre-deployment testing failed to rule out the possibility that the models could meaningfully help novices develop biological weapons.

The report also raised the concern about the difficulty of reliable testing of AI models before they are made publicly available. It has become more common for the AI models to detect the difference between testing environments and real-world deployment, and to deceive testers about their capabilities. That means that dangerous capabilities could go undetected before the AI model is released into the world.

Further risks identified in the report were:

- AI systems are being misused to generate content for scams, fraud, blackmail and sexually abusive imagery. Systematic data on these uses and their severity remains limited;
- In experimental settings, AI-generated material can be as effective as human-written content to change people's beliefs. The use of AI for manipulation in the real world may increase as its capabilities increase;
- Some AI systems can discover software vulnerabilities and write malicious code for cyberattacks. Criminal groups and state-associated attackers are actively using general-purpose AI in their operations;
- Early evidence shows that AI is not yet impacting overall employment, but it is impacting demand for early-career workers in occupations such as writing;

- Early evidence suggests that reliance on AI tools can weaken critical thinking skills and encourage "automation bias". Automation bias is the tendency to trust AI system outputs without sufficient scrutiny; and,
- The inner workings of AI models remain poorly understood, increasing the risk of harmful outcomes. The risk is increased by the pace of development, which can create pressure to prioritise the speed of development over risk management.

In 2025, 12 corporations developing AI published or updated their Frontier AI Safety Frameworks, documents that describe how they plan to manage risks as they build more capable models.

Most risk management initiatives remain voluntary, but a few governments are beginning to formalise some practices as legal requirements. ●

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO SUBSIDISE FOSSIL FUEL USE BY LARGE MINING CORPORATIONS

The latest figures show the Federal Government has given away \$10.8 billion in the last year to subsidise the use of fossil fuels through the fuel tax credit scheme, including to large multinational mining corporations. The amount given away is many times more than what the Federal Government spends on health services for First Peoples and twice as much as the overseas development budget.



The largest 15 diesel fuel corporate users burned nearly six billion litres of the fuel in the 2023 – 2024 financial year, generating 16 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. The Federal Government subsidised them by \$2.9 billion to do so.

The JIM Cluster continues

to promote a postcard campaign calling on the Federal Government to no longer provide the fuel tax credits to large mining corporations. If you are able to collect more signatures on postcards, the postcards can be ordered by e-mailing jim@victas.uca.org.au ●



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES BOOST TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF FAMILY, DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In April 2025, we requested that you write to the Victorian Government for reforms and funding to address family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). In August 2025, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government requesting additional housing to assist people who need to leave situations of FDSV. Particularly, we raised the situation of people fleeing FDSV being forced to live in unsuitable motels for prolonged periods.

There was good news on 20 February with the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments announcing an extra \$180 million to support women and children experiencing FDSV in Victoria.

Some of the funding will go to services that specialise in supporting children and young people who are FDSV survivors, including:

- The Amplify Project run by Melbourne City Mission. The program supports those aged 15-19 years old through trauma-informed case management, safety planning, peer support and access to legal, financial and education-related assistance; and,
- The ASPIRE program run by Meli (www.meli.org.au). The program helps children and young adults aged 12 to 25 living in regional Victoria with risk assessment and safety planning, assistance to remain engaged in education and help accessing legal, financial and housing support.

The funding will also support increased crisis response capacity and safer accommodation options, reducing reliance on motels and expanding safer, trauma-informed crisis accommodation.

On 4 March, the Commonwealth Government also announced an additional \$291.7 million to support the sustainability and security of people working to assist survivors of FDSV. These workers assist women and children escaping violence with safety planning, counselling, and access to housing and financial support.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in support of further actions by the Victorian Government to curb FDSV. ●

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES FURTHER MEASURES TO SUPPORT YOUTH AT RISK OF COMING INTO CONTACT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In the October 2025 JustAct mailing, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government urging them to provide support to prevent vulnerable children from entering the youth criminal justice system. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in

response to the action.

There was further good news in late January 2026, with the Victorian Government announcing that it would spend \$33 million to boost youth early intervention services and community services. The funding will provide mental health support

for young people, particularly for those at high risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Funding will provide health and community services to divert youth away from criminal behaviour.

By contrast to support and diversion programs, at the end of January, the Productivity Commission reported that imprisoning an average of 74 youth a day in Victoria cost \$343 million in the 2024-2025 financial year.

That works out to \$2.67 million to incarcerate a young person for a year. Incarceration is also failing at rehabilitation, with 57% of those imprisoned reoffending within 12 months. ●

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON THOSE WHO EXPLOIT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY



For several years, we have invited you to write letters to the Commonwealth, Victorian, and Tasmanian Governments requesting reforms to improve the lives of people with disability. Many of these reforms have been targeted at ending the abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.

There has been good news with the Commonwealth Government mounting a crackdown on disability services providers that have ripped off people with disability. The Commonwealth Government had established a task force, the Fraud Fusion Taskforce, to investigate cases of fraud

involving Commonwealth Government revenue.

As shown in the table next page, there has been a substantial increase in the number of disability service providers being banned from operating within the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Table. Number of banning orders issued against disability service providers in the NDIS 2021 to 2025.

| Year | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of banning orders issued | 23 | 54 | 105 | 139 | 281 |

In one case, a disability service provider in St Albans Melbourne was banned after being found to have provided proper safeguards for people with disability using their service as well as claiming \$250,000 from people using their service for supports that

were never provided.

In addition to banning orders, 1126 orders demanding improvements had been issued to disability service providers in 2025, up from 26 in 2024.

The Synod JIM Cluster recently arranged a meeting between

the Fraud Fusion Taskforce and organisations that advocate for people with disability, to help identify more cases of abuse and exploitation. Thank you to everyone who has written letters in support of reforms to improve the lives of people with disability. ●



FEDERAL PARLIAMENT PASSES REFORMS TO SUPERANNUATION

In June 2025, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government in support of reform to address the existing unfairness of the superannuation system that greatly favours Australians with high incomes and contributes to growing financial inequality in Australia. Thank you to everyone that wrote letters in response to the action.

On 11 March, there was good news when the Parliament passed the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Better Targeted Superannuation Concessions)*

Act 2025, which adds a 15% tax on the portion of earnings from the part of the superannuation balance that exceeds \$3 million. It also added an additional 25% tax for the earnings on the part of an individual's total super balance above \$10 million.

Approximately 80,000 people, or 0.5% of all people with super accounts, have account balances over \$3 million and only one in a thousand Australians have a superannuation account balance of greater than \$10 million. A superannuation balance of \$3 million is well over ten times the median superannuation account balance on retirement. In 2021, the median account balance for men around retirement age was \$211,996, and for women it was just \$158,806.

Both the \$3 million and \$10

million thresholds are indexed so that the additional tax will apply to roughly the same number of people over time.

The new law also increases the Low Income Superannuation Tax Offset (LISTO). As superannuation contributions are taxed at 15%, for people on low incomes, that is a higher rate of tax than they would be required to pay on their income.

The LISTO will now refund up to \$810 of the tax paid by low-income people on superannuation contributions, up from \$500. The eligibility threshold would increase from \$37,000 to \$45,000, effective 1 July 2027.

This will benefit 3.1 million Australians, 60% of whom are women, so it's an important reform. ●

“HOW WARS END: A HOPEFUL HISTORY OF MAKING PEACE” BY JAN VAN AKEN

Dr Jan van Aken (PhD) worked as a genetic engineering expert for Greenpeace and as a biological weapons inspector for the UN from 2004 to 2006.

He was a member of the German Parliament from 2009 to 2017 for *Die Linke* (the Left Party). He then worked as a policy advisor in international conflict analysis at the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation in the Middle East.

With that background, Jan's book explores what works for peacebuilding to prevent and end armed conflicts. The book ends with his views on the pathways to end the wars in Ukraine and the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

Jan argues in his book that ending an armed conflict is most likely when the conflict reaches a painful military stalemate and when those at the political level are seeking a way out. He pointed out that each side has normally engaged in propaganda to vilify the other side in the conflict, so it is then hard to sell to their own population why they would negotiate with maniacs and war criminals.

Jan makes the case that peace treaties are not an endpoint in a conflict but an intermediate step in a longer process. It's crucial that a peace treaty ensure the process continues. Only through gradual accommodation between the peace agreement and realities on the ground can lasting peace be achieved.

Jan argues in his book that the broadest possible cross-section of civil society should be at the



peace negotiating table:

It's only if it's their peace treaty that people will uphold it on a day-to-day basis and call for its implementation. As a result, inclusivity has been very extensive in some cases of peace negotiations. In the Burundi peace process, for example, 19 political parties were involved. In Northern Ireland, special elections were held, and the ten most successful parties took part in negotiations.

Jan states that a meaningful and lasting peace needs to address the conflict's underlying causes: "These are often social injustices, and resolving them can be particularly complex, as they often touch the foundations of a society organised in line with capitalism."

He makes the case that lasting peace also needs to be driven by the people on the ground. There have not been any new UN military missions since 2014, after several failed with

UN troops in previous missions having inflicted serious harm on populations they were supposed to protect. UN peacekeepers have committed mass rapes, and countries contributing troops have repeatedly pursued their own self-centred interests during missions. For example, during the operation in Haiti, UN peacekeepers accidentally introduced cholera, which sparked an epidemic that killed nearly 10,000 people.

He states, "In my view, the concept of the UN as a military power that could wage war against any country, under the control of a completely undemocratic UN Security Council, would be horrific."

Jan argues:

Without precise knowledge of the subtle nuances in these societies and of deeper conflicts, processes initiated externally can completely bypass people. Sustainable reconciliation can only work if confrontation with the past comes from within a society. International actors can help, can finance processes and offer experiences from other post-war societies, but they should always remain supportive rather than be the drivers of a reconciliation process.

"How Wars End" is a great read for anyone wanting to know what measures, actions and policies we should be calling for if we want to be effective peacebuilders living out the Gospel call to us. ●