

# **CLIMATE CHANGE**

## **THE UNITING CHURCH GOES NET ZERO**

### **YOUR GUIDE FOR GETTING INVOLVED**

#### **WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE AND WHAT ARE ITS CAUSES**

The climate change we are currently experiencing is a warming trend caused by increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which affect the ability of the earth to radiate heat into space. The main contributor to these gases is carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels

Since the year 1900 the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have risen by over 50% above historic levels and average global temperatures have risen by about 1.5 degrees centigrade. While we continue to burn fossil fuels average temperatures will continue to rise.

This is already causing drastic changes to the earth - melting icecaps, rising ocean levels, bushfires in places where they never occurred in the past, unprecedented floods, extinctions of species  
We must act now to save our planet

#### **THE UNITING CHURCH - RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

##### **The Vision of the Uniting Church National Assembly-**

“We seek the flourishing of the whole of God’s Creation and all its creatures. We act to renew the Earth from the damage done and stand in solidarity with people most impacted by human-induced climate change. Government, churches, businesses and the wider community work together for a sustainable future.”

“Acting to make this vision a reality we will work with all parts of the Uniting Church to reduce emissions by 5% per annum and aim to become a net zero emissions church by 2040”

#### **THE SA SYNOD**

At the SA Synod meeting in July 2022 our Synod voted to support this vision and to aim to achieve net zero carbon emissions from Uniting Church activities by 2040.

Net zero means that we aim to eliminate all emissions of greenhouse gases but that while any emissions remain we will

offset them by investing in projects which reduce atmospheric carbon elsewhere, eg. growing trees, introducing green technologies or new industrial processes which replace old ones with a large carbon footprint

## **WHY SHOULD WE SUPPORT THIS PROJECT**

There are many reasons.

- 1. The earth belongs to God. It is not ours to despoil**
- 2. As Christians we have a duty to God to protect the earth**
- 3. We want to leave a healthy, habitable earth to our children**
- 4. We love the earth and want to keep it safe**
- 5. We have a responsibility to nature and other creatures**
- 6. We have a responsibility to vulnerable nations**
- 7. Our actions will demonstrate to the wider community where we stand and encourage others to do likewise**
- 8. The cost is not out of reach. Most costs will bring a longer term gain and lower costs in the long run**

## **THE SA SYNOD CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

### **Trial Program**

The Uniting Church Environmental Action Group has been requested by the SA Synod Standing Committee to act as the core of the Synod Climate Action working Party for the implementation of the Plan. The EAG conducted audits of emissions currently generated by a small number of churches who volunteered to be part of a trial. The results showed that most emissions are in two categories

- 1. Use of buildings and amenities**
- 2. Travel on church activities**

Therefore the Synod Climate action plan needs to focus on these two areas

## **Synod Climate Action Plan for Buildings**

The South Australian Government's aspiration is to achieve an electricity supply coming 100% from renewables by 2027. This means that if we can source all our energy from the electricity grid (or in-house renewable sources), after 2027 we will not produce emissions from appliances powered by electricity.

Most churches which have solar panels and/or storage batteries installed have reduced their power costs significantly. Therefore it would be good to extend this to as many churches as would benefit financially from doing so.

Considering these factors the strategy to reduce emissions and power costs from use of buildings might be:

### **Strategy for Buildings**

1. Over time electrify everything. In particular replace all gas appliances with electric ones and all internal combustion appliances with electric ones (eg lawn mowers).
2. Conduct an audit of everything which may have an influence on emissions such as building insulation quality, power wastage, efficiency of lighting and heating, etc. and fix any problems or inefficiencies
3. Conduct an economic analysis to see if a solar or solar/battery installation is justified on a financial basis and take appropriate action on that analysis after researching government and other rebates which may be available
4. It may be necessary to delay some actions to wait until prices drop to an affordable level

## **SA SYNOD CLIMATE ACTION PLAN FOR TRAVEL**

Australia currently has no emissions standards for vehicles. As a consequence average emissions from passenger vehicles in Australia are almost double those in comparable countries (eg. Europe, China, USA). The Government has now passed legislation to introduce emissions standards for new vehicles which comes into effect in January 2025. This will have the effect of reducing average emissions from vehicles by an estimated 17% per year over 5 years.

In view of these developments we can see that there will be a gradual shift towards lower emissions from cars due to technological change and government policy. This is unlikely to reduce to zero by 2040 depending on other technological developments and price incentives

To reach zero net carbon by 2040 it will probably be necessary to use offsets to compensate for residual emissions from vehicles or other sources There are a number of potential avenues available to do this

### **STRATEGY FOR- TRAVEL**

- 1 New emissions standards will lead to lower average emissions over time
- 2 Encourage members to consider emissions when buying a new car
- 3 Use offsets to compensate for residual emissions

### **IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

Each church will make their own decisions about implementing the Synod Climate Action Plan for their congregation. All actions will be at the discretion of the local church

We are asking Church Councils to nominate a person to drive and coordinate the implementation of the Plan for their church under the direction of the Parish or Church Council

The Environmental Action Group is the responsible group to represent the Synod and stands ready to support individual congregations to the extent that they are able

### **FUNDING**

Most actions to mitigate carbon emissions will cost money but many of them are effectively a temporary outlay which will be returned in lower on-going costs in the future.

Eg a solar array will cost say \$3000 to install but will result in lower power bills in the future with a net saving after 3 to 5 years.

The same could be said for replacing a gas powered appliance with an electric one especially if the electricity used is from roof - top solar

A centralised pool of funds may be needed to assist less well-endowed congregations to implement their plans with beneficiaries repaying the fund by regular annual instalments as the benefits are realised. A small pool of funds exists for this purpose. Another option for a small congregation might be to partner with a larger congregation.

## **AUSTRALIA'S EMISSIONS - THE BIGGER PICTURE**

Our carbon emissions related to Church activities are only a small proportion of the total emissions we generate in our daily lives. To be serious about combatting climate change we must each address our own emissions by minimising all that we can and offsetting those we cannot eliminate by ourselves.

Recent Federal Government decisions to approve new coal mining and gas fracking projects run directly counter to their committed goals to limit climate change. As a church striving to care for God's creation in practical ways we must respond to any decisions which deeply harm our planet. We urge the Uniting Church community in SA to vigorously protest continued Government support for fossil fuel developments, false Corporate green washing, and failure to meet our climate goals.

## **OUR OVER-ARCHING PURPOSE**

The purpose of this project is not just to reach carbon zero but to energise us all to take better care of the earth for the sake of our faith, our children, and all creation.

Thus we urge our members to embrace a wholistic approach including cutting waste, eliminating plastic, taking responsibility for our own emissions and treading more lightly on the earth in the way we live, starting now.

We also encourage our members to become active in the community to urge that Australia meet its international obligations to reduce its emissions at least in line with the Paris accord but preferably by much more.

*Prepared by the Environmental Action Group of the Uniting Church in SA  
Website : <https://www.environmentalaction.org.au/>  
Convenor David Shepherd  
email [dshe4700@bigpond.net.au](mailto:dshe4700@bigpond.net.au)*