



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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## **Submission of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia on the *Climate Change (State Action) Amendment Bill 2021* 14 November 2021**

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the draft *Climate Change (State Action) Amendment Bill 2021*. The Synod supports the Bill and welcomes the commitment of the Tasmanian Government to reach net-zero, or lower, greenhouse gas emissions by 31 December 2030. We also welcome that the Tasmanian Government is acting on consultation feedback to the review of the *Climate Change (State Action) Act*.

The Uniting Church in Australia has had a long-standing concern for protecting our natural environment and, more recently, addressing the risks created by climate change. The relevant resolutions of the Uniting Church representative bodies are outlined in the Appendix.

The Synod strongly supports the aim of the Paris Agreement to strengthen the global response to climate change, including setting a collective goal to keep the global temperature increase to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to keep warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The Synod welcomes that a climate change action plan will need to be provided at least every five years. However, given the limited time between now and 2030, the Synod would urge that the Bill be amended so that the first plan consistent with the Bill needs to be produced by the end of 2022. A second plan by the end of 2026 at the latest, so there will be at least two plans produced with adequate spacing before 2030.

The Synod also asks that Section 5A be amended so that each climate change action plan needs to report on the progress made towards the goals set in the previous climate change action plan.

Under Section 5A(4e) of the Bill, it would be desirable to explicitly include academics with expertise on climate change to catch those academics that may not be part of a research institution.

The Synod would suggest that the climate change risk assessment in Section 5B should be produced with timing to inform the development of the climate change action plan. However, we realise that to lock in specific timing of the climate change risk assessment in relation to the timing of the climate change action plan in the Bill may be counter-productive by removing flexibility in timing. That said, the Synod recommends that Section 5A be amended so that the climate change risk assessment must inform the climate change action plan. As it stands in the current drafting of the Bill, the climate change action plan and the climate change risk assessment are not required to interact with each other.

The Synod supports the sectors selected in Section 5C, which largely align with the sectors assessed for emissions in the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory reports. However, consideration could be given to aligning the sectors named more tightly to the definitions and categories in the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory reports.

The Synod would again support amending Section 5C so that there will be at least two rounds of emissions reduction and resilience plans developed for each sector before the 2030 deadline for net-zero emissions.

The Synod also asks that Section 5C be amended so that each emissions reduction and resilience plan needs to report on the progress made towards achieving the goals and outcomes set by the previous plan.

The Synod supports Section 8 of the Bill to amend Section 18 of the *Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008* regarding a review of the Act. In addition, the Synod would recommend the section be amended to include explicit reference to academics with expertise in climate change who may not be part of a scientific body.

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## Appendix: Uniting Church in Australia resolutions relevant to climate change

In 2003 the meeting of church representatives from across Australia, at our National Assembly, resolved:

*03.18.01 The Assembly resolved:*

- (a)*
  - (i) to call on the Australian Government to immediately sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocols in relation to global warming, especially because this has affected the nation of Tuvalu and other Pacific countries;*
  - (ii) to call on the Australian Government to offer the guarantee of special immigration status to the people of Tuvalu, for immigration to Australia when their nation loses its viability for human habitation;*
- (b) to express our solidarity with the Christian Church of Tuvalu in this predicament and to call on our people to remember the people and church of Tuvalu in their prayers.*

The 2006 meeting of the National Assembly resolved:

*06.21.04 The Assembly resolved:*

- (a) to reaffirm the decision of the Tenth Assembly (Minute 03.18.01), which called on the Australian Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocols in relation to global warming because of the impact of rising sea levels on the nations of the Pacific; and*
- (b) to call upon the people of the Uniting Church to adopt lifestyles that have a minimal impact on global warming.*

At the 2007 meeting of Uniting Church representatives across Victoria and Tasmania, the Synod meeting resolved:

*07.4.37.4 The Synod resolved:*

- (a) To call on the Australian Federal Government to honour its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by:*
  - (i) Taking a lead in targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as a developed country, agreeing to an emission reduction target of at least 30% by 2020, based on 1990 emission levels, if other developed countries agree to make similar commitments;*
  - (ii) Assisting developing countries to adapt to climate change, providing additional funding to achieve this outcome rather than using existing overseas aid;*
  - (iii) Providing technical and financial assistance to developing countries to adopt technologies to assist them in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions without reducing their ability to meet the necessary development needs of their people; and*
  - (iv) Continuing to assist developing countries in addressing deforestation with the promotion of sustainable forest management and the need to reward developing countries that preserve existing forest estates.*
- (b) To call on the Federal, Victorian and Tasmanian Governments to work collaboratively:*
  - (i) To commit to binding greenhouse gas emissions reductions of 20% by 2020 and at least 60% by 2050, based on 1990 emission levels;*
  - (ii) To set a target to stabilise and then reduce residential, industrial and government per capita electricity consumption with supporting legislation and programs, with the inclusion of measures to ensure that low-income people will still have access to affordable electricity;*
  - (iii) to increase the Renewable Energy Target to 10% by 2010;*
  - (iv) To provide financial incentives for households to take up renewable energy;*

*(v) To mandate the requirement for new building stock to have gas boosted solar hot water systems wherever possible and appropriate in Australia; and*

*(vi) To implement programs to rapidly increase the uptake of gas boosted solar hot water systems in existing building stock;*

*(c) To write to the Australian Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for the Environment, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for the Environment, the Premiers and Ministers for the Environment in Victoria and Tasmania to inform them of this resolution; and*

*(d) To request that all congregations and bodies associated with the Uniting Church take immediate steps to comply with past Synod resolutions regarding reducing energy usage and energy efficiency and take all reasonable further steps to minimise their own greenhouse gas emissions.*

The 2008 meeting of the Synod in Victoria and Tasmania resolved:

*08.5.16.4.4 The Synod resolved (by agreement):*

*(a) To call on the Australian Federal Government to take a leadership role in the development of a global solution to climate change to limit global warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels and in particular to:*

*(i) Honour their commitment under Article 4.2(a) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which calls upon developed countries to take the lead in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and recognises the different capacities of various countries in their ability to achieve this outcome; and*

*(ii) Commit to greenhouse gas reduction targets as part of the UNFCCC process that are at least of comparable effort to those of developed countries that are already showing leadership in the levels of greenhouse gas emission reduction to which they are willing to commit; and*

*(b) To write to the Prime Minister, Minister for Climate Change and Water, the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water to inform them of this resolution.*

The 2018 National Assembly resolved:

*18.12.01 For the Whole Creation*

*18.12.01.01 to acknowledge the Church's past and continuing commitment to addressing climate change (Appendix E);*

*18.12.01.02 to request the Assembly Resourcing Unit to develop the contents of proposal 19 as brought to the 15th Assembly as a discussion paper that contributes to this ongoing commitment;*

*18.12.01.03 to acknowledge with thanks the long history of advocacy and practical action on climate change carried out by the Uniting Church, including its synods, presbyteries, congregations, agencies, schools and members;*

*18.12.01.04 to work with First Peoples in Australia and our church partners in the Pacific, Africa and Asia and other faiths to together understand the impacts of climate change on traditional, spiritual and contemporary ways of life;*

*18.12.01.05 to encourage Uniting Church members, synods, presbyteries, congregations, agencies and schools to:*

*(a) continue to inform themselves and their communities about the causes and consequences of climate change and appropriate responses;*

*(b) advocate for government policies and political action to address climate change;*

- (c) listen to and learn from the voices of vulnerable people across the world who are experiencing firsthand the impact of climate change;*
- (d) consider ways we can reduce our contribution to climate change, individually and in our communities, set meaningful targets and be transparent with our efforts and outcomes; and*
- (e) tell stories of best practice across remote, rural and urban areas;*

*18.12.01.06 to request the Standing Committee to consider specific actions, resourcing and ways of connecting practically with other councils to address issues related to climate change.*

At the meeting of representatives of the congregations across Victoria and Tasmania in February 2021, the following resolution was extensively discussed and adopted:

- (a) To acknowledge that God calls us to live in harmony with our natural environment and to seek justice and well-being for all creation.*
- (b) To affirm the covenanting relationship between the Uniting Church in Australia and the UAICC, and our relationships with our partner churches in the Pacific as these groups are significantly impacted by climate change.*
- (c) To acknowledge that the World Council of Churches Executive Committee has declared a climate emergency “which demands an urgent and unprecedented response by everyone everywhere”.*
- (d) To acknowledge the need for immediate and substantial action by governments, businesses and communities, including the councils and institutions of the church in this Synod, to mitigate climate change caused by human activity and the threat it poses to God’s good creation.*
- (e) To undertake urgent action on climate change based on the overwhelming scientific evidence and the Synod Vision and Mission Principles that guide the Synod to “care for creation” and “live justly and seek justice for all”.*
- (f) Encourage members of the church to join the Synod Climate Action Task Force to identify and facilitate actions for the councils and institutions of the church in this Synod to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.*
- (g) To request congregations to inform their presbyteries what actions they are already taking to address climate change, and for the presbyteries to provide that information to the Synod Climate Action Task Force and report back to Synod 2022 with an update.*
- (h) To thank the Commonwealth Government for its efforts to promote greater recycling and reduction in waste generation in Australia.*
- (i) To call on the Commonwealth Government to commit to:*
  - Showing leadership in taking actions to limit global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;*
  - Net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest;*
  - meaningful engagement and support for communities currently dependent on coal mines or coal-fired power stations to allow for a just transition away from financial dependence on fossil fuel production and consumption;*
  - not providing financial support to new natural gas developments; assisting businesses to reduce or eliminate any dependence on natural gas, and Australia’s natural gas requirements being met by reserving a portion of existing production, as is already the case in Western Australia; and*
  - no financial or other support for new coal-fired power stations;*
  - no approval for new coal mines and coal mine expansions of existing mines; and*
  - continued support for the uptake of renewable energy sources.*
- (j) To commend the Victorian Government for the passage of the Climate Change Act 2017 that sets a target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.*

*(k) To commend the Tasmanian Government for:*

- establishing an aspirational emissions reduction target of net- zero emissions by 2050;*
- having 90 per cent of its electricity generated from renewable sources;*
- having set a target of 200 per cent renewable energy generation by 2040; and*
- having reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 95 per cent on 1990 levels.*

*(l) To call on the Tasmanian Government to legislate the net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050, including a credible mechanism to progressively achieve the target.*

*(m) To write to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy, the Leader of the Greens, the Premier of Victoria, the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the Premier of Tasmania informing them of this resolution*