



# Anglican Church of Australia

## Public Affairs Commission

### Issues and Questions for the 2013 Federal Election Process from the Public Affairs Commission<sup>1</sup> of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia

**We need a Government who will determine the truly critical issues that should be addressed for the long term national and global good and then go about achieving progress collaboratively.**

Social cohesion based on core values is important for the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and beyond that for effective democracy. For a democracy in which many politicians espouse Christian faith and/or values, as they do in Australia, it will be a source of strength if politics and conscience informed by religion can work together in the public arena. We present some key issues and values we consider important for this relationship and this election.

The nature of politics puts a premium on clearly defined, simply explained issues, demanding a 'yes or no' stand. Some issues are deliberately chosen to provide simple wedges, but complex issues that are critical for the future of the nation and world cannot be reduced to simple wedges. These may not be as attractive for use in political competition, and may not receive the high priority they warrant in debate and action, but they deserve effective and collaborative action.

Following are some briefing notes on enduring issues and questions for the political parties in the lead-up to the 2013 Federal election. They are not intended to be comprehensive, but to highlight some issues of particular concern to members of the Public Affairs Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia; we note that the Uniting Church of Australia has also prepared election issues briefing and questions which appear on their website.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is prepared by the Public Affairs Commission and should not be taken to reflect the opinion of the Anglican Church of Australia, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia, the Standing Committee of General Synod or the Primate.

## Summary of questions to the political parties:

### 1. Respect for all:

- Mindful of the disrespect expressed frequently in the Parliament in recent years, what will your party do to ensure that conduct of business inside and outside Parliament is done with due respect for your fellow parliamentarians, and honour for the dignity of the institution and its leaders?

### 2. Refugees and asylum:

- Where do you now stand on each of the 22 recommendations of the Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers?
- We are deeply concerned -- on (a) moral grounds -- the general human responsibility to protect the vulnerable, especially those in our vicinity; (b) legal grounds -- Australia is signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951; (c) Judeo-Christian grounds -- the long tradition of care for the stranger in our midst -- with many aspects of the asylum seeker debate in this election campaign. In particular: (i) total exclusion of maritime claimants to refuge; (ii) arbitrary decisions about relocation; (iii) unacceptably long periods of mandatory detention; (iv) and the exclusion of those in community detention from the possibility of work. What is your party's policy in relation to these matters? And on what grounds do you base it?
- What precise changes in interpretation of the 1951 Convention are proposed, and why should these not be regarded as an abandonment of international law and the ancient tradition of welcome?
- How do you respond to the specific policy implications arising from the three scriptural principles set out in the attached briefing note?

### 3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- What policies will you pursue and what actions are you proposing to put in place to build community support for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and for a successful referendum to implement this?
- Do you support a constitutional prohibition on adverse racial discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and, if so, what are your policies on the form of such a prohibition?
- What legislative and practical measures will you pursue in relation to making the proof required for native title claims less onerous?
- What legislative and practical measures will you pursue in relation to strengthening the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to protect their important heritage areas and objects and to protect their ability to access and use their traditional lands and waters?

### 4. Responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions urgently

- Do you accept the scientific consensus that global emissions of carbon dioxide need by 2050 to be less than half of those in 2000, if we are to have a better than even chance of preventing more than 2 degrees rise in global average temperature and that action to date in Australia and overseas gives no confidence that such reduction will be achieved?

- If you accept, what are you prepared to do to lead our nation in effectively doing our share to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on this timescale? e.g.
  - Will you commit to aim for Australia to achieve by 2020 at least a 20% reduction on its year 2000 level of carbon emissions, and try vigorously to persuade other nations to do likewise?
  - Will you commit to increasing the target of 20% of electricity being produced from renewable sources by 2020, to 30% or more?
- If you are not prepared to aim for at least a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020, what policies will you pursue to deal with the effects of climate change:
  - in Australia (e.g., threats to food production; damage to the Great Barrier Reef; protection from extreme weather events)
  - in the South Pacific region (rising ocean levels and consequent forced migrations from low lying countries), and
  - globally (e.g., in relation to the temptation to engage in wholesale geoengineering despite huge risks)?

## 5. Care for the environment

- Will you review the sustainability of water usage levels and technology in the Murray-Darling Basin, and the health of communities in the region, revisiting preventative policy as necessary?
- Will you refuse to accept short term economic benefits with serious risks from coal seam gas extraction, instead applying the precautionary principle and ensuring that independent scientific evidence will guide more informed decisions?
- Will you refuse to allow dredging through the Great Barrier Reef and disposal of spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, ensure that cumulative assessments of environmental risks are undertaken, increase emphasis on environmental management, and redouble efforts to ensure that the delayed targets for improving water quality on the Reef are met?
- Will you suspend COAG negotiations to hand over Federal environmental powers to the States and Territories, given serious doubt that they would adequately respect responsibilities to protect the environment and biodiversity, and seek ways to protect the national reserve system more effectively?

## 6. Food security – risks and challenges

- Will you take the long view to sustain food production in Australia over this century, to meet the food needs of our own population securely in a changing climate and assist countries experiencing famine?
- Will you scrutinize overseas purchase of Australian arable land, developing policy for the long term in a world adapting to climate change?
- Will you ensure that mining, particularly for coal seam gas, is not permitted unless the most stringent testing has been done to ensure it will not damage arable land?
- Will you support the flourishing of Australian research to increase crop productivity and adaptability?
- Will you encourage less food wastage and more sustainable diets?
- Will you provide unemployment benefits to Australian citizens sufficient to enable them to have both housing and sufficient food, in particular increase the Newstart Allowance to a livable level?
- Will you support the development of community gardens as a positive step towards greater food security, especially for those on low and fixed incomes? In particular, given that such

gardens do much better when supported by government, will you encourage all levels of government to support the development of such gardens actively?

**7. Responding to population issues**

- Do you recognize that continuing increases in population are placing stress on the environment world-wide, and particularly on people in poorer nations?
- Will you advocate that Australian aid contribute more generously to improving the welfare of people (and other life forms) in the least developed nations; in particular by including with aid for development, support for family planning and women's reproductive health programs in ways that respect the cultures of those people and take account of Christian values including respect for the sanctity of all human life?
- Will you avoid encouraging population growth as a means to achieve economic growth in Australia, and instead determine a sustainable population policy for Australia?

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## Briefing notes

### 1. Respect for all in public life

***'Do to others as you would have them do to you'.***

These words were spoken by Jesus (Luke 6:31) and they constitute the 'Golden Rule' that is widely accepted in community life. As Hugh Mackay says in his book 'The Good Life' (Macmillan, 2013), great thinkers in virtually every philosophical and religious tradition have said much the same thing – if we want to contribute to a civil society by promoting peaceful, harmonious and mutually supportive communities, then we must learn to treat others in the way we ourselves would wish to be treated.

So it has been a matter for great disappointment and concern that words of many of our leading elected representatives in the Federal Parliament have, over the past term of the Parliament, been so vehemently disrespectful of others in public life. The example shown to the community at large has been painful. It has very likely encouraged some of the more extremely disrespectful media commentary. Who knows what damage has been done to the standards that will be carried by today's youth into their adult lives.

It seems that some of the leading political protagonists recognize the damage being done, and have called for a kinder approach in the next Parliament – but such calls seem to come only after individuals obtain, or feel confident of obtaining, what they want.

Is it not time for us in the community to say enough is enough? **Fellow politicians need to be treated with dignity and respect, as do the rest of the community.**

The new Australian Public Service Values which came into effect on 1 July 2013 comprise being impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful and ethical. The Minister for the Public Service, when launching this 'more focused' set of values, emphasized that they lie at the heart of the democratic process. With the arguable exception of the first ('impartial') under some political circumstances, since we do after all live in an adversarial political system, these values are ones that absolutely need to be adhered to not just by public servants, but by those who define, expect and impose these APS Values - our elected representatives.

In the present context, the value of 'being respectful' deserves great emphasis.

#### **Question to the political parties:**

***Mindful of the disrespect expressed frequently in the Parliament in recent years, what will your party do to ensure that conduct of business inside and outside Parliament is done with due respect for your fellow parliamentarians, and honour for the dignity of the institution and its leaders?***

## 2. Refugees and asylum

In August 2012, Houston, Aristotle and L'Estrange released the *Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers*.<sup>2</sup> 'The common and principal focus of activity', they suggested, 'must be to shift the balance of risk, predictability and incentive in favour of the use of regular pathways of international protection and migration, and against the need to resort to irregular and dangerous boat voyages to Australia for those purposes'. The panel made 22 recommendations to this end, ranging from addressing root causes and building regional capacity, through to funding more research of 'push' and 'pull' factors. The Gillard Labor government said it would implement all recommendations. However since then, government and opposition policy has moved quickly. The parties therefore need to clarify their current position apropos the *Report*.

### **Question to the political parties: *Where do you now stand on each of the Report's 22 recommendations?***

Like the Australian community, the Anglican community contains a range of views on how individuals, communities and governments should respond to asylum seekers arriving by boat. As with many public policy matters, biblical and Christian thought does not provide explicit guidance on how to proceed. But important themes can be discerned. Elemental to the Judeo-Christian ethic is a conviction often shared by people of other faiths and none: that '[t]he foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself' (Leviticus 19:34, NIV). This conviction is reflected in the biblical literature across its entire span. The great-heartedness of such welcome found its way into common law traditions, and finally into international law as expressed in the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

In continuance with this ancient tradition of welcome and care, the Archbishop-elect of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Dr Glenn Davies, urged churches to 'call upon the Government to act with compassion and care for people who are made in the image of God, regardless of their ethnic origin, their religious affiliation.' He also called for the provision of 'gainful work' for people in detention, as opposed to the 'demoralising and demeaning' alternative. The Social Responsibilities Committee of the Diocese of Brisbane has prepared discussion papers on refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>3</sup>

Three scriptural principles guide a Christian response to asylum seekers, and are broadly shared by many in the Australian community:

1. Strangers need hospitable welcome  
(in Christian thought, e.g. Romans 5:8;  
Jeremiah 22:3; Matthew 25:31–46.)
2. The vulnerable and needy need generous help,  
*and* the freedom to make a productive contribution  
(in Christian thought, e.g. Galatians 6:2 and 6:5)
3. Resources should not be allocated using a discriminatory formula.  
(in Christian thought, e.g. James 2:1–10)

Political posturing has masked the way many Australians *would* support more welcoming policies towards asylum seekers, and more generous support for those arriving by boat. Many are dismayed at the allocation of resources to maintain mandatory detention and offshore processing, while recommendations for various regional and international initiatives make slow progress.

<sup>2</sup> <http://expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au>

<sup>3</sup> [anglicanbrisbane.org.au/dsrc-publications/](http://anglicanbrisbane.org.au/dsrc-publications/)

### Questions to the political parties:

- ***We are deeply concerned -- on (a) moral grounds -- the general human responsibility to protect the vulnerable, especially those in our vicinity; (b) legal grounds -- Australia is signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951; (c) Judeo-Christian grounds -- the long tradition of care for the stranger in our midst -- with many aspects of the asylum seeker debate in this election campaign. In particular: (i) total exclusion of maritime claimants to refuge; (ii) arbitrary decisions about relocation; (iii) unacceptably long periods of mandatory detention; (iv) and the exclusion of those in community detention from the possibility of work. What is your party's policy in relation to these matters? And on what grounds do you base it?***
- ***What precise changes in interpretation of the 1951 Convention are proposed, and why should these not be regarded as an abandonment of international law and the ancient tradition of welcome?***

The three principles above do not provide sufficient guidance for the development of a whole policy on asylum seekers. There are, however, some specific policy implications that naturally flow from them.

*Implication 1:* The policies of offshore processing and the 'no advantage' principle do not align with the principle of welcoming strangers, and need to be abandoned.

*Implication 2:* People's inherent value, and the non-discriminatory allocation of resources, entails sufficient support (once in the Australian community) to avoid the development of longer term social problems - providing asylum seekers already in the community with a right to obtain meaningful employment, and with the equivalent of 100% of Newstart allowance until they do so. They need also to have access to settlement services similar to those provided to permanent protection visa holders.

*Implication 3:* Policies to discourage people from boarding unsafe boats should be pursued by means that do not harm already vulnerable people. The *Report of the Expert Panel* was right to exclude naval turnbacks as a safe option. As stated in the *Report*, such discouragements should include: resources to establish alternative and safe means of seeking asylum (such as expanded UNHCR offices in source countries); international diplomacy toward peace in areas of conflict, and to encourage greater refugee resettlement internationally; increases in Australian refugee and humanitarian intake 'quotas'; and revised practices to radically expedite Refugee Status Determination, and to shorten time in detention. In addition, the efficacy of mandatory detention as a deterrent remains unproven, yet is both costly and morally suspect. The considerable resources it devours should be diverted to more constructive regional initiatives.

### Question to the political parties:

***How do you respond to these implications?***

### 3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Anglican Church in Australia has long been committed to recognition, notably through an apology delivered in 1988 by the Most Rev'd Sir John Grindrod, and its 2007 Affirmation of Faith and Justice<sup>4</sup>. There have also been a number of General Synod resolutions over some 30 years evidencing the Church's concern for self-determination and Indigenous control of their own resources.

#### A. Constitutional Recognition

There has been an inquiry and campaign for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Australian Constitution. The Expert Panel set up to carry out wide-ranging consultations into this issue reported in 2012 and made recommendations for Constitutional changes that were not only symbolic but were also aimed at making substantive changes to prevent discrimination on the grounds of race.

The main changes recommended by the Expert Panel were:

- The removal of s25 which contemplates States disqualifying people from voting on the basis of their race. There is no basis to accept exclusion of people from voting on the basis of their race.
- The removal of the Commonwealth power in s51(xxvi) to make laws with respect to race and to replace this by a new power to the Commonwealth to make laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (as s51A), with a preamble in that section dealing with recognition, respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their culture, languages, heritage, relationships with land and waters etc. This is because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples should be recognised on the basis of their special status as the original occupants of this country, not on the basis of uncertain concepts such as race.
- The insertion of a clause prohibiting racial discrimination but allowing for laws to overcome disadvantage and to protect the cultural heritage of any group (in a new s116A). This will be the section that will bring the greatest practical change as our various anti-racial discrimination statutes do not have constitutional effect and can just be amended by parliaments when it suits them.
- The insertion of a new s127A to recognise English as the national language but to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as the original Australian languages and part of our national heritage.

The Australian Parliament voted in February 2013 on a multi-party basis in favour of passing the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill*. This was passed without any opposition as a step towards building momentum for a constitutional referendum. This Act of Recognition acknowledges on behalf of the people of Australia the first occupation of this country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their continuing relationship with their traditional land and waters. It acknowledges and respects their continuing cultures, languages and heritage and sets up a process of review to consider a referendum and proposals for change. The government has committed \$10 million towards a campaign to build support for such change. It is heartening to see that all shades of politics have supported the principles of constitutional recognition.

One question, however, is the extent to which the parties are committed to building the required community support for such reforms to enable a successful referendum. A referendum requires the amendments to be passed by Parliament and a majority of electors in a majority of States (ie 4 out of

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<sup>4</sup> [Anglican.org.au/docs/general-synod/2007/GSO7B3a7EJointAffirmation.pdf](http://Anglican.org.au/docs/general-synod/2007/GSO7B3a7EJointAffirmation.pdf)

the 6 states). It also requires an overall majority of all electors in Australia. There is much work to be done to achieve this important step.

The other issue is while the parties have indicated a commitment to recognition, it is not clear what position will be taken on type of reforms to be supported. In other words, will the next government support not only symbolic recognition but also changes that will result in legal "teeth", for example, will the parties be supporting a constitutional prohibition on adverse discrimination against our First Peoples?

#### **Questions to the political parties:**

- ***What policies will you pursue and what actions are you proposing to put in place to build community support for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and for a successful referendum to implement this?***
- ***Do you support a constitutional prohibition on adverse racial discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and, if so, what are your policies on the form of such a prohibition?***

#### **B. Native Title and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Reform**

There have been many recent inquiries into native title reform and into reform of federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage legislation. There were 2 bills to reform aspects of the *Native Title Act* that were before the Commonwealth Parliament recently but so far have failed to be enacted.

The details of these are rather technical, but there has been an ongoing concern by native title claimants that the level of proof required to establish native title claims is too onerous, in requiring proof of continuous observance of traditional laws and customs from the time of British sovereignty to the present day. Claimants find it particularly insulting to have to prove their connections and that of their ancestors to their land and waters. Reversal of this onus of proof has been recommended, including by the judges.

There have also been concerns that the "future act" regime, which enables the grant of titles, permits and other tenures, has not provided sufficient protection to native title holders wishing to prevent the overriding of their native title rights and the protection of their important areas. Reforms have been proposed to increase the requirements on governments and people seeking such grants to negotiate in good faith to try to reach agreement about such grants. There are also concerns that heritage protection legislation has not been effective in ensuring protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage due to the powers of government ministers or statutory bodies to give permission for damage to such areas and objects in favour of development of the land and waters.

#### **Questions to the political parties:**

In our view it is vital that proof of native title be made less onerous for those making such claims.

- ***What legislative and practical measures will you pursue in relation to the proof required for native title claims?***

It is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the ability to protect their important heritage areas and objects and to protect their ability to access and use their traditional lands and waters.

- ***What legislative and practical measures will you pursue in relation to these matters?***

#### 4. Responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions urgently

Awareness carries a responsibility to do our best for the future. Unless we take account of the needs of our own descendants, and of other life, we will not be behaving kindly, fairly, ethically or morally. Anglicans respect the clear statement on the public record from the 1998 conference of world-wide Anglican Bishops, that *'human beings have responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all creation'*<sup>5</sup>.

***'The Earth's climate has changed. The global average surface temperature has increased over the last century and many other associated changes have been observed. The available evidence implies that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the main cause. It is expected that, if greenhouse gas emissions continue at business-as-usual rates, global temperatures will further increase significantly over the coming century and beyond.'*** These are the measured introductory words to the publication *'The Science of Climate Change – Questions and Answers'*, published by the Australian Academy of Science. In this booklet the evidence is summarized – from physical principles, the record of the distant past, measurements from the recent past, and climate models - and consequences are outlined.

Some brief excerpts:

- *To have a better than even chance of preventing the global average temperature from eventually rising more than 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial temperatures, the world would need to be emitting less than half the amount of carbon dioxide by 2050 than it did in 2000.*
- *Observations already made include widespread melting of glaciers, decrease in Arctic sea ice and the Greenland ice sheet, sea level rise of 20cm since 1870, greater intensity of heavy rains, and shifts in weather patterns. In Australia the average surface temperature has increased by about 0.7 degrees since 1960 and the warming has caused an Australia-wide increase in the frequency of extremely hot days.*
- *The inertia of the climate system means that climate change will continue for centuries after greenhouse gas concentrations have stabilized.*

Other respected and expert bodies have been making similar statements (eg the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose fifth synthesis report is in preparation and due in October 2014). The Academy's publication states that with the world's population now exceeding 7 billion and on the way to around 9 billion by mid-century, there is increasing stress on the planet and its people; and without major changes to population growth policies, land use, city development, and economic and social systems, the additional potential burdens of climate change impacts could lead to social unrest across large parts of the world.

In Australia the targets for 2020 appear to be a decrease of only 5% in carbon emissions from 2000, and only 20% of electricity produced from renewable sources. Much more urgent action is needed (see <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html> for 31 July 2013). For example, when proposing a >50% global reduction target by 2050, too little account has been taken of the slow warming of the oceans with consequent bubbling up of methane that has been frozen on the sea bed for thousands of years. The journal *Nature* (July 2013) has a report that the 'methane pulse' will bring forward substantially the average date at which the global mean temperature rise exceeds 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, to 2035 - 2040 rather than 2050. Methane from permafrost may eventually account for nearly 40% of the world's greenhouse gas output. This will add much to the already expected heavy burden of adaptation to climate change.

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<sup>5</sup> Resolution I.8 at [www.lambethconferene.org/resolutions/1998](http://www.lambethconferene.org/resolutions/1998)

Political leadership of the highest quality is needed. Individuals can only do things on a small scale and many of us are –eg paying for 100% green choice electricity - but effective national and international action is desperately needed. The Federal Government’s Climate Commission has endorsed calls for fossil fuel industries to be phased out because of their contribution to climate change. Of fossil fuel reserves, 80% need to be left in the ground - but those who profit directly from mining and selling them resist, and governments build linked revenue into their forward budgets. Professor Ross Garnaut recently lamented that ‘interest groups have come to feel less inhibition about investment in politics in pursuit of private interests’, and said that political culture has to change if policy reform is to be pursued in the public interest.

Confusion caused by political partisanship, and lack of wide and clear reporting of crucial information, mean that people find it hard to keep up with the increasing urgency of the situation. Despite this, a recent survey for the Climate Institute indicated that nearly half of people support some form of carbon pricing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Another, for the Worldwide Fund for Nature, showed that a majority support the basic principle of an emissions trading scheme, and more than 60% want Australia to have a target cut of 15% or more by 2020, rather than the 5% currently on the table. Against this, there remains serious discomfort in the community about paying the cost involved, and most apparently do not see action for the future wellbeing of the planet as a high priority in the election context. **Such inconsistency cries out to be addressed with the greatest possible political skill, leadership and courage.**

#### **Questions to the political parties:**

**Do you accept the scientific consensus that global emissions of carbon dioxide need by 2050 to be less than half of those in 2000, if we are to have a better than even chance of preventing more than 2 degrees rise in global average temperature – and that action to date in Australia and overseas gives no confidence that such reduction will be achieved?**

If you accept, ***what are you prepared to do to lead our nation in effectively doing our share to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on this timescale?*** eg

- ***Will you commit to aim for Australia to achieve by 2020 at least a 20% reduction on its year 2000 level of carbon emissions, and try vigorously to persuade other nations to do likewise?***
- ***Will you commit to increasing the target of 20% of electricity being produced from renewable sources by 2020, to 30% or more?***

If you are not prepared to aim for at least a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020, ***what policies will you pursue to deal with the effects of climate change:***

- ***in Australia (e.g., threats to food production; damage to the Great Barrier Reef; protection from extreme weather events)***
- ***in the South Pacific region (rising ocean levels and consequent forced migrations from low lying countries), and***
- ***globally (e.g., the temptation to engage in wholesale geoengineering despite huge risks)?***

*‘Climate change is just at the very beginning...It’s an irreversible situation. I think it’s too late. I try not to express that because people are trying to do something, but they keep putting it off’ (the late Frank Fenner, AC, CMG, MBE, FRS, FAA; eminent Australian scientist and philanthropist).*

## 5. Care for the Environment

*'The only way to maximize choice is to make sure that it is still possible to choose and use something, and to secure the possibilities of reasonable choice for our children and grandchildren, even at the price of restricting some options. Without that restriction, nothing is solid.'* These words were delivered by the recently retired Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the world-wide Anglican Church, in 2009 in the context of the Copenhagen conference on climate change and in the wake of the economic crisis. Our understanding is that human beings are not to exploit the creation without care for others, but to care for the creation - our world - as God cares for all.

The General Synod of the Anglican Church has encouraged Anglicans and the church to reduce their levels of consumption, and to contribute thoughtfully and prayerfully to public debate about how to achieve justice for future as well as current Australians and to nurture life on this fragile land with all its beauty and diversity<sup>6</sup>. The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church has published Essays on Ecological Theology.<sup>7</sup>

A number of environmental issues warrant wise consideration by Government at this time:

### **Sustainable use of Australian water resources, with particular reference to the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB):**

Good rains in the past few years have reduced pressure on use of the water available in the MDB, but the pressure of prolonged periods of low rainfall will return – and more acutely, if expectations of the effects of climate change on this part of Australia are fulfilled. Proposals to limit the availability of water for agricultural production in order to conserve the aquatic integrity of the system and to ensure its continuing sustainability have in the past been strongly rejected by many of those whose livelihoods would be adversely affected. The Anglican Church is widely spread through these affected communities and is concerned for their welfare. However, there can be no doubt that practices with strong likelihood of irretrievable damage to natural ecosystems must be prevented and replaced by scientifically sound, environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Support needs to be provided to the affected communities while this is accomplished. The alternative of allowing irretrievable damage would lead to decline in economic productivity and continuing, even worse, distress for the regional communities affected.

### **Question to the political parties:**

- ***Will you review the sustainability of water usage levels and technology in the Murray-Darling Basin, and the health of communities in the region, revisiting preventative policy as necessary?***

### **Coal seam gas**

Although the main component of coal seam gas, methane, burns with lower carbon dioxide emissions than coal, methane itself is a much more potent and long-lasting greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Methods of extracting coal seam gas cannot entirely prevent leakage of methane, and they require injection of pressurized water containing chemicals (fracking); there is a real risk of

<sup>6</sup> 'Caring for the Creation: the Need to Act and Respond, [http://www.anglican.org.au/content/general\\_synods/general\\_synod\\_2010/General\\_Synod\\_2010\\_-\\_Minutes\\_of\\_the\\_General\\_Synod.aspx](http://www.anglican.org.au/content/general_synods/general_synod_2010/General_Synod_2010_-_Minutes_of_the_General_Synod.aspx) Day 4

<sup>7</sup> Nurturing Nature: Essays on Ecological Theology from the Doctrine Commission, at. [www.anglican.org.au/content/governance/commissions/Doctrine.aspx](http://www.anglican.org.au/content/governance/commissions/Doctrine.aspx)

contamination of underground water reservoirs. Intense exploitation of coal seam gas is now in progress in Australia, with contracts often written well in advance. Both industry and governments benefit financially. But some of the risks are not well understood and there may well be irreversible negative effects. In addition, there is competition with agricultural production.

#### **Question to the political parties:**

- ***Will you refuse to accept short term economic benefits with serious risks from coal seam gas extraction, instead applying the precautionary principle and ensuring that independent scientific evidence will guide more informed decisions?***

#### **The Great Barrier Reef**

There has been some progress in addressing polluted runoff onto the Reef, with nitrogen reduced by 7% and sediment reduced by 6% between 2009 and 2011, a tribute to farmers' efforts to change land management practices. However, the Government's target for reduction expressed in 2009 was 50% by 2013. The risks to the Reef are great – the Australian Institute of Marine Science reported in 2012 that half of the Reef's coral has disappeared in the past 27 years. A panel of leading marine scientists this year expressed consensus about declining trends in the condition of the Reef, due to continuing poor water quality, cumulative effects of climate change and increasing intensity of extreme events such as cyclones. Although funding has recently been announced for a new plan over the next five years to reduce runoff and improve overall water quality, some targets have been shifted back five years to 2018.

There is a risk that UNESCO will downgrade the Reef's World Heritage status next year, possibly listing it as a 'World Heritage Site In Danger', noting that the overall health status of the Reef has recently been downgraded from 'moderate' to 'poor'. The UN body has voiced concern, including about the impact of major coal and gas export developments planned for the Queensland coast. Grave concern is being expressed in Australia (eg John Brody, ABC Radio Bush Telegraph 15/7/13) about port development not being managed well; there is the possibility that dredging will occur through the Reef and huge amounts of dredged material will be disposed of there.

Economic benefit for fossil fuel industries should not be given preference over damage to such a global natural treasure as the Reef.

#### **Question to the political parties:**

- ***Will you refuse to allow dredging through the Reef and disposal of spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, ensure that cumulative assessments of environmental risks are undertaken, increase emphasis on environmental management, and redouble efforts to ensure that the delayed targets for improving water quality on the Reef are met?***

#### **Conservation of Forests, National Parks and Wilderness Areas**

A few examples illustrate the continuing complexity of forest, national park and wilderness area issues. The context is that the Commonwealth, as part of a process to reduce 'red tape' is proposing to hand over to States and Territories its approval powers under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act passed in 1999. Environmental groups have said that this would remove what little protection exists for many environmental matters.

One example relates to the program funded by the Commonwealth to restructure the forest industry in Tasmania, compensate displaced forest workers, pay out forest contracts and help establish and manage new forest reserves. This is based on an agreement between the forest industry, the Tasmanian Government and two environment groups (Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society). Angst has been expressed because there is an obligation on these two environment groups to do all they can to ensure that there will be no substantial active protests or market disruption by other groups – because if there are effective protests and disruption, promised new forest reserves will not be declared and the minimum saw log quota will be more than doubled. Some commentators have criticized the pressure this places on others (who may wish to protest and speak out) not to do so because of the penalties against the environment (*Richard Dennis, the Australia Institute*). Very recently, profound amendments were made to the Agreement legislation, which are considered by the Wilderness Society to risk the protection of forests they thought had been secured in the Agreement.

Another example relates to a proposal by the NSW Government to allow recreational shooting in national parks because of a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party which holds the balance of power in the upper house of the NSW Parliament. This proposal was widely and strongly criticized on grounds such as public safety and fear about entering national parks, ineffective control of feral animals and risks to native fauna. The proposal will now not proceed as intended, but a very real risk was there.

A third example is that the NSW Government has announced plans to allow native forests to be logged and biomass burned for electricity generation. This would be devastating for native fauna and flora, the health of the local environment and carbon emissions; it is not green energy production. The Victorian and Queensland Governments are also planning to go ahead with logging or grazing in their national parks and reserves.

Other issues of high profile environmental significance include iron ore and tin mines proposed for the Tarkine Wilderness Area in Tasmania, widespread coal seam gas extraction proposed or in progress in Queensland and NSW, policy linked to the wild rivers in Cape York, and proposed developments in sensitive coastal areas of Western Australia for the processing of gas in the Kimberley region, some of which have recently been deferred by the industry but which may be reactivated.

#### **Question to the political parties:**

- ***Will you suspend COAG negotiations to hand over Federal environmental powers to the States and Territories, given serious doubt that they would adequately respect responsibilities to protect the environment and biodiversity, and seek ways to protect the national reserve system more effectively?***

## 6. Food Security - risks and challenges

Food security will be of major concern to civilization in this century. The risks and challenges warrant attention now if we are to support all of humanity, particularly the poorest, to avoid hunger and starvation. A number of factors contribute:

- World population is now over 7 billion and expected by the United Nations (*World Population Prospects*) to reach about 9.2 billion (there might be more, up to 11 billion) before there is likelihood of overall stabilization and then decline.
- Expectations for energy-intensive, high quality diets are increasing in many developing economies, but governance problems hinder production and equitable distribution of food in more troubled nations.
- Much agricultural productivity currently depends on fertilisers based on fossil fuels which need to be phased out because of the impacts of carbon emissions on climate. Organic fertilisers require land for their production, in competition with crops for direct consumption.
- There are now severe limitations to increases in agricultural land and water for crops, and any increases come at the expense of other forms of life.
- Some of the best agricultural land in Australia, and elsewhere, is under threat from expanding suburbs due to population increases. There is also a threat in Australia from mining, especially coal seam gas extraction.

There are serious doubts that increases in food production can be achieved to feed the peak number of people for all these reasons. However, on top of these factors, climate change can be expected to really compound and force the issue (see for example *'The Coming Famine'*, J.Cribb, CSIRO publishing).

**It is through food security that many people are likely to experience climate change personally** - with major increases in the cost of food due to drought, very high temperatures, and greater frequency of extreme weather events such as floods and cyclones. Changes can be expected to the geographical areas in which crops can flourish, not only because of the temperature sensitivity of particular crops but also because of factors such as greatly decreased flow in rivers that have traditionally been depended upon for irrigation (eg in northern India, where the glaciers that feed the rivers are retreating and expected to disappear). The World Bank has warned that India could lose up to half its grain crops upon 2 degrees of warming, and Africa a third of its arable area. It is also relevant that about 45% of the world's population lives in urban areas; substantial migration is occurring from rural to urban areas and the proportion has been growing. Many urban people in developing countries live in slums and are already finding it difficult to obtain enough food.

The interplay between climate change, food prices and politics will very likely lead over the coming decades to famine, conflict and mass movements of people, increasing pressure on peaceful nations with high living standards, such as Australia. Australia has been a major food exporter, but this is changing and concerns are now being expressed about future food security in relation both to foreign ownership of arable land in this country and the requirement for food by other nations and refugees world-wide. Agricultural commodities have a healthy long term demand outlook, probably better than commodities like coal and iron ore, but there have been many examples in recent years of takeovers of Australian food commodity groups by overseas interests. In Australia's grain market and others such as sugar, most of the profits beyond the farm gate will be collected in other countries (Malcolm Maiden, *The Canberra Times*, 27 April 2013). Serious policy debate about such overseas investment is warranted.

Productivity increases in food production have been slowing, but they need to be increased by a factor of 2 -3 to meet expected demand. Australia could make a significant impact through technology developed here, but our research effort needs to be sustained and increased as well as implemented effectively; this expertise could be used overseas to help poorer nations avoid famine for their growing populations. Dietary changes are also needed - a single serve of meat is estimated to create 25 kg of greenhouse gases compared with more like 1 – 1.5 kg of gases for 1 kg of fruit or vegetables. People everywhere will need to appreciate the lower impact of vegetarian diets, and be encouraged to reduce meat and dairy consumption.

To increase food production is a challenge, but in contrast about a third of the food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted each year, according to the United Nations, which chose food waste as the theme for World Environment Day in 2013. Australian households throw away about 360 kg of food, worth about \$616 for the average household, each year (National Waste Report). The food rescuer *The Yellow Van* collects and delivers to charities some part of fresh food that would otherwise go to waste from businesses, but businesses and households need encouragement to avoid food waste.

In Australia there is significant hunger. Anglicare Australia conducted a research project on the experience of food insecurity among people seeking emergency relief (*Hard Choices – Going Without in a Time of Plenty*). This found that a critical factor is low income – more than two-thirds of households with an income of less than \$1000 per fortnight were food-insecure, with about 90% of such respondents not having enough money to buy the food they needed, and running out of food because of an unexpected expense or event. This reflects the inadequacy of some Government payments such as the Newstart Allowance. Most food-insecure households are renting and those in the private rental market are very vulnerable to rental stress. Other characteristics included being unemployed, homeless, a sole parent or indigenous.

A growing movement in Australia of direct relevance to food security, especially to those on low incomes, has been the resurgent community garden movement. Many community organisations around the country have, in collaboration with land controlling entities like schools and local government, brought back the idea of community garden enterprises. Not only have these provided important opportunities for community cohesion and resilience, they have also provided very practical benefits in terms of food security by utilising urban land that nevertheless has productive capacity in terms of food; these benefits have been shared across community but have been of especial assistance to low and fixed income groups. There are also instances where local government entities have experimented with the use of productive trees for planting in public access areas in place of purely ornamental trees; community benefit has been the key motivation of such experimentation.

### Questions to the political parties:

#### *Will you*

- ***take the long view to sustain food production in Australia over this century, to meet the food needs of our own population securely in a changing climate and assist countries experiencing famine?***
- ***scrutinize overseas purchase of Australian arable land, developing policy for the long term in a world adapting to climate change?***
- ***ensure that mining, particularly for coal seam gas, is not permitted unless the most stringent testing has been done to ensure it will not damage arable land?***
- ***support the flourishing of Australian research to increase crop productivity and adaptability?***

- *encourage less food wastage and more sustainable diets?*
- *provide unemployment benefits to Australian citizens sufficient to enable them to have both housing and sufficient food, in particular increase the NewStart Allowance to a livable level?*
- *support the development of community gardens as a positive step towards greater food security, especially for those on low and fixed incomes? In particular, given that such gardens do much better when supported by government, will you encourage all levels of government to support the development of such gardens actively?*

## 7. Responding to population issues

The Anglican Church of Australia at its last General Synod meeting supported the need to acknowledge and respond to population issues in order to care for life on our planet.<sup>8</sup> As background, the Lambeth conference of bishops from the world-wide Anglican church reaffirmed more than a decade ago that the divine Spirit in Creation and human beings have a responsibility to make sacrifices for the common good of all life.<sup>9</sup>

The global population is now more than 7 billion and is expected by the United Nations (*World Population Prospects*) to exceed 9 billion by mid-century, before there is likelihood of overall stabilization and then decline. In Australia our population is now over 23 million and, if immigration continues at its present rate, will reach 40 million or more by 2050.

Such increases are taking place in a finite world and through sheer numbers and consumption we are having unprecedented impact:

- Much of the Earth's photosynthetic potential is already being directly used by us; land now being cleared is increasingly inhospitable or home to precious and unique stocks of biodiversity.
- The welfare and even survival of poorer people is threatened.
- Major extinctions of other life forms are very likely by the end of this century.
- Shortage of resources is now fuelling many human conflicts in the world. Combined with climate change, we have to expect that there will be much more conflict and suffering, and more refugees.

Even at present populations, nations have not been able to agree to do enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid damaging increases in temperature. Concern has been expressed for many years from the scientific community, some of whom have said that the Australian population is already around the level of what can be sustained, given our limited water and areas of fertile land. Here and globally, climate change can be expected to place additional stress on the environment and on living standards, as more people need to be fed, housed, and transported. Nevertheless, political leaders here seem to support quite rapid population growth in response to arguments that this is good for the economy.

There have been public expressions of concern, but they mostly focus on infrastructure needs and loss of amenity. The big picture of caring for the whole of life in our world is largely missing, but is of great concern to us.

The last Australian Anglican General Synod called on Anglicans to grow in understanding of global and national environmental challenges and the fundamental role of human population growth and consumption in contributing to them. It has encouraged individuals and the church to reduce their levels of consumption, and to contribute thoughtfully and prayerfully to public debate about how to achieve justice for future as well as current Australians and to nurture life on this fragile land with all its beauty and diversity. It emphasized the need to share in a world of finite resources, showing concern particularly for neighbours who live in the poorest two-thirds of the world.

The Synod recognized that the issues are so huge that political leadership towards a more sustainable future is essential, but that major change cannot be achieved urgently unless the

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<sup>8</sup> 'Caring for the Creation: the Need to Act and Respond,  
[http://www.anglican.org.au/content/general\\_synods/general\\_synod\\_2010/General\\_Synod\\_2010\\_-\\_Minutes\\_of\\_the\\_General\\_Synod.aspx](http://www.anglican.org.au/content/general_synods/general_synod_2010/General_Synod_2010_-_Minutes_of_the_General_Synod.aspx) Day 4

<sup>9</sup> Resolution I.8 at [www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998](http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998)

community speaks up and politically partisan approaches are put aside. The Synod called on the Australian Government to avoid any reliance on population growth to maintain economic growth; to determine a sustainable population policy for Australia; to consider carefully any incentive aimed specifically and primarily at increasing Australia's population, while continuing to support low-income families; and to contribute more generously to improving the welfare of people in the least developed nations, *and* other life in their environments, in particular by including support for family planning and women's reproductive health programs with aid for development, in ways that respect the cultures of those people and take account of Christian values including respect for the sanctity of all human life.

Three strongly linked goals – population stabilization, environmental sustainability and ending extreme poverty – are the essence of the Millennium Development Goals. Sadly, it has been difficult to obtain enough support from rich countries to help poor countries speed up their demographic transition to stable population levels. Contributing much more to this cause would be a very effective and compassionate way for Australia to help people in poorer nations, *and* their environments.

#### **Questions to the political parties:**

- ***Do you recognize that continuing increases in population are placing stress on the environment world-wide, and particularly on people in poorer nations?***
- ***Will you advocate that Australian aid contribute more generously to improving the welfare of people (and other life forms) in the least developed nations; in particular by including with aid for development, support for family planning and women's reproductive health programs in ways that respect the cultures of those people and take account of Christian values including respect for the sanctity of all human life?***
- ***Will you avoid encouraging population growth as a means to achieve economic growth in Australia, and instead determine a sustainable population policy for Australia?***

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