

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION
DRAFT SYNOD PROPOSAL ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Synod:

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Encourage and challenge both individuals and congregations to:

- (a) Become advocates for sustainable environmental policies and practices that protect, honour and care for our natural resources.
- (b) Be proactive in supporting local, national and international environmental agreements and initiatives.
- (c) Request that the Social Justice Commission Initiate a conversation across the synod to develop a practical commitment to the sustainable care of Church land, from a biblical and theological basis.
- (d) Study the “Election 2001: A Briefing Paper” regarding the linkage of commitment to our natural environment with commitments such as reconciliation and treaty; regional, rural and remote Australia; fair employment; community service delivery; and structural causes of poverty.

Rationale:

Because creation is a good gift (Genesis 1-2:3) from God, the Source and Wellspring of life, and because God has established an “everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Genesis 9:16), human beings—as together created in the image of God—participate in the vocation of responsibility and care for our natural environment. Human beings share in the whole plan or *oikonomia* (Ephesians 1:10, 3:9) of God for the justice, peace and integrity of creation. Our faithful hope is for nothing less than the healing and transformation of “heaven and earth” (Revelation 21:1).

In 1988, the UCA Assembly declared in its “Statement to the Nation” that...

We affirm our belief that the natural world is God’s creation; good in God’s eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life. Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to

promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation.

In Section 3 of the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church, we have affirmed the connection of humanity with a global vision of Christian hope:

The Church as the fellowship of the holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation of a new humanity; God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal with is the end in view of the whole creation.

In 1991, the UCA recognised in the “Statement to the Nation, the Rights of Nature and Future Generations” that we share life with other living beings in an ecological community, linking human rights with the rights of future generations for sustainable societies:

- We affirm the inalienable dignity of all humans and call for the recognition and guarantee of human rights throughout the world.

- We express the conviction that those who live today share responsibility for the ability of future generations to live in dignity.

- We support the attribution of rights not only to humans but also to nature, God’s creation, and we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human.

In recent years we have become aware of major ecological problems as a result of human action and inaction. God's creation is threatened by human sin understood as greed, apathy, exploitation, ignorance and arrogance. Not only does non-human creation suffer, the poor and powerless among humans are often the first to feel the effects of climate change, salinity, species extinction and the loss of diversity. A new relationship with the rest of creation is a major challenge facing humanity in the twenty first century. Further policies have been developed by the Church on the use of nuclear fuel, mining, and management of native forests, which show the integral connection of social justice with eco-justice.

Last year at the National Assembly, the Uniting Church accepted the request from Theology and Discipleship (#94) for “The Care of Church Land,” which sought to initiate a discussion across the wider Church. If the Church is to have a credible voice in the discussions of environmental care at the state, national and international levels, it needs to get its own house in order first. The Uniting Church in Australia holds title to thousands of properties across the country. Congregations, institutions and faith communities can develop guidelines for the care of those properties, which will itself make an important difference, as well as being a practical demonstration in faith to the wider society.