



Uniting Church in Australia

The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations

In 1991 the Assembly resolved to adopt the resolution on the rights of nature and the rights of future generations (resolution 91.14.18):

We believe that God, the Creator, upholds human dignity. God has created the human in the divine image. No human authority can take away or contest the dignity thus bestowed upon the human.

We believe that God has blessed humanity and that God's faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

We believe that God loves the divine creation and wills the development of its life. No creature is indifferent in the eyes of God. Each has its dignity and thereby also its right to existence.

The Holy Scriptures attest to God's covenant with the creation. "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature" (Genesis 9:9-10).

In view of the fact that this promise is today being undermined by human lack of moderation,

- 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.

We call upon the churches to make room for God's covenant with creation within the realm of law by committing themselves at all levels to recognition of the following "Rights of Future Generations" and "Rights of Nature".

A. Rights of Future Generations

1. Future generations have a right to life.
2. Future generations have a right to an unmanipulated human genetic inheritance, that is, a genetic inheritance not artificially altered by humans.
3. Future generations have a right to a rich plant and animal world, and thereby a right to a life within an abundant nature and to the preservation of multifarious genetic resources.
4. Future generations have a right to healthy air, to an intact ozone layer, and to the sufficient thermal exchange between the earth and space.
5. Future generations have a right to clean and sufficient waters, and, in particular, healthy and sufficient drinking water.
6. Future generations have a right to healthy and fertile soil and to healthy woodland.
7. Future generations have right to substantial reserves of non-(or only very slowly) renewable raw materials and energy sources.

8. Future generations have the right not to be confronted with products and wastes of earlier generations that threaten their health or require excessive expense for protection and control.
9. Future generations have a right to "cultural inheritance", that is, to an encounter with the culture created by earlier generations.
10. Future generations have in general a right to physical living conditions that allow them a humanly dignified existence. In particular, they have a right not to be forced to accept physical alterations deliberately produced by their predecessors that inordinately restrict their individual and collective self-determination in cultural, economic, political, or social respects.

B. Rights of Nature

1. Nature – animate or inanimate – has a right to existence, that is, to preservation and development.
2. Nature has a right to the protection of its eco-systems, species, and populations in their inter-connectedness.
3. Animate nature has a right to the preservation and development of its genetic inheritance.
4. Organisms have a right to a life fit for their species, including procreation within their appropriate ecosystems.
5. Disturbances of nature require a justification. They are only permissible when the presuppositions of the disturbance are determined in a democratically legitimate process and with respect of the rights of nature; when the interests of the disturbance outweigh the interests of a complete protection of the rights of nature; and when the disturbance is not inordinate. Damaged nature is to be restored whenever and wherever possible.
6. Rare ecosystems, and above all those with an abundance of species, are to be placed under absolute protection. The driving of species to extinction is forbidden.

We appeal to the United Nations to develop a new Declaration which explicitly protects the rights mentioned above. Simultaneously, we appeal to the individual nations to incorporate these rights into their constitutions and legislation.