



Australia must aim higher on emissions target

The President of the Uniting Church in Australia Stuart McMillan has expressed disappointment at the low greenhouse gas emissions reduction target announced by the Federal Government today.

Mr McMillan said the Government's proposal to reduce emissions up to 28% of 2005 levels by 2030 is weaker than the minimum recommendation of national and international climate bodies such as the Climate Change Authority and the IPCC.

"Climate change really is a great moral challenge for our generation," said Mr McMillan.

"The Government's target is well below the level that experts say is required to reverse the effects of climate change.

"This is not just a failure of leadership, it's a failure to care for future generations and for creation."

"This unambitious target will threaten Australia's transformation to a robust and successful low-carbon economy", said Rev Elenie Poulos, National Director of UnitingJustice Australia.

"Instead of dragging our feet, we need a target that sets Australia on a course of zero pollution by the middle of the century."

"The transition to a low carbon economy by the middle of the century is possible. But Australia must have a plan as well as a target," said Rev. Poulos.

In its submission to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's review of Australia's post-2020 reduction target, UnitingJustice recommended: 'reinstating a price on carbon, reducing reliance on coal-fired power plants, strengthening the renewable energy sector and increasing support to the mitigation efforts of developing country neighbours'.

Rob Floyd, National Director of UnitingWorld, said that the low emission target represents a 'total lack of understanding' of the plight of people in the Pacific, many of whom live on low-lying islands and face the daily effects of rising sea levels.

"Our church partners have urged us to advocate on their behalf. They have asked us to let Australians know about families forced to leave their homes and communities battling extreme weather events including ever more frequent cyclones.

"Their message to us is that Australia must take climate change seriously," he said.

"This target of 26-28% also puts Australia out of step with other similar nations" said Rev. Poulos.

"It will be even more difficult for Australia to act with credibility in the continuing international climate change negotiations when we are effectively asking poorer countries to shoulder the burden on our behalf".

“Unmitigated climate change is likely to have far-reaching consequences for our region, with rising sea levels, species loss, greater poverty and hunger, increased movement of refugee populations and extreme weather events.

All these impacts have financial, environmental and social costs that all of us will have to bear,” added Rev. Poulos.

In 2014 the Uniting Church Assembly resolved to divest from corporations engaged in the extraction of fossil fuels, recognising that “with national governments reluctant to take difficult decisions, it falls to us as members of the body of Christ to show leadership in taking action to reduce damaging pollution.” Similar decisions on divestment have been taken by the UCA Synod of NSW and the ACT, the Synod of Western Australia and the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

As negotiations continue, Rev. Poulos says there is still time for Australia to put higher targets on the table.

“We are renewing our call for the Government to reconsider its policies on climate change, better support renewable energy and take a strong emissions reduction target of at least 40% of 2000 levels by 2020 to the international negotiations in Paris later this year” said Rev. Poulos.

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