

24th June

Peace ...for Climate Sake! By Thea Ormerod

I've been asked to talk about the climate crisis as it affects Australia, how we in Australia are contributing to it and what ARRCC would like the Government to do about it.

I'm here as President of ARRCC (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change), a multi-faith Charity founded in 2007.

As a religious organisation, we are of course concerned about the impacts on Australia but our greatest concern is for those who are most vulnerable. What drives us is a thirst for Climate Justice. Later in this talk, I'll cover some of the work we do as ARRCC.

Climate impacts

People in this room will be all-too-familiar with the impacts on Australia. One of the nation's most destructive bushfires occurred right here in 2003. Four people died and 510 properties were destroyed.

All of us have borne witness to the historic drought which ended in 2019, the catastrophic summer bushfires of 2019 – 2020 and the flooding of the last few years. Many of the communities affected are nowhere near recovered, years later. For some, insurance is impossible to get now.

There has been an increase variously in extreme heat events, extreme fire weather and heavy rainfall. There has been an overall decline of around 15 per cent in winter rainfall in the south-west of Australia since 1970.

One of the 'canaries in the coal mine' are koalas. These marsupials are known for getting most of their water needs through gum leaves, but there are lots of stories now of koalas drinking thirstily from water bottles and dishes.

And that's with a national warming average of 1.47°C since national records began in 1910 (Bureau of Meteorology). There's an ill-informed anticipation of tolerating warming of 1.5°C – 2°C, but the climate is **not safe now**.

The reality is that we're currently sleep-walking into a slow-building but full-blown catastrophe.

The calls for change become ever louder. After the recent alarming IPCC A6 Synthesis Report, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, 'The climate time-bomb is ticking. The report is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every timeframe. In short, our world needs climate action on all fronts — everything, everywhere, all at once.' The impacts of humanity's addiction to burning coal, oil and gas is much worse in low-income countries. Bangladesh is experiencing internal migration from coastal areas inundated by sea level rise; the super-storm Typhoon Haiyan killed over 6,300 people in the Philippines in 2013; desertification is a major threat to survival for people in East Africa; drought in Syria was a factor in the origins of that country's civil war.

ARRCC is also concerned for generations coming after us who will have to live with the consequences of this generation's failures.

The grave injustice is that neither low-income countries nor up-coming generations bear the historical responsibility for the climate emergency, but they will pay the highest price.

Put it another way: today's high-consuming populations are less affected and therefore have no sense of urgency. People's comfortable lifestyles lull them into optimism and denial.

Australia's contribution

Tanya Plibersek approved the Isaac River Coal Mine in the same week as 800 people were killed in floods and landslides in the Congo, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, countries that have historically done little to create the climate crisis. Fousseny Traore of Mali wrote to ARRCC saying, "I am really devastated by the situation, it is a new illustration of an acceleration of climate change and its dramatic consequences for countries that do not participate in global warming of the planet. Politicians have made a calculated decision that the protection of our planet is less important than the protection of the fossil fuel industry."

Australia is one of the world's biggest coal exporters with a staggering [45% of all new proposed coal projects in the world here in Australia.](#)

Australia's exports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) have risen dramatically in the last five years and, with our small population, Australia is now the [third largest exporter of fossil fuels](#) globally, behind Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Australia's Labor Government has made strides in incentivising the transition to renewables but they are intransigent about calls to wind back our coal and gas exports.

Yet they must, if they're serious about climate action. In the International Energy Agency's roadmap to limiting warming to 1.5°C, there is [no room for new coal, oil and gas mining](#) or expansions of existing mines.

Pacific Island nations, faith leaders and scientists are urging humanity to [at least stop new coal, oil and gas mining](#). Last month, Pope Francis [added his voice](#) said,

“it is madness to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure. ... Let us heed our call to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, and to put an end to the senseless war against creation.”

ARRCC and others would at least like to see Australian governments, both federal and state, to remove all forms of public finance for these two industries, which have been rising and reached \$11.6 billion in 2020-2021. Such huge amounts should be going to social housing, aged care, disaster preparedness, the health system and so on.

By winding back coal and gas mining, fewer First Nations groups will have to fight against mining interests violating their spiritual connections to Country.

The peoples of the Pacific would begin to believe that Australia is serious about climate action, as they have made many calls a fossil free Pacific and endorsement of the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#).

Finally, ARRCC believes Federal Labor should contribute substantial amounts of money to the UN Green Climate Fund and, separately, to a Loss and Damage Fund. Australia stopped honouring this Paris commitment in 2018.

Such money should be additional to the Overseas Aid budget. [Oxfam and ActionAid have calculated](#) that Australia’s fair share of climate finance would mean we progressively build up to \$12 billion annually by 2030.

How does ARRCC respond to the climate crisis?

In a moment you’ll be in small group discussions about what we can do, as concerned citizens. I hope you might be inspired by ARRCC’s work at the level of people of faith, faith communities, local groups as well as corporate advocacy and political advocacy.

On the one hand, we encourage communities across Australia to embrace lifestyle options which would reflect caring for the earth. We've published online Climate Action kits for communities in Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist and Jewish traditions.

Our website features practical resources for important lifestyle choices such as eating less meat, GreenPower, installing solar panels on homes and places of worship and more.

ARRCC promotes fossil fuel divestment by individuals and faith-based organisations, this being one of the most effective ways to take action.

Political advocacy

We're probably best known for our advocacy work. ARRCC is building a movement of diverse people of faith takes action strategically, in partnership with others in the civil society. We have a distributed network of volunteers and local ARRCC groups in most capital cities and some regional towns.

Our people hang banners on places of worship, visit MPs, hold forums, take part in protests, hold Vigils and more. We participate in corporate campaigning aimed at directly stopping coal or gas mines, or by stopping those who finance or provide services to fossil fuel mining companies. As part of this, our supporters participate in targeted peaceful civil disobedience actions.

ARRCC also amplifies the prophetic voices of faith leaders in mainstream, religious and social media.

In a context where despair and helplessness are widespread and a there is plenty of misinformation about climate change, the world needs honest and hopeful voices. ARRCC makes a modest attempt to be one of these voices, to keep faithful to the urgent need to protect the integrity of creation for future generations.