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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Paris Agreement.

The Uniting Church in Australia has had a long standing concern for living with respect with our natural environment and more recently with regards to climate change. In 2003 the meeting of church representatives from across Australia, at our National Assembly, resolved:

03.18.01 *The Assembly resolved:*

- (a)
- (i) *to call on the Australian government to immediately sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocols in relation to global warming, especially because this has affected the nation of Tuvalu and other Pacific countries;*
 - (ii) *to call on the Australian government to offer the guarantee of special immigration status to the people of Tuvalu, for immigration to Australia when their nation loses its viability for human habitation;*
- (b) *to express our solidarity with the Christian Church of Tuvalu in this predicament and to call on our people to remember the people and church of Tuvalu in their prayers*

The 2006 meeting of the National Assembly resolved:

06.21.04 *The Assembly resolved:*

- (a) *to reaffirm the decision of the Tenth Assembly (Minute 03.18.01) which called on the Australian Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocols in relation to global warming because of the impact of rising sea levels on the nations of the Pacific; and*
- (b) *to call upon the people of the Uniting Church to adopt lifestyles which have a minimal impact on global warming.*

At the 2007 meeting of 400 Uniting Church representatives across Victoria and Tasmania, the Synod meeting, resolved:

07.4.37.4 *The Synod resolved:*

- (a) *To call on the Australian Federal Government to honour its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by:*





(i) *Taking a lead in targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as a developed country, agreeing to an emission reduction target of at least 30% by 2020, based on 1990 emission levels, if other developed countries agree to make similar commitments;*

(ii) *Assisting developing countries to adapt to climate change, providing additional funding to achieve this outcome rather than using existing overseas aid;*

(iii) *Providing technical and financial assistance to developing countries to adopt technologies to assist them in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions without reducing their ability to meet the necessary development needs of their people; and*

(iv) *Continuing to assist developing countries in addressing deforestation with the promotion of sustainable forest management and the need to reward developing countries that preserve existing forest estates.*

(b) *To call on the Federal, Victorian and Tasmanian Governments to work collaboratively:*

(i) *To commit to binding greenhouse gas emissions reductions of 20% by 2020 and at least 60% by 2050, based on 1990 emission levels;*

(ii) *To set a target to stabilise and then reduce residential, industrial and government per capita electricity consumption with supporting legislation and programs, with the inclusion of measures to ensure that low-income people will still have access to affordable electricity; (iii) to increase the Renewable Energy Target to 10% by 2010;*

(iv) *To provide financial incentives for households to take up renewable energy;*

(v) *To mandate the requirement for new building stock to have gasboosted solar hot water systems wherever possible and appropriate in Australia; and*

(vi) *To implement programs to rapidly increase the uptake of gasboosted solar hot water systems in existing building stock; (c) To write to the Australian Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for the Environment, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for the Environment, the Premiers and Ministers for the Environment in Victoria and Tasmania to inform them of this resolution; and*

(d) *To request that all congregations and bodies associated with the Uniting Church take immediate steps to comply with past Synod resolutions regarding reducing energy usage and energy efficiency and take all reasonable further steps to minimise their own greenhouse gas emissions.*

The 2008 meeting of the Synod in Victoria and Tasmania resolved:

08.5.16.4.4 *The Synod resolved (by agreement):*





(a) *To call on the Australian Federal Government to take a leadership role in the development of a global solution to climate change to limit global warming to no more than 2oC above pre-industrial levels and in particular to:*

(i) *Honour their commitment under Article 4.2(a) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which calls upon developed countries to take a lead in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and recognises the different capacities of various countries in their ability to achieve this outcome; and*

(ii) *Commit to greenhouse gas reduction targets as part of the UNFCCC process that are at least of comparable effort to those of developed countries that are already showing leadership in the levels of greenhouse gas emission reduction to which they are willing to commit; and*

(b) *To write to the Prime Minister, Minister for Climate Change and Water, the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water to inform them of this resolution.*

Thus the Synod strongly supports the aim of the Paris Agreement to strengthen the global response to climate change, including setting a collective goal to keep the global temperature increase to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to keep warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The Synod supports ratification of the Paris Agreement by the Australian Government.

The Synod agrees with paragraph 10 of the National Interest Analysis that:

Collective global climate action under the Agreement is the most effective means of protecting Australia against the threats of climate change. Without effective global climate action, Australia will face risks to the health and resilience of our coasts and beaches including iconic natural systems such as the Great Barrier Reef, cities and built environment, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, water resources and natural ecosystems, and the health and wellbeing of Australians, with consequent economic costs.

The provisions of the agreement alone will not keep the planet away from dangerous climate change. The Australian Government must therefore increase its commitments, along with action by other governments, if we are to keep temperatures well below the 1.5°C threshold stated in the agreement.

The Paris Agreement is a universal and durable agreement requiring actions from all governments, and spanning decades, unlike previous agreements which needed to be renegotiated regularly. The Paris Agreement also provides a pathway to proper transparency and accountability with work to do over the next four years.

It was positive the Australian Government joined the High Ambition Coalition, which championed the 1.5°C goal, but the Australian Government mitigation targets remain more aligned to global warming of an average of 3-4°C. The Australian Government 2030 targets would still leave Australia as the highest per capita polluter in the developed world – alongside just Saudi Arabia in the G20. According to the Climate Institute the current Australian mitigation





targets will see Australia have the most pollution intensive economy of any developed nation.¹

The difference between allowing an average global temperature rise of 2°C and 1.5°C matters. Climate Analytics has pointed out:²

If the world warms by 1.5°C, currently rare climate related extremes (extreme heatwaves, unusual dry spells, extreme rainfall, massive global coral bleaching events) would become the new normal. If global mean warming were to reach 2°C, the climate system would move into uncharted territory. For example, in a world that is 2°C warmer than preindustrial levels, the typical annual length of warm spells would be up to 60 days longer than today across northern parts of Australia and around 20 days longer across central and southern regions. This increase would be reduced by at least 30%, if global warming is limited to 1.5°C....

Global sea level rise at 1.5°C warming would reach 40 cm above current levels by 2100, compared to 50 cm at 2°C. However this does not take into account the longer-term post- 2100 commitment to further sea level rise, nor does it include the risk of crossing a threshold to irreversible melt of parts of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, with multi-metre sea level rise as a consequence. This risk is estimated to be much lower at 1.5°C than at 2°C. In summary the difference between 1.5°C and 2°C marks the difference between the upper end of present day climate variability and a new climatic regime of temperature and water related extremes. In a country already experiencing temperatures exceeding 40°C in its urban centres this is a very serious reason for concern for human health (Smith et al., 2014). Along with a substantial drying trend projected in particular for southern part of Australia this will negatively affect agricultural productivity (Reisinger et al., 2014) as well as lead to increased risks of forest fires (Pitman, Narisma, & McAneney, 2007). Risks under a 1.5°C warming would still be substantial but would alleviate several of the most profound risks for coral reef degradation, extreme temperatures and drying projected for 2°C.

The national social justice body of the Uniting Church in Australia, UnitingJustice, has called for the Australian Government to take the following actions:

- set a post-2020 emissions reduction target of at least 40% below 2000 levels by 2025;
- set specific national policy measures to reduce harmful emissions and move to a low carbon economy which might include:
 - A price on carbon;
 - Support for investment in renewable energy research and production;
 - A renewable energy target of 100% by 2050; and
 - A moratorium on the development of new coal mines.
- take account of climate change in all its forward planning and policy reform; and
- increase financial support to mitigation and low carbon development activities in most affected countries that neighbour Australia (this funding should be in addition to current

¹ Climate Institute, 'The Paris climate agreement and implications for Australia', Policy Brief, December 2015, p. 5.

² Bill Hare, Niklas Roming, Michael Schaeffer, and Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, 'Implications of the 1.5°C limit in the Paris Agreement for climate policy and decarbonisation', Climate Analytics, August 2016, pp. 3-4.





levels of overseas development aid).

The Synod notes that the Climate Change Authority has advised the Government that “To meet Australia’s emissions reduction goals, Australia’s emissions will need to decline more steeply in the coming years than they have in the past.”³

We are in agreement with the Climate Institute that, in order to maintain international credibility and take effective climate action, there are four immediate steps the Australian Government should now take:

1. Improve initial post-2020 pollution reduction target and commit to net zero emissions before 2050;
2. Expand domestic policies and, in particular, have a plan to replace existing coal-fired power plants;
3. Increase “climate finance” investment to assist vulnerable countries; and
4. Cancel our “Kyoto carryover” of surplus carbon credits.

In addition, the Synod notes and supports the recommendation by the Climate Change Authority “To promote policy stability and investor certainty the existing Large-scale Renewable Energy Target (LRET) should be unchanged to 2020 and remain in place until 2030.”⁴

As noted by the Climate Institute, the longer we delay setting a credible target, the greater the risk that we will need to take more drastic action at a later date to keep up with global action. Failure to deliver on the details and spirit of the Paris Agreement to scale up action will also see the Australian Government face an increasingly negative reaction from other countries in both climate change and other international fora.⁵

Climate Analytics points out that for scenarios of average global temperature rise of 1.5°C, zero CO₂ emissions globally are needed by about 2050, and about ten years later for 2°C average global increase scenarios, with global emissions peaking no later than about 2020 before rapidly declining.⁶

Climate Analytics further points out:⁷

For the world to get onto a 1.5°C pathway, the first and most urgent measures include the rapid scaling up of renewable energy systems, energy efficiency, electrification of transport systems, and improvements of industrial and building efficiency. Increased energy efficiency at all levels is needed to reduce the growth in primary energy demand,

³ Climate Change Authority, ‘Towards a Climate Policy Toolkit: Special Review of Australia’s Climate Goals and Policies. Summary’, August 2016, p. 20.

⁴ Climate Change Authority, ‘Towards a Climate Policy Toolkit: Special Review of Australia’s Climate Goals and Policies. Summary’, August 2016, p. 21.

⁵ Climate Institute, ‘The Paris climate agreement and implications for Australia’, Policy Brief, December 2015, p. 5.

⁶ Bill Hare, Niklas Roming, Michael Schaeffer, and Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, ‘Implications of the 1.5°C limit in the Paris Agreement for climate policy and decarbonisation’, Climate Analytics, August 2016, p. 4.

⁷ Bill Hare, Niklas Roming, Michael Schaeffer, and Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, ‘Implications of the 1.5°C limit in the Paris Agreement for climate policy and decarbonisation’, Climate Analytics, August 2016, pp. 4-5.



4 <https://www.coralcoe.org.au/media-releases/coral-death-toll-climbs-on-great-barrier-reef#> P. 5 and renewables and other low-carbon energy systems are needed to decarbonise the primary energy supply system rapidly.

The Synod notes there is analysis suggesting that the Paris Agreement does not go far enough. A group of scientists, of which Professor Sir Robert Watson, a former chair of the IPCC, has published a report expressing concern that average global temperature rise could reach 2°C by 2050 even if all the current pledges to cut emissions are met.⁸ The report, *the Truth About Climate Change*, has warned that the 1.5°C global average temperature rise target has “almost certainly been missed.” The report argues “While the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is an important step in the right direction, what is needed is a doubling or tripling of efforts. Without additional efforts by all major emitters, the 2°C target could be reached even sooner.”⁹

Professor James McCarthy, an oceanographer at Harvard University and one of the report’s authors, said:¹⁰

Climate change is already causing harm. Although implementation of the Paris Agreement will slow the rate of change, we will still need widespread adaptation to reduce its risks. It is important that appropriate adaptation measures be planned and implemented with sensitivity to specific regional context.

Further a report by Breakthrough, the National Centre for Climate Restoration, states:¹¹

Although the Paris deal gives the impression that global warming is now being properly addressed, in fact the measures fall alarmingly short of what is needed to avoid escalating climate change. Amongst its “deadly flaws” is the lack of any obligation on the parties to upgrade their existing pledges before 2030.

Indeed analysis reveals that the Paris voluntary commitments, with no further progress in the post-pledge period, would result in expected warming by 2100 of 3.5°C (uncertainty range 2.0 – 4.6°C).

Claims that the Paris commitments represent a 2.7°C path are dangerously over confident as they are based on a highly uncertain assumption that countries will commit, in the future, to keep emissions after 2030 at the rate they did beforehand.

Even if such concerning analysis is correct, it only adds weight for the need for the Australian Government to ratify the Paris Agreement, as it is the global mechanism that is on the table that can be used to reduce emissions. If the above analysis is correct it will mean much greater global mitigation commitments and actions are needed sooner under the Paris Agreement, starting with those suggested by the Climate Institute above in the case of Australia.

⁸ Ian Johnston, ‘Most people alive today set to witness dangerous global warming in their lifetime, scientists warn’, *The Independent*, 30 September 2016.

⁹ Ian Johnston, ‘Most people alive today set to witness dangerous global warming in their lifetime, scientists warn’, *The Independent*, 30 September 2016.

¹⁰ Ian Johnston, ‘Most people alive today set to witness dangerous global warming in their lifetime, scientists warn’, *The Independent*, 30 September 2016.

¹¹ David Spratt, ‘Climate Reality Check. After Paris, counting the cost’, Breakthrough – National Centre for Climate Restoration, August 2016, p. 4.





The Synod supports the Paris Decision that existing commitments under the UNFCCC by developed country Parties will collectively provide and mobilise US\$100 billion per year by 2020 to developing country Parties for mitigation and adaptation. However, the Synod is disappointed that the Paris Agreement sets no specific finance obligations for individual countries. While Australia's current contribution towards this target of \$200 million a year is welcome, the Climate Institute points out our fair share should be closer to \$1.5 billion a year.¹²

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¹² Climate Institute, 'The Paris climate agreement and implications for Australia', Policy Brief, December 2015, p. 6.

