

## PROPOSAL 6

### SINGLE USE PLASTICS

#### THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION (SJC):

That the Synod,

- *noting the long commitment of the Uniting Church to social, environmental, and intergenerational justice, which is expressed in various Assembly documents and in the Synod of WA's own resolutions on the care of creation and,*
- *reaffirming the importance of resolution 29/2001<sup>i</sup>, which encouraged and challenged individuals and congregations to become advocates for sustainable environmental policies and practices which protect, honour and care for our natural resources; Synod resolution 51/2005<sup>ii</sup> referring to energy and sustainability; and Synod resolution 59/2007<sup>iii</sup> Modelling Sustainability,*
- *and noting the Congregational Sustainable Practice policies<sup>iv</sup> (13/08/14):*
  1. *affirm the 2018 decision by the WA State Government to ban the provision of single-use plastic bags;*
  2. *call on the State Government to commit to phasing out use of all non-essential single-use plastics, including products like balloons, glitter, disposable take-away cups and straws;*
  3. *call on the State Government to phase out the procurement of products containing synthetic fibres (except where suitable and safe alternatives composed of natural fibres cannot be obtained);*
  4. *call on the State Government to invest in promoting and expanding the local plastic recycling industry;*
  5. *call on the Federal Government to implement a ban on the manufacturing and sale of washable products containing microbeads;*
  6. *commit to phasing out the use of non-essential single-use plastics across all operations of the Synod by July 2019;*
  7. *encourage the Presbytery and congregations to phase out the use of non-essential single-use plastics across all of their operations by July 2019;*
  8. *encourage agencies and schools to audit and, where possible, phase out their use of:*
    - *non-essential single-use plastics and,*
    - *uniforms made of synthetic fibres.*

#### Rationale

As noted in previous resolutions passed by both the WA Synod and National Assembly, the Uniting Church has expressed its long standing commitment to social, environmental and intergenerational justice which is at risk due to the effects of climate change, as a result of human impact on the planet. In order that we do more than just pass resolutions to show our commitment to the care of creation, this motion asks us to act.

At the very beginning of our scripture, we find God creating a world that is 'very good'. It is clear from the first chapter of Genesis that God created a world for humans, plants and animals alike. God saw to it that all the creatures and human beings were provided for, with the human being charged with being a steward of God's good creation. This is particularly clear in Genesis 1–2. Keeping the creation as 'good' can be reasonably interpreted as not poisoning or polluting it, as giving due care to the natural needs of domestic food animals,

and as preserving the habitat of wild animals. This is further reinforced in Genesis 8, where God makes the same covenant with animals as humans, promising never to destroy the Earth again.

It is a sad truth that in our modern, civilised world, we have not kept the creation ‘good’. With the increase of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, we have changed the climate of our planet; threatening the homelands of many people and the extinction of many animals. We leave a trail of indestructible plastic garbage throughout the world. Right now, we have so many good reasons, as Christians and stewards of the planet, to live sustainably. Climate change, energy costs and problems of supply, personal happiness and contentedness, species extinction, disastrous environmental destruction, our family’s health and safety, adaptability, healthy food and water supply issues, waste, and a fair go for those who grow our food... the reasons are many, and we could no doubt add several more to this list. We are treating our world like it has endless resources instead of finite ones.

The impact of plastics on the environment, particularly the marine ecosystems, is widely recognised to be highly significant. The 2014 CSIRO Marine Debris Report<sup>vi</sup> found that approximately three-quarters of the rubbish along the Australian coastline was plastic. The density of plastic in oceans ranges from a few thousand pieces of plastic per square kilometre to more than 40,000 pieces of plastic per square kilometre. Debris is more highly concentrated around major cities, suggesting that the majority of litter in Australian waters comes from Australian consumers and industries.<sup>vii</sup>

After a substantive consultation process, and following studies undertaken by CSIRO<sup>vi</sup>, and following the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, the WA State Government determined that reducing the number of plastic bags used is an important measure to reduce the amount of plastic entering our environment.<sup>vii</sup>

In June 2018 the Federal Government generated a Senate Report from the Environment and Communications References Committee, *Never Waste a Crisis: the waste and recycling industry in Australia*, analysing the impact of current waste and recycling practices, and putting forward a number of recommendations of strategies to mitigate negative impacts of waste levies.<sup>viii</sup>

The WA State Government (and Federal Government where applicable), has a responsibility to commit to environmentally sustainable policies. The Uniting Church, in upholding decades of commitment to environmental justice, should continue to hold governments to account, as well as undertaking measures to implement policies and practices itself, to protect, honour and care for our natural resources.

**Mover: Elizabeth Raine**

**Seconder: David Gray**

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- 29/2001** The Synod approved by consensus to encourage and challenge both individuals and congregations to:
- a) become advocates for sustainable environmental policies and practices which protect, honour and care for our natural resources;
  - b) be proactive in supporting local, national and international environmental agreements and initiatives;
  - c) request the Social Justice Commission to 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 *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.

**ii 51/2005**

The Synod agreed to:

- 1 reaffirm the importance of resolution 29/2001, which encouraged and challenged individuals and congregations to
  - a. become advocates for sustainable environmental policies and practices which protect, honour and care for our natural resources;
  - b. be proactive in supporting local, national and international environmental agreements and initiatives (by consensus);
- 2 encourage leaders and members of the church to keep in touch with the resources and activities associated with WA Collaboration, which is a partnership of non-government organisations committed to a sustainable future for Western Australia ([www.wacollaboration.org.au](http://www.wacollaboration.org.au)) (approved by agreement);
- 3 commend government and private initiatives that have further developed the use or potential use of renewable energy sources in Western Australia during the last year (by consensus);
- 4 urge the Commonwealth Government
  - a. to take seriously our corporate civic responsibilities for the stewardship of the Earth for the benefit of future generations (consensus);
  - b. to ensure that contracts for the sale of [uranium] to other countries include safeguards to best protect the lives of people and the long term environment (approved by agreement);
  - c. to assist in the transfer of cleaner technologies to developing countries and to assist with their safer mining of energy sources and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (by consensus);
  - d. to increase its support for research and development of environmentally benign, renewable energy sources along with more sustainable lifestyle and industrial behaviours (by consensus).
- 5 request the Social Justice commission to resource congregations and the Council of Synod for further consideration of the mining and use of uranium (by consensus).

**iii 59/2007**

The Synod agreed:

- 1 Note the statement of the Assembly Standing Committee 'For the Sake of the Planet and all its People: A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change';
- 2 Note the Synod resolution 51/2005 relating to a range of issues on environmental sustainability;
- 3 Welcome the 'Green Church Handbook' as a resource for congregations and individuals to discuss issues of faith and sustainability;
- 4 Encourage all congregations and faith communities to
  - a. undertake an energy self-audit and seek ways to minimise their production of greenhouse gas emissions;
  - b. respond to the results of the energy self audit.
- 5 Encourage congregations schools and agencies to purchase Green Energy;
- 6 Request the General Secretary to direct the Uniting Church Centre to lead by example in seeking ways to reduce the production of greenhouse gas emissions by;
  - a. arranging for an energy audit of the Uniting Church Centre;
  - b. develop a strategy to respond to the results of the energy audit in 6a;
  - c. purchasing Green Energy by 2009

**iv 13/08/14** General Council agreed:

In response to policies adopted by the Uniting Church Assembly and the Synod of Western Australia:

- Synod Resolutions 29/2001 advocating sustainable policy and practice
- Synod resolution 51/2005 Energy and sustainability
- Synod resolution 59/2007 Modelling Sustainability

the Synod encourages all congregations to minimise their impact on the environment by preventing pollution and continually improving our environmental performance by increasing communication and awareness of our efforts in accordance with this policy and fostering environmentally responsible behaviour amongst our members and the wider community.

We ask each congregation to accept that they have an obligation to demonstrate good environmental stewardship and social responsibility to the community, as we recognise the need for

responsible and sustainable development and the pursuit of social justice.

(The full list and detail of this resolution is available here: <https://ecochurcheswa.net/how-to-make-your-church-more-eco-friendly/>)

vi <https://www.csiro.au/~media/OnA/Files/MarineDebris4ppFactsheet-PDF.pdf>

vii [https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/our-work/consultation/Plastic\\_bag\\_ban/Plastic-bag-ban\\_discussion-paper.pdf](https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/our-work/consultation/Plastic_bag_ban/Plastic-bag-ban_discussion-paper.pdf)

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[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/WasteandRecycling/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/WasteandRecycling/Report)