



Wind turbines, Bungendore NSW. Photo-ABC Four Corners: Karen Mitchelmore

## Environmental Crossroads

This issue of *Watermark* looks at the action required to meet commitments entered into under the Paris Climate Agreement that came into force on 4 November 2016 and reviews the major environmental challenges highlighted in the Australian Government's five yearly State of the Environment 2016 report released on 7 March 2017.

### From Paris to Marrakech and onwards

Australia signed the Paris Climate Agreement in time for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Parties (COP 22) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Marrakech during November 2016.

Globally the Paris Climate Agreement commits all nations to work together to keep warming **as far below 2°C** as possible and **achieve zero net greenhouse gas emissions** (a balance between what we emit and carbon dioxide that might be captured through reforestation and other processes) before the end of the century.

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### State of the Environment 2016 Report

The federal government's [State of the Environment 2016](#) report, prepared by a group of independent experts, shows that population growth in our major cities - along with Australia's reliance on private cars - and economic development, are the main drivers of environmental problems such as land-use change, habitat destruction, invasive species, litter in our coastal and marine environments and climate change.

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Watermark is a regular publication of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW

### CARDINAL JOHN RIBAT, MSC OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Source: Catholic News Service, 17 Feb 2017

"Climate change is really the biggest issue for us. We cannot keep quiet about it. We have to come out with it. King tides, king waves" and rough winds "belting" the island nation [of Papua New Guinea] are already forcing many people from their homes.

"We have islands disappearing, being washed away because of the high-rise sea level and people there, they have to move," he said, noting that many of the smaller islands "are not able to sustain themselves" for much longer.

"Pope Francis' response is that the nations are not listening, that the answer ultimately depends on other nations." Speaking of the *Laudato Si'* encyclical, Cardinal Ribat said it helped the world to see "the importance" of the problems faced not just in Papua New Guinea, but "in the whole Pacific."

# STATE OF ENVIRONMENT

The first ever State of the Environment (SOE) report was produced in 1996.

The 2016 report authors see that the main pressures on the Australian environment are broadly the same as those in the first report – namely the conflict between economy and nature.

## Any good news?

The report notes some improvements in the state of, and trends, in parts of the Australian environment.

Our heritage (built, natural and cultural) and marine environments are generally in good condition, as is the Australian Antarctic Territory.

**Where there has been effective policy and management between federal and state governments, there have been improved outcomes for the environment and people.**

Some individual pressures have eased, such as those associated with air quality, poor agricultural practices and commercial offshore fishing, as well as offshore oil and gas exploration and production, in the marine environment.

## Increasing Pressures

The **Great Barrier Reef** is of major concern after damage by Cyclone Yasi in 2011 and extensive coral bleaching and die-off, particularly across the northern regions, from record high sea surface temperatures in 2015-2016. Fertiliser for sugar cane has been the main focus of government-funded programs to save the reef.

Increasing environmental pressure is coming from the effects of **coal mining and the coal-seam gas industry**.

Some parts of Australia's environment are not being managed sustainably including invasive species and litter in our coastal and marine environments. Coastal waterways are threatened by **microplastics and nanoparticles** (such as **microfibre plastic** from synthetic fabrics in clothing) that are largely unregulated and their effects poorly understood.

Australia's biodiversity is continuing to decline. More than 1200 plants and 500 animals are threatened with extinction. **Land clearance and extreme weather related to climate change have led to accelerating decline in many species.** The authors stress that because climate change will increase existing pressures, the capacity of the environment to adapt to climate change can be improved if other existing threats are addressed or ameliorated.

## Digital tracking

The SOE website is an interactive online platform that improves the ability of **users to track change over time** and access the information we want.

<https://soe.environment.gov.au/>

### Assessment frameworks

The elements for assessments are:

- pressure on environment
- state and trends
- management effectiveness
- resilience
- risks
- outlook for the future.

### Explore by themes

Australian biodiversity ~ Land ~ Marine environment ~ Heritage ~ Atmosphere ~ Antarctica ~ Coasts ~ Built environments ~ Inland water.

"For 20 years the Australian Government has been releasing these depressing reports that simply highlight that our existing approach to environmental protection is failing.

We need a tough new independent environmental watchdog, with wide powers and real funding to deliver an environment plan that also addresses climate change so we can finally turn around 20 years of failure by the national government."

**National Director Lyndon Schneiders  
Wilderness Society**

***TAKE ACTION*** on microplastics and microfibres killing waterways & oceans:

***Beat the microbead*** – check your toothpaste and cleansers and learn more at [www.beatthemicrobead.org](http://www.beatthemicrobead.org)

Watch ***The Story of Microfibers*** and sign the petition to clothing makers at [http://action.storyofstuff.org/sign/stop\\_microfiber\\_plastic\\_pollution/](http://action.storyofstuff.org/sign/stop_microfiber_plastic_pollution/)

Support the limited-release documentary ***The Plastic Ocean*** – [watch the trailer on YouTube](#) about the making of the film.

*“We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, On Care of our Common Home, #165

The Climate Council has reported that “in March, public polling showed that Australian concern for climate change is at the highest level in seven years (1).

After years of pushing, renewables and energy are finally front and centre of the political debate and tangible outcomes are being achieved.”

1. <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/climate-change-13>

**The Adani mine  
is this generation's  
Franklin River.**

**People power can  
stop it.**

**Bob Brown**

“We stress that putting Oceania and other regions which have hardly contributed to global emissions at risk would be unjust and shameful to the family of nations especially as feasible alternatives exist.

**On the other hand, limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees centigrade would generate real hope for the survival of these people and costs are comparatively moderate.**

**‘Political and economic leaders have to face the fact that the climate discussions are about survival.’ (Anoto Tong, former President of Kiribati)”**

We implore world leaders, especially the G20 in their next meeting in [July] 2017, to take immediate measures for implementing the Paris Agreement and thereby to promote integral ecology and the protection of the earth, our common home, and the wellbeing of all nations, especially the most vulnerable (cf.LS13; Chapter: V).”

*Extract from Declaration of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania, November 2016*

## TOWARDS COP 23

**Fiji** will be co-chair of the UN climate change meeting COP 23 in Germany, 6-17 November 2017. Fiji is the first Pacific nation to be chair and will put the issues of the Pacific Island nations to the fore – that climate change is the biggest challenge they face.

**China** has cancelled 104 proposed coal plants - some under construction – in response to the air pollution crisis of January 2013 and overcapacity in the energy sector.

**India** has invited the International Solar Alliance, an initiative of the 2015 Paris climate meeting, to establish there. The Energy Minister has said that a new coal plant will be costlier than a solar plant. The Prime Minister has announced plans to install, by 2022, 30 times more solar generating capacity than now.

**New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, Costa Rica, Maldives, Sweden and Finland** have, or are, legislating to be ‘carbon neutral’.

**Australia** wants the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to fund new coal fired power stations.

Government at national and state levels are championing the Adani Carmichael coal mine in the Galilee Basin of Queensland.

Emissions from the Adani coal will be greater than the total annual emissions from Viet Nam or Philippines and more than the combined emissions from Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Both the Queensland Land Court and the Federal Court have ruled that environmental assessments in Australia only need to take account of emissions that occur in Australia.

It is the current efforts of three jurisdictions in developing renewable energy sources – ACT, South Australia and Victoria – that will substantially deliver Australia’s targeted decrease in carbon emissions by 2020, and achieve progress towards 2030 goals.

**TAKE ACTION over**

# Community Climate Petition

## To the House of Representatives

**1 petition across 150 electorates  
150 days of action**

**for  
1 Goal: Stronger Action on Climate  
Change**

The Australian Government will undertake two reviews in the next two years to assess the effectiveness of its own policies to tackle climate change.

In June 2017, the Government will launch a review into its Emissions Reduction Fund, the scheme that pays polluters to cut some of their greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2018, the Australian Government must also review Australia's national emissions reduction targets in order to take stronger targets and policies to the 2020 international climate negotiations.

### The Community Climate Petition to the House of Representatives

calls on the Australian Government to  
take stronger action

- ❖ to reduce our emissions,
- ❖ transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy and more sustainable land use,
- ❖ support our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours as they face the increasing impacts of climate change.

### Petition Coordination

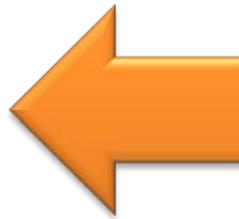
**Micah Australia** – a coalition of Christian aid and development organisations and church groups – has initiated the petition, supported by other faith-based groups to reach places of worship, work, study and the wider community, including

| Franciscan Friars | Pacific Calling Partnership |  
CLRI (NSW) | Australian Religious Response to Climate  
Change (ARRCC) | Catholic Earthcare |

**To find out more, and register your interest as a  
Petition Organiser to collect signatures,  
contact Jill at Edmund Rice Centre:**

[jillf@erc.org.au](mailto:jillf@erc.org.au) | (02) 8762 4200

Text from Climate Petition to be launched on International Earth Day, 22 April 2017



"We remind the House of Representatives that Australia's greenhouse emissions are the highest per person among wealthy nations while our emission reduction targets are among the weakest."

### God of Love,

We gather as one human family,  
turning to you in our distress.

We pray for our sisters and brothers in Africa who are suffering through conflict, drought and famine today.

### God of Compassion and Mercy,

We ask that vital food and water quickly reach the millions of children, women and men.

### God of Peace,

Bring an end to violence in those countries in conflict.

Protect our sisters and brothers  
who are wounded and displaced.

### God of Justice,

Help us to be more open and sensitive  
to the cry of the poor and marginalized.

Awaken us all to the causes of injustice.

Guide the Church to become a stronger voice  
for justice and peace.

May your spirit of love bring comfort and hope.

**For this we pray to you God. Amen.**

*Adapted from Caritas Australia's Parish Prayer for Africa Emergency*

**20 million children, women and men  
in Africa** are experiencing severe food  
crisis in **South Sudan, Kenya, Malawi,  
Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Yemen.**

**Conflict, climate change and inflation**  
have all increased the severity of the crisis.

You can donate online to Caritas Australia  
'Africa Emergency Appeal'