



CHRISTIANS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A statement from the Australian Evangelical Alliance Inc.

God and Creation

1. Christians worship the only God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose creative, dynamic relationship of love overflowed in the creation of the universe. Christians trust in God who created all things and who said that 'it was good', and they continually affirm that 'the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it'. They learn about God from seeing and appreciating the environment and the creatures in this wonderful world (Genesis 1-2; Psalm 24: 1; Job 39: 1- 42: 6).
2. God entered into a protective relationship, not only with the people of the world, but also with the other creatures. God also gave a particular privilege and responsibility to humanity to tend and care for the world as a participation in divine purposes (Genesis. 9: 1-17; 1: 26- 31).
3. God not only created the world, but will also redeem it through Jesus Christ – through whom all things originally came into being. One day the whole of creation will be freed from stress and disorder through Jesus Christ and his cross and will come to be a renewed creation (John 1: 1-3; Ephesians 1: 10; Romans 8: 21; Colossians 1: 19-20; 2 Corinthians 5: 17; Revelation 21).
4. The hope of a new creation does not detract from, but actually encourages Christians to care for our present creation as there is a direct connection between the two. Life in the Spirit and the Christian calling to serve God means sharing in the vision of the redemption of all things and having a concern for the whole of creation as well as for individuals. (2 Corinthians 3: 6; 1 Corinthians 15: 35-49).
5. A Christian understanding of creation means seeking forgiveness for the occasions that we have treated the world as ours and not God's and for the times we have inappropriately exploited and polluted the world without thought for others – present or future – or for the good of creation itself. Repentance involves a commitment to turning away from harmful action and turning towards a lifestyle and a way of relating to others and the world which is most caring for both people and the world and honouring to God (Luke 11: 4).
6. The task which Christ has given to the church also means, in particular, a commitment to caring for people through care for the creation. When thinking of large-scale environmental issues God's call to love our neighbours means taking a global, rather than purely national focus. It means recognising that there is unequal access to natural resources; that the effects of environmental disasters fall unevenly on the people of world; it means understanding the greater difficulty of poorer nations and the moral responsibility of wealthier ones. It means genuinely loving our global neighbours through just, loving and sacrificial action (Matt. 22: 34-40).

Climate Change

7. There is now no reputable science which denies either that climate change is happening or that a large part of global warming is human-induced. In 2001 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provided strong evidence of climate change, the warming of the earth and of the dominant role of human induced greenhouse gas emissions in causing this. But the extensive scientific research that has been undertaken since then is even stronger.
8. The 2001 IPCC report expected an end-of-century increase of 1.4° to 5.8°C in global average temperature. The most recent scientific work since then indicates that average temperature is likely to rise by 3°C or more unless there is effective action to substantially reduce emissions. If this occurs the consequences will be devastating and will have severe impacts on human life and health as well as on the environment and biodiversity. These impacts will affect everyone but will not be distributed evenly. Generally, those who are wealthier bear more responsibility for producing greenhouse gases while those who are poorer suffer more from the effects - due to their lesser ability to deal with them. But there is still time to avoid the top range of risk – provided that we do the necessary things and act immediately. As far as government policy is concerned that probably means establishing a clear policy framework for significantly reducing emissions by the end of the next parliamentary term.
9. The scientific evidence which connects greenhouse gas emissions with climate change is the same evidence which indicates that the goal for developed nations ought to be in the order of a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from year 2000 levels by 2050. It makes no sense to accept the conclusions about the reality of climate change and not accept the conclusions about the necessary goals for rectifying it as they are based on the same evidence. Nor does it make sense to hold back from acting on this because of the fear it would have a damaging impact on Australia's GDP. A failure to act will cost even more in the long run and the use of fossil fuels (the major causes of human-induced climate change) is itself distorting the economy as it is highly subsidised through not being required to pay for its effects.
10. Although globally Australia is nowhere near being the leading overall emitter of greenhouse gases we are, arguably, the world's biggest per capita contributors to greenhouse gas pollution. Australians are directly involved in the causes of climate change which is damaging the world and, for example, harming the people of the Pacific region more than ourselves, even though they have far less influence on global warming than we do. The response to this has to be a whole-of-society response. It would not be right for individuals to leave it to community groups, or for community groups to leave it to business, or for businesses to leave it to government. Or for Australia to leave it to larger nations. Australia's contribution to the overall amount of greenhouse gases may be small by international standards but our credibility in the world, our moral responsibility to our global neighbours and our influence on others will be diminished unless we act. Internationally, much more has to be done beyond Kyoto and negotiations with other nations are of great importance. But we must remember our special moral responsibility as a developed nation whose way of life has benefited most from the causes of global warming to continue to lead the way in finding solutions.
11. It is important to maintain a broad view in which the needs of the rest of the world, and the needs of future generations are considered as seriously as the needs of present-day Australians. The interests of business and the work of climate scientists can go together, as in the cooperative venture of the Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change and the Australian Conservation Foundation. It brings together business interests and scientific data and, very appropriately, calls for nationally consistent climate change policies, supported by all

jurisdictions. We find their proposals to be helpful and believe that the Christian community is willing to bear the cost needed in order to adopt the recommendations of ‘The Business Case for Early Action’, and the CSIRO report ‘Climate Change Impacts on Australia and the Benefits of Early Action to Reduce Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions’.

12. The report also calls for a legal framework for a carbon price signal. While the nature of any such mechanism will be complex and subject to appropriate expert advice, it seems fair and appropriate that the costs of pollution should be applied to the technologies which cause it and, ultimately to those who use them. Not to do so would be to subsidise greenhouse gas emitting technologies. It is also important as it is a means of encouraging the development of other energy options. Any additional cost will not ultimately be borne by either government or business - but by individuals and families and so it is not inappropriate for community groups, such as AEA, to indicate a willingness to bear this cost. It is not only a matter of common-sense to act quickly, but also a matter of justice. We cannot fail to act about global warming and allow the consequences to fall more severely on others who have not caused it. Nor can we fail to act and expect the solution to come from others when we are among the beneficiaries of the actions that have led to global warming.
13. If action is taken soon the costs are modest and manageable – not excessive. The Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change indicates that deep cuts in emissions could be achieved with policies that would only reduce economic growth from 2.2% to 2.1% pa. Nothing less than a willingness to accept this is satisfactory. Living standards and income can continue to rise strongly with these policies. It may also be that moving to more efficient modes of energy production will soon be more economically beneficial than current, less efficient processes. An economic problem does arise however, if there is not international consensus on the matter. The implementation of climate-change policies in Australia and not in other countries will place some industries at a severe trade disadvantage. This points to the importance of continued international negotiation on climate change. However, there is a moral responsibility for Australia, as a developed nation that has benefited from the events that have led to the present situation, to be in the lead in not only negotiating but also in actually acting to mitigate the effects of climate change. water
14. Australian Christians are responsible to God for the way their actions affect the world and the lives of other people both present and future. Individuals and churches need to examine the Biblical and ethical issues involved in climate change, as well as the social, scientific and economic ones. These principles should be allowed to affect individual, family and corporate lifestyle, consumption and behaviour in order to respond positively to the challenge of human-induced climate change. The responsibility to act in response to climate change is not that of government alone but one which very appropriately belongs to Christians and church communities who serve the Creator and Redeemer of the world, and the Lord whose love extends to all people.

The Australian Evangelical Alliance Inc is a network of Christian organisations, churches and individuals. Its aim is to be a catalyst for Christian unity, cooperation and mission. AEA links people and networks; stimulates Biblical thinking in church and society; and gives voice to Christian concerns on matters of public significance. AEA is affiliated with the World Evangelical Alliance, an international fellowship with National Alliances in 127 countries embracing more than 420 million evangelical Christians. The Australian National Director is Mr Tom Slater. Queries and comments concerning this statement should be directed to Dr Brian Edgar, Director of Public Theology, P O Box 175, Box Hill 3128, (03) 98900633, brian@ea.org.au.

Resources

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Third Assessment Report – Climate Change' (2001) available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environmental Programme. It involves the work of thousands of scientists and synthesises the best scientific, technical and socio-economic data about climate change. It has produced three major assessment reports (in 1990, 1995 and 2001) and a fourth is scheduled for late 2007.

CSIRO, 'Climate Change Impacts on Australia and the Benefits of Early Action to Reduce Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions' available at <http://www.businessroundtable.com.au/>

Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change, 'The Business Case for Early Action' available at <http://www.businessroundtable.com.au/> The Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change is an independent entity established by six large businesses in Australia. Roundtable members are BP Australia, Insurance Australia Group, Origin Energy, Swiss Re, Visy Industries and Westpac with the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The Allen Consulting Group, 'Deep Cuts in Greenhouse Gas Emissions - Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts for Australia' available at <http://www.businessroundtable.com.au/>

The Climate Institute, see <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/cia/home.html> Established in late 2005, The Climate Institute aims to raise public awareness and debate about the dangers to Australia of global warming and to motivate the country to take positive action. It works collaboratively with business, community, scientific, environment and other organisations concerned with climate change.

Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia's Position', available at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/environment/climate/>

The Evangelical Climate Initiative Statement, available at <http://www.christiansandclimate.org/> In February of this year, in the USA a group of Christians launched the Evangelical Climate Initiative. It began with strong statement of purpose and a call to national action on climate change. It took the political leadership of the country, who assumed that they understood the social concerns of evangelicals in that country, by surprise. It demonstrated that many people were further ahead in their thinking than had been given credit.

Sir John Houghton , 'Global Warming: The Science, the Impacts & the Politics' (2001) available at Christians in Science (UK) <http://www.cis.org.uk/resources/articles/environment.shtml> Sir John, an evangelical Christian, was formerly the chairman of Scientific Assessment for the IPCC.

Sir John Houghton, Climate Change / Global Warming Briefing (2005) Evangelical Environmental Network <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/climate/>