

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2009

Report of Management Committee to the AGM

(Thea Ormerod, President)

Well, we've just completed our first exciting full year as ARRCC and, miraculously, we're all still friends. There have been creative tensions, mainly because this is an area where there are many and passionately-held viewpoints even on the same general side of the debate.

It's been interesting to have the discussions – loong, involved discussions - about what position we should take as an organisation on, for example, what our role should be in the whole landscape of environmental action in this country. Should we get mixed up in the policy debates at all? Or simply stick to helping faith communities become more responsible towards the Earth? Is it worth switching to Green Power when, with the proposed CPRS and low targets for emissions reductions, this will just mean big companies won't have to do as much to cut their emissions?

Some observers were surprised, for example, that ARRCC chose to support the Climate Emergency Rally, with its demand for 100% of Australia's energy to come from renewable by 2020. Our thinking was: would it be a good thing? Yes. Did the prophets shrink from naming what is right because it may be considered impractical? No. So we went for it.

Then it was our turn to be surprised when we joined, at the Rally, with a range of religious groups who might also normally be seen as fairly conservative: Catholic Mission, Uniting Care and Caritas Australia as well as the Faith Ecology Network and TEAR Australia.

It is a great sign of hope that everywhere we turn we are seeing organisations turn their attention to climate change as a central issue of concern: Micah Challenge suddenly made it an issue at the last Voices For Justice lobbying effort in Canberra which is normally about overseas aid; Oxfam invites people to become UN Climate Trackers; Unions are inviting their members to become Climate Connectors. What do we want our people to be? Climate Prayer-every-dayers?

There's a general consensus that ARRCC should provide the religious theology and language to support environmental concern among people of faith. There's a place for us to make the case for seeing responsible caring for the Earth not simply a scientific, political, environmental or economic issue, but also as a moral and spiritual issue.

Individual members of the Management Committee and, no doubt, other members of ARRCC, have spoken about a faith perspective variously in Churches, at the Multi-faith Conference in Brisbane, on radio, at the Pentecostal Alphacrucis College, in Moslem places of worship, and so on.

In the long term, we'd like to have available theological and spiritual resources, kind of "tool kits", in a range of traditions which could support faith communities wanting to give expression to these kinds of concerns.

There is scope for this side of our work to be developed more, but we need resources. If there's anyone here who is especially interested in putting their time into it this, there's plenty of scope for it.

We can (and do) provide resources on our website for communities and individuals to take responsible action themselves by switching to Green Power, conducting energy audits, making their homes and buildings more energy efficient. There's scope to enhance this side of our work too, if anyone is interested.

We've also aimed to be a conduit for information about all activities across Australia pertaining to climate change, concentrating on initiatives by religious communities. So we've included as many as we can in our e-newsletter.

And we've had our own activities. Everyone will remember the Earth Hour vigil at Observatory Hill. It was a wonderful night well, except that we couldn't switch the lights off at the rotunda, and except that people couldn't hear very well because of the revellers next to us and, oh yes, except that the sound equipment didn't work that well. But still, there was a great spirit among us that night, some great music and prayer.

But events are not so much our thing, because they take a heck of a lot of time to organise.

Instead, various individuals have wanted to run with certain projects. The management committee has given up trying to keep a close track of every side of people's work, so it meets now every two months and a lot of ARRCC's real work is being done in working groups. So far there's the Meat-free Day working group and the advocacy and policy working group. Also there are small groups loosely organised to work on the Eco-Award program and the idea of riding to your Place of Worship.

In some ways ARRCC can be an umbrella for a range of initiatives, depending on people's enthusiasm. For example, Geoff Callaghan was keen to have a submission in from us to the Henry Tax review. Geoff was keen to see the reform of tax arrangements that actually gave incentives for people to drive their company cars, and instead he wanted to see incentives for people to use their bikes or use public transport. ARRCC provided backing for this, so adding weight to his submission.

A few of us have been especially interested in the advocacy side of ARRCC's work. So we've had a letter signed by 60 religious leaders to the Prime Minister, saying we want more ambitious emissions reduction targets. Robert will give a full report later.

In relation to this last year, I especially want to thank our out-going Executive Officer, Miriam Pepper. Miriam's tireless dedication and attention to detail was a huge benefit to a little organisation trying to get to its feet. Miriam spared no personal expense, in terms of time, energy and thoughtfulness, to get ARRCC up and running.

Greg O'Donnell, when he joined us just 9 months after our launch last year, has had to get up quite a speed to catch up with us. He brings excellent organisational and communication skills to the job, so we look forward to his contribution.

Lastly I'd like to express ARRCC's gratitude to The Climate Institute for its continuing financial support for another year. It's of course so much more is possible when there's someone being paid three days a week. However The Climate Institute itself is unsure of its own financial future so we are now seeking other sources of funding.

It's easier to secure funding if potential donors can claim their donations as tax deductions, and we nearly have enough members to apply for it. So, everyone here, please get a friend to join if you can.