

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2008

Report of Management Committee to the AGM (Thea Ormerod, President)

History leading up to ARRCC

Obviously the year up to 30th June marked the establishment of ARRCC, with some modest but important achievements, not necessarily directly because of the present Management Committee. They were largely because of the heroic efforts of Dr Miriam Pepper and, prior to Miriam, Geoff Callaghan.

The name, the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, affectionately known as ARRCC, was the brainchild of Geoff and colleagues at The Climate Institute in late 2007.

Also last year in October, "Common Call to Action on Climate Change" was published. Thirteen Australian faith leaders including Anglican Bishop George Browning, Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence from the executive council of Australian Jewry and Br Ikebal Patel (President of Australian Federation of Islamic Councils) called for targets to reduce greenhouse pollution by between 60-90% by 2050 and a clean energy target of 25% by 2020.

This Interfaith Common Call to Action builds on Common Belief which was released in 2006 and included statements by a wide range of Australian faith leaders about climate change and a shared belief that there is a moral obligation to care for the earth.

The Interfaith Call to Action has been on the Climate Institute's website and has been signed by a whole lot of people. These signatures affirm our commitment as people of faith to looking after our planet.

ARRCC's establishment

Since then, Miriam has basically been bringing ARRCC into formal existence. She has put enormous energy into the incorporation of ARRCC. She has negotiated the maze of Government rules and paperwork, and here we are! This has been a great discipline, as I'm sure she'd much rather get in and do the more interesting work of advocacy.

Incorporation means that we can now begin an attempt to obtain deductible gift-recipient status and consolidate the long-term viability ARRCC as an organization.

Miriam has put a lot of work into creating a successful website, with the knowledge that if we exist in cyberspace, we do exist! I'd like to especially thank Miriam for her amazing input, essentially giving birth to ARRCC. May any future birthing processes be a lot easier for you!

Miriam has been building networks with other faith-based groups working on climate change, and has established a database. She has been scoping the advocacy landscape to find other groups with similar aims, and envisaging how we can complement rather than duplicate what these organizations and groups are doing. Using our website and e-newsletters ARRCC intends to publicise the events and actions of other similar groups as well as our own.

I'd like to acknowledge the work of ARRCC since June 30th on this occasion also. We held a very well-attended and successful strategy workshop on 10th August, giving ARRCC a sense for what our stake-holders would like to see happen. I'd like to thank all those who attended this rather exciting occasion, especially those who came long distances from Canberra, Cooma and Kiama, for example. Thank you also, everyone who has become a member of ARRCC since then.

Some future directions

Many suggestions came out of the day but perhaps the ones that stood out were:

- That we should develop a language around caring for creation that faith-based communities can relate to, theological resources which can communicate with them. Action on climate change is a moral issue.
- That we should work together with other groups supporting people adversely affected by climate change, particularly the Pacific Islanders.
- That we should be inclusive of people in other parts of Australia, youth, women, people of varying faiths and spiritualities, including the indigenous.
- That we concentrate on mobilizing grass roots support, but we could also facilitate advocacy by religious leaders.
- That we should be advocates politically and facilitate faith-based communities acting as a conscience for the nation.

The outcomes of the strategy workshop set a kind of blueprint for the coming year. Some more specific suggestions were the training of “champions” within congregations, to generate change locally; to target marginal seats for education and mobilization. Obviously one worker can’t be expected to do all that’s needed so everyone’s invited to work together on agreed goals.

Of course others have been working on these aims, but for ARRCC this work has started through the expansion of resources on our website, and some of it through Miriam’s work with communities. Miriam managed to get signatures of key religious leaders on a letter to the Government advocating for a significant reduction of Australia’s emissions and stronger action to assist affected Pacific Islanders with adaptation and technology transfer.

We’ve begun co-operating with other groups creating opportunities for learning and dialogue, such as the Caring for Creation series of seminars. We supported the Hindu Council in their meat-free day conference on 2nd October in Parramatta. We’ve been publicizing an evening with Richard Cizik who is in the US National Association of Evangelicals, who has been vocal on climate change since 2002. He is one of TIME magazine’s 100 most influential people. This event is on Thursday, November 13th in Castle Hill.

And of course, Miriam has been instrumental in creating the fundraiser initiative with Jackgreen. This is an occasion when our goals and the goals of a company have nicely intersected, ie, encouraging people to switch to clean green energy. With a little co-operative work, we have been able to get going the Greenpower fundraiser for places of worship and faith communities. Already Our Lady Queen of Peace, Greystanes, has taken the opportunity, and we hope this is just the beginning.

We also have some modest sponsorship from Australian Ethical, with whom we share goals.

Next

We intend to have a visible presence of the Walk Against Warming on Saturday November 15th, where we plan to join the Faith Ecology Network. We’re meeting on the corner of Castlereagh and Martin Place at 10.45 am.

With all this going on, I declare that we are well and truly launched!