Community Climate Petition to the House of Representatives

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Australian Religious Response to Climate Change

Community Climate Petition to the House of Representatives

A guide to running a powerful electorate-based petition as part of a national 150 days of action on climate change.

- 1 Petition Across 150 Electorates.
- 150 Days of Action for
- 1 Goal: Stronger Action on Climate Change

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What is this petition about?

This petition calls on the Australian Government to take stronger action to reduce our emissions, transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy, and support our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours as they face the increasing impacts of climate change.

Petition text

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of concerned people/citizens of [electorate name], draws to the attention of the House the severe and urgent threat that climate change poses to the health, well-being and security of all people around the world, particularly our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours.

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

We therefore ask the House to do all in its power to protect communities in Australia and our region from the harmful impacts of climate change – such as more severe heat, extreme and unpredictable weather and rising seas – by:

- committing to deeper and more urgent reductions of our greenhouse emissions;
- developing a plan to ensure Australia achieves zero net greenhouse emissions well before 2050, and supporting families and communities affected by the transition towards renewable energy and more sustainable land use;
- providing additional assistance to help our poorest neighbours adapt to the harmful impacts of climate change.

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Why does it matter?

Climate change is already hurting vulnerable communities and making hard lives harder in many parts of the world. Climate change is hurting people directly through extreme weather events, disrupted rainfall patterns, changed pathways for pests and diseases, the melting of glaciers and sea level rise. Australia is the developed country most vulnerable to climate change, vulnerable to impacts such as heatwaves, droughts, greater risk of bushfires, extreme weather, and sea level rise. Climate change also adds to stresses of poverty, inequality and conflict.

For people of faith, responding to climate change is part of what it means to live our values. All our traditions affirm our responsibility to care for the earth. Our common commitment to compassionate relationships and justice towards those who are marginalised means that we cannot remain on the sidelines.

> "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."
>
> **Proverbs 31:8–9 (Talmud)**

> Live in complete harmony with Nature,
> Experience the grace of God
> in the splendour of the universe.
>
> **Mother Nature, Yajur Veda 34.37**
> **(Hindu scripture)**

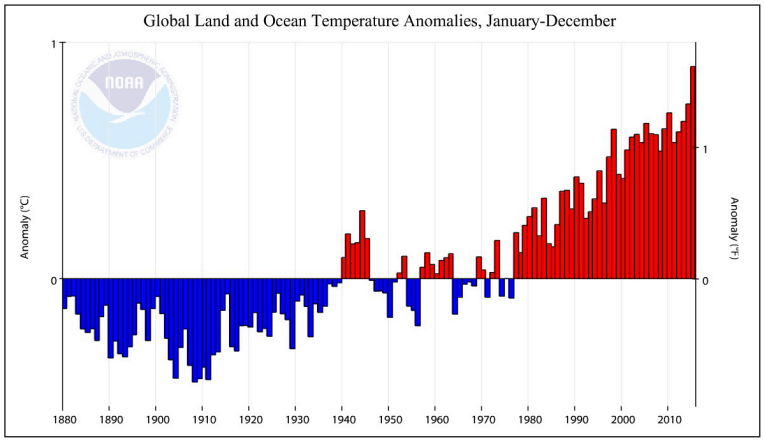
Our greenhouse gas emissions have already warmed the world by 1°C since the end of the 19th Century. 2015 was the hottest year on record and each year human beings pump another 37 billion tonnes of heat-trapping gases (CO_2 equivalent) into the atmosphere.

This increased heat and the disruption it causes to the Earth's climate has terrible human consequences. In 2015 alone, heat waves in India and Pakistan in May and June 2015 resulted in more than 3,000 deaths. Droughts from South America through the Pacific to Africa affected at least 20 million people. Cyclone Pam, likely the strongest cyclone ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere, smashed into Vanuatu with wind speeds of up to 320 km per hour, rendering 75,000 people homeless and destroying up to 90% of Vanuatu's food crops. In Australia, too, record ocean temperatures damaged 93% of the Great Barrier Reef (some of which will never recover) and massive bushfires in early 2016 destroyed huge swathes of Tasmania's Central Plateau World Heritage Area.

Why now?

Action to tackle climate change is at a crossroads – both globally and in Australia.

Globally, the Paris Climate Agreement, which entered into force on 4 November 2016, commits all nations to work together to keep warming as far below 2°C of warming as possible and achieve zero net 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.



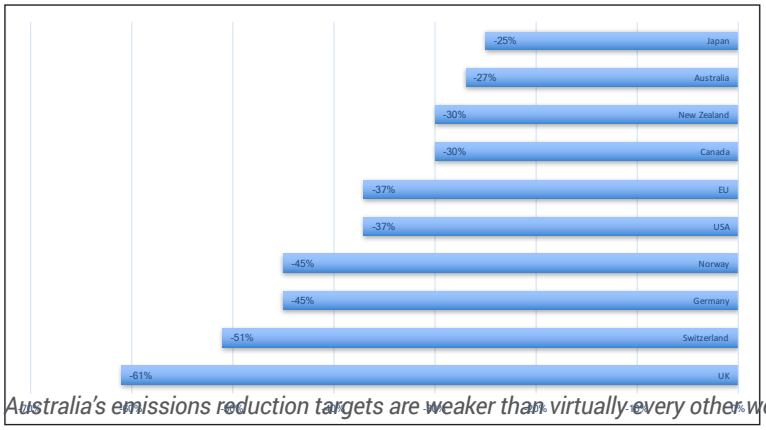
15 of the 16 hottest years ever recorded have occurred since 2001

Source: www.ncdc.noaa.gov

In Australia, the 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 Australian 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.

However, there are huge gaps between what we *need* to do, what we have *pledged* to do, and what we are *actually* doing. We need to speak out now in order to close those gaps.



Australia's emissions reduction targets are weaker than virtually every other wealthy nation

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Will it make a difference?

A petition to the Parliament is the most direct way you can ask the Parliament to take action.

If our Parliament receives many petitions on climate from local communities across the country, our politicians will better understand the breadth and depth of support for stronger action to reduce emissions and support vulnerable communities in our region.

One petition in one electorate might be possible to ignore. Any number of email petitions can be sent straight to trash.

But one hundred-and-fifty old-school, pen-and-paper petitions, gathered by churches and schools and community groups across all of Australia's 150 electorates is hard to ignore. By coordinating our efforts, handing the petitions to MPs at one key moment, and having our requests heard by Parliament, we will make it impossible to ignore.

The petition will build a strong sense of public pressure and momentum at a time when the Government is assessing whether our emissions reduction targets are an adequate contribution to global efforts to tackle climate change and whether our climate policies are reducing emissions far and fast enough. (Hint: they're not. Not by a long shot.)

How will the petition work?

From January through to July 2017, churches, schools, businesses and other community groups will gather petitions in their local electorate. One person will act as a Principal Petitioner for each electorate.

On World Environment Day (June 5) we will officially launch the Community Climate Petition. This coincides with the Government's review of its "Emissions Reduction Fund" climate policies.

At the end of July, all groups will return the signatures they have collected to the Principal Petitioner for their electorate.

During August and September, Principal Petitioners will coordinate with Petition Organisers in their electorate to hand the petition over to their MP and call on him or her to present it in Parliament.

In November, as the international climate conference begins to meet, we will hold a coordinated media event to highlight public support for stronger action to tackle climate change.

Community Climate Petition

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A grassroots petition to achieve influence at scale

Each electorate needs a Principal Petitioner and lots of Petition Organisers

micahaustralia.org/climate-petition

Churches, Schools, community groups gather petition signatures until mid 2017, returning them to the

Groups present their petition in a series of coordinated handover events to every Member of Parliament in each

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What happens to the petition in Parliament?

If your MP is presenting your petition personally, he or she will have the opportunity to make a statement, thereby increasing awareness about the need for climate action. If your MP is not involved, petitions are usually presented on Mondays by the Chair of the Petitions Committee who announces the subject of the petition and the number of signatories but contributes no discussion of the petition's subject matter.

The full terms of the petition will be printed in the Hansard (the parliamentary record) for that day and they will also be published on the Petitions Committee's webpage. The Committee may forward the terms of the petition to the relevant Minister, in which case the Minister is expected to respond within 90 days. Responses to petitions are announced in the House, printed in Hansard and published on the Committee's webpage. The Principal Petitioner will also be advised.

Who is involved?

Micah Australia – a coalition of Christian aid and development organisations and church groups – is coordinating the petition. The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and other faith-based organisations will work together as part of this initiative to empower diverse people of faith to gather signatures in their places of worship, places of work or study and in the wider community.

We want this to be a tool to empower people of faith to gather signatures in their churches, places of work or study and in the wider community.

To make the petition as powerful as possible, we want it be something that any individual or group from any faith background (or no faith at all) can sign and also organise and gather signatures for. For that reason, while it's a petition launched and coordinated by Christians, it's not a petition for Christians alone. For the Community Climate Petition to be influential, it will need to demonstrate wide, deep and diverse support in each of our electorates.

For more information about who is involved in promoting the petition, visit micahaustralia.org/climate-petition

> "The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact... When we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings."
>
> **Pope Francis**

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> Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea due to what the hands of people have wrought so He may let them taste part of the consequence of what they have done that perhaps they will return to goodness.

Qur'an [30:41]

> Many drops of water come together to make a river" and "tiny droplets of love have the collective power to achieve great things.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen

How to run the petition

1. Play Your Part

Decide whether you want to be the Principal Petitioner for your electorate or Petition Organiser.

The Principal Petitioner is the first named person on the petition and will coordinate the handover of the petition to your electorate's MP.

A Petition Organiser is any other person who will gather signatures and help to promote the petition in their groups and networks and the wider community.

Principal Petitioners will also do the work of a Petition Organiser – gathering signatures and promoting the petition – but have a few specific responsibilities regarding the coordination of the petition.

To find out more about these roles or to register your interest in being either a Principal Petitioner or a Petition Organiser: micahaustralia.org/climate-petition

If You Are The Principal Petitioner For Your Electorate

- Petitions to the House must have a 'Principal Petitioner' - someone who will be the contact person for any correspondence with the House of Representatives Petition Committee about the petition. Principal Petitioners provide their full name and contact details on the first page of the petition. These details are for the use of the Petition Committee only and will not be made public.
- Principal Petitioners receive the other petition signatures gathered across the electorate.
- Principal Petitioners coordinate the handover of the petition to your electorate's MP. This could be a simple handover meeting or a larger public handover event. There is more detail about these handover events below.
- Principal Petitioners also act as Petition Organisers to gather signatures and promote the petition.

If You Are a Petition Organiser

- You will gather signatures among your groups and networks and the wider community.
- You will promote the petition through your networks and through social and local media.
- You will return all completed petition forms by the dates indicated in the schedule below.
- You may join the meeting or event to hand over the petition to your Member of Parliament.

2. Gather signatures

Plan how you will gather signatures. The simplest way is to schedule key moments where you will gather signatures into your calendar. Plan the best way to do this by asking a few questions:

- Which groups (school, faith community, community, workplace, other) are you part of where you could invite people to sign the petition?
- Will you have an opportunity to make a short presentation to explain the petition and ask for signatures and who do you need to ask in order to do this?
- What other groups are you in contact with who you could invite to promote the petition (such as local businesses, community groups, and local events or festivals)? When and how will you get in touch with these groups?
- Will you gather signatures in public?

To gather petitions in a public place, you may need appropriate permissions.

Individuals or small groups of people approaching people in a public place to request signatures do not require permission.

However, setting up a stall or booth to gather signatures requires permission from:

- Council if in a public area or civic space (e.g. library, square or park)
- Shopping centre management if in a mall or shopping centre
- Event organisers if at a community festival or event

Print copies of the petition to gather signatures. Every signature must be handwritten on a page showing the request of the petition at the top. Signatures on the blank reverse side of such a page are not accepted.

3. Promote the petition

- Use social media to share the fact that your group is gathering signatures for this petition:
- Tag @micahaustralia to let us know you're gathering signatures
- Use hashtags to amplify your voice on social media [#CommunityClimatePetition]
- Let your local media know that your groups is gathering signatures for this petition.
- Find more resources to share and promote the petition at micahaustralia.org/climate-petition

4. Return completed petitions

To coordinate handover events, we need to ensure that signatures are collated and sent to the Principal Petitioner with enough time for them to organise a handover meeting with your Member of Parliament.

In order to ensure that your group's signatures are collated and presented along with other signatures in the same electorate, post all signatures to:

Micah Australia
413/410 Elizabeth St
Surry Hills
NSW 2010

by 31 July 2017.

We will collate numbers of signatories on all petitions from churches and other groups around the country to use solely for the purpose of demonstrating the strength of support for climate action across the Australian community. We will not record any other details and will not use them to contact petitioners.

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5. Organise a handover event (Principal Petitioner)

Simple handover meeting

Confirm with other groups who have gathered petitions in your electorate whether they are interested and able to send a representative to the meeting.

Contact the MPs office and request a meeting with the MP to present the petition. This meeting could take place at the MP's office or at another venue. You can find out who your MP is and his/her contact details via the Australian Electoral Commission: electorate.aec.gov.au

Try to find a suitable date for the meeting in August or September. However, if the MP is not available, request a staff member for the meeting.

At the meeting, briefly explain the petition and outline why your community feels strongly about climate change and what you would like the Parliament to do. Ask your federal MP or his/her representative to present your petition to Parliament.

Public handover event

This is more complicated and requires more planning, but if done well can have a very powerful impact on the MP and the wider community.

Three months before the event:

1. Choose and book a venue (such as location outside the MP's office, church, school, community hall, or park) at an appropriate time on your electorate's assigned handover date.

When choosing your venue you will need to consider the following:

- Size of expected group
- Photo opportunity – does your location have an area appropriate for your group photo?
- Suitability for all types of weather

2. Register your event and spread the word

If haven't already done so, please contact the Micah staff team to register your event on (02) 8317 5080 or email info@micahaustralia.org. Micah staff and other participating organisations can also provide further assistance in your event planning if required.

3. Plan your gathering:

- Invite any speakers – for example local community leaders concerned about climate change
- Invite your Federal MP
- Invite all groups who have gathered signatures to bring people to the handover event. Having people come in shared colours, uniforms and/or with banners can create a powerful visual effect.
- Plan a creative action and/or photo opportunity – for example, people forming the shape of a heart to symbolise love for creation and neighbour and concern about climate change.

One month before the event:

- Recruit and brief support volunteers for the event. Depending on your event, you may need one or more marshals to help direct people. One marshal per 50 participants is a good ratio to aim for. You may also need an appropriately-trained first-aid volunteer. Make sure that all volunteers have been briefed about the petition aims, and given a simple script to follow when interacting with the public.

- Draft a run-sheet for your event with timeframes and durations for each part of your event.

- Download a simple event planning tool from micahaustralia.org/climate-petition

One week before the event:

- Send out a media alert to local newspaper and radio. Use the draft media alert in this kit as a template, and edit it to include the specific details of your event.
- Give the contacts for key faith communities, schools and groups a friendly reminder about the event, and confirm how many people they will bring to the event.

- Prepare an event contact list with names and mobile numbers of key organisers, marshals, and first-aid volunteers.

The day before the event:

- Contact local newspaper and radio stations to confirm that they will attend your event. If necessary, send the media alert again.

At the event:

- Make any necessary safety announcements, including road- safety and sun-protection. Ensure that marshals and first-aid volunteers are clearly identified.

- Encourage participants to have fun – perhaps dress up, use banners, perform chants or songs.

- At the start of the gathering, include an acknowledgement of country using something like the following words, "I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people, and pay my respect to elders both past and present." Contact the local council or Aboriginal Land Council if you aren't sure who the traditional owners of the land are.

- Have one or more speakers make short presentations about why they are concerned about climate change and what they want the Government to do.
- Hand over the petition to the MP and ask him/her to have the Petition read into Hansard (the record of proceedings in Parliament) and presented to the House of Representatives Petitions Committee.
- Take lots of high-resolution photos. Action shots and close-ups of people are best. Email these to your MP and tag them on social media.

After the event:

- Send your media release (see below), along with one or two high-resolution photos, to the local newspaper if they were not able to send a journalist and photographer. It is quite possible that they will publish your media release as written – so make sure it says exactly what you want it to say.

- Tell us how it went. Send photos, any media coverage, and a short blurb to info@micahaustralia.org
- If your MP won't receive the petition or won't present it in Parliament:

Mail your petition to:

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

And make sure to let your local media know that your MP chose not to receive your petition.

What Support Will I Receive?

Staff and volunteers from Micah Australia and other involved organisations will act as coaches and mentors for Principal Petitioners and Petition Organisers, providing additional resources and direct support through webinars and personal meetings.

SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT/INVITATION

Community Climate Petition Event in [Place or Group Name]

Local faith communities/schools/groups to present Grassroots Climate Petition at:

[location, time and date of event].

Event details:

- Photo opportunity
- Creative action/performers (if any)
- Names of significant people attending (e.g. MP, mayor, community leaders)

The community petition in [name of electorate] is one of 150 events being organised by groups in every electorate across the country and presented to every Member of Parliament throughout August and September.

For media enquiries or to RSVP, please contact [insert name and mobile phone number of the event's organiser or media contact person here].

SAMPLE POST-EVENT MEDIA RELEASE

Community Climate Petition Action

Local groups have urged [name of Federal MP] to support stronger action on climate change.

Fatih groups, business, schools, community groups and others have presented a community petition to [name of Federal MP], calling on the Federal Parliament to support deeper and more urgent reductions to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions and to increase support for vulnerable communities affected by climate change.

Event organiser, [name], said, "This event and the community petition highlights the deep concern that so many people feel about climate change. The world is taking action to reduce reliance on coal, oil and gas and shift towards clean energy, yet in Australia there is still at the huge gap between what we need to do to respond to climate change and how little we actually are doing."

Event participant, [name], said, "I thought it was important to lend our voice to this community climate petition because we all have to work together to stop climate change getting worse and help communities affected by its impact."

2015 was the hottest year ever recorded and 2016 is on track to be even hotter [update in 2017]. Global temperatures are now more than 1°C hotter than at the end of the 19th Century. Because of global warming and climate change, our neighbours in the Pacific are threatened by more intense cyclones and rising sea levels. Record heat in our oceans led to 93% of the Great Barrier Reef being damaged by bleaching and Tasmania's World Heritage Area was devastated by unprecedented bushfires in just the last year.

Groups involved in gathering signatures for the petition include:

- [list groups]

[Name of MP] has promised to present the petition in Parliament and call for stronger action from the Government.