

# JUSTACT

NEWS & RESOURCES FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION UNIT

APRIL 2018



## VALE JILL RUZBACKY

**The Justice and International Mission Unit mourns the loss of Jill Ruzbacky who died on Sunday night 8 April from complications relating to heart surgery that took place eight months ago. Jill had been in hospital since the surgery.**

Jill was well loved across the Uniting Church and ecumenically.

She joined the JIM Unit in 2008 and her main areas of work involved running the AboutFACE program, campaigning for more humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia, managing the relationship

the Synod has with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and the relationship between the Synod and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

She inspired, encouraged and equipped many, many members of the Uniting Church to pursue social justice.

We remember in prayer her husband Robert, her family and friends who mourn her most deeply and offer them our sympathy.

The best tribute we can offer Jill is to live our lives with the same joy and deep commitment to creating a kinder, more compassionate world. ●

## VIC GOV'T ACTION ON PRICE GOUGING BY ELECTRICITY COMPANIES

In September 2017 we invited you to write letters to the Victorian Government in support of them taking action in response to the findings of an independent review of Victoria's electricity market that found that the electricity corporations were making rip-off profits while vulnerable Victorians struggle to pay their bills.

On 20 March the Essential Services Commission, the regulatory for the Victorian electricity corporations, announced that it would be setting new standards for bills and marketing materials to help people navigate the electricity market more easily.

The problem with such an approach is that the electricity market is that people make decisions in time poor environments by choosing the first option that meets their basic requirements, rather than optimising their choice. This was demonstrated in the comprehensive work by psychologist Gary Klein in his work on how people really make decisions, "*Sources of Power. How People Make Decisions*". His work and that of behavioural economists take Dan Ariely have shown that people do not make the optimal decision based on an assessment of all options, so free markets result in people making sub-optimal decisions and leave room for people to get ripped off and exploited without adequate regulation and safeguards. ●

# UPDATE ON THE JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL MISSION UNIT

**Since the last JustAct, the Justice and International Mission Unit has moved into the Priorities, Focus and Advocacy section of the new equipping Leadership for Ministry (eLM) Unit. It is yet to be decided if the JIM Unit will remain as a separate identity.**

The JIM Unit has moved from the 130 Little Collins Street office to the Centre for Theology and Ministry at 29 College Crescent, Parkville.

**Rev Nigel Hanscamp** is now the manager of the social justice staff. Nigel was the minister at Heathmont Uniting Church and previously (2006-2013) was the Mission Resourcing Director in the Methodist Church in New Zealand.

**Cath James** has departed the JIM Unit after 18 years, making a great contribution to the environmental work of the Synod, as well as working on the issue of combating online child sexual abuse and campaigning for tax justice. Cath also coordinated a

social justice program for Uniting Church schools and was a lead organiser for the annual Synod family camp. In recent years Cath helped to shape and align the JIM Unit's communication, to try and ensure it was more accessible to you as our supporters and that it showed how all the parts of our work fitted into a bigger picture. Not an easy task. The Synod and the JIM Unit wished Cath well for her future endeavours.

After six months with the JIM Unit, **Jenna Mizzi** and **Chris Rummery** finished up as Social Justice Researchers. Jenna only had a contract until the middle of the year, and was offered a two year contract doing community development work in Cambodia with another non-government organisation. Chris decided to take a position in the area of human rights education with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. In their short time with the JIM Unit Jenna and Chris produced a large volume of very valuable research work, notably helping to set the future direction of the JIM Unit's work

on family violence, First People justice and privatisation of human services.

**Denisse Sandoval** returned to the JIM Unit on 10 April and will be working three days a week.

With the number of staff in the JIM Unit reduced from 4.6 to 1.6 currently there will not be the ability to provide the same level of support to congregations and church members in their social justice mission activities. We therefore request your understanding as the Synod restructure is completed. The plan is that there will be three specialist social justice staff in the eLM Unit. In addition, there is an aim is to spread the social justice work across more staff within eLM Unit, but what that will look like is yet to be finalised.

Uniting (the successor to UnitingCare) has established their own social advocacy Unit, which currently has two staff. Staff from both Units are currently in discussion to align their work. •

## FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION UNIT

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All of the resources in this mailing can be found on the JIM website.

If you would like to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to either this hardcopy mailing (bi-monthly) or email update (weekly), contact the JIM Unit on the details above.

# IMPROVEMENTS IN LABOUR CONDITIONS IN THAI SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

**Back in 2013 we requested that you write to a number of Australian seafood buyers to ask that they take steps to ensure product they were buying from Thailand was free of human trafficking and forced labour.**

The JIM Unit has continued to engage with the Australian seafood importer companies and they in turn engaged with the Thai seafood industry and the Thai Government on seeking measures to eradicate these abuses in the Thai seafood industry.

Thailand is the source of 70% of the seafood imported into Australia.

**In great news, the Governments of Australia and Timor Leste have reached an agreement on the sea border between the two countries.**

The JIM Unit has campaigned on this issue for a number of years and most recently requested that you write to the Australian Government in October 2016 asking that it negotiate a just sea border between the two countries. A resolution from a Synod meeting had also supported a just outcome to the setting of the border. This work flowed out of support the Synod had shown towards the Protestant Church of Timor Leste.

The new border is approximately at the mid-point between the

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has released an assessment of working conditions in the fishing and seafood industry in Thailand based on interviews with 434 workers in 2017. On the positive side they found that:

- There had been a decrease in the number of reports of violence against the workers by their employers, with 7% of workers reporting they had been threatened with violence by their employer and 2% were subjected to violence;
- Fewer workers (less than one percent) are under 18 years old; and
- There has been an increase in wages for some of the workers, with 39% of those working on fishing boats now getting a fixed wage rather than a piece rate based on what is caught, which is up from 10% getting a fixed wage in 2013.

On the negative side:

- 34% of workers reported being paid less than the legal minimum wage (before deductions);
- Over half the workers were subjected to deductions from

two countries. Previously the Australian Government had been arguing for a boundary that would have given it almost all the gas deposits under the sea between the two countries.

The outcome will mean greater revenues for the Timor Leste Government to spend on schools, health clinics and other social needs for the people of Timor Leste. It is expected that the Timor Leste Government will get an extra \$8 billion to spend over the next 35 years. Currently the Government of Timor Leste derives 85% of its revenue from oil and gas sales.

On signing the new treaty setting the border, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie

their wages by the employer, with up to a third of the deductions being for things the employer should cover, such as accommodation, required clothing and safety gloves. In a few cases deductions were used as a punishment against workers;

- 24% of those working on fishing boats reported that their pay had been withheld by boat owners, some for 12 months or more, which was an increase from 12% of workers reporting this form of exploitation in 2013;
- Over 40% of workers in seafood processing plants are required to work seven days a week;
- 34% of workers reported that they did not have access to their identity documents, which is an indicator for forced labour.

The JIM Unit will continue to resource you to take action to seek decent jobs for all working people, including in the Thai seafood industry.

Thank you to everyone who has taken actions so far to see the eradication of human trafficking, slavery and forced labour. •

## AUSTRALIA AND TIMOR LESTE SETTLE SEA BOUNDARY

Bishop, said: "Australia has an enduring interest in a stable and prosperous Timor Leste."

The treaty setting the border is yet to be ratified by the two governments, but there is no reason to assume this will not just be a matter of time.

Thank you to everyone who took action in support of this outcome. •

# COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT PASSES BILL TO REIN IN ONLINE GAMBLING ADVERTISING

**In April 2017 we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government on eliminating gambling advertising for online sports betting corporations.**

Research has shown that such advertising increases the harm gambling causes by getting people already harmed by gambling to bet more than they otherwise would and it normalise the association between sport and gambling for children.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation reported that half of all adolescents have high levels of exposure to sports betting marketing. Further they reported:

- About one in five children can identify three or more sports betting brands;
- Over two-thirds of children aged 8 to 16 can recall the name of at least one sports betting brand;
- Around one in ten young people gamble online in a year;
- 60% of teenagers who had gambled illegally had done so online;
- 15% of Australian adolescents had engaged with betting operators on social media;
- A 2015 study found that 42% of adolescents had seen promotions of gambling on social media and around one in ten reported that social media promotions had increased how much they gambled;

- About one young person in every 25 has a problem with gambling; and
- One in five adults with gambling problems started gambling before they were 18.

In March the Commonwealth Parliament passed legislation to give the Australian Media and Communication Authority the ability to restrict advertising by online gambling corporations, which is a step forward. Around the same time the peak television and radio bodies released codes which largely ban gambling advertisements during sporting events between 5 am and 8:30 pm. However, this still means children and people who have trouble controlling their gambling will be subjected to gambling advertising if a sporting event runs beyond 8:30 pm, and many do.

The JIM Unit will continue to provide you with further opportunities to take action in support of the eradication of gambling advertising.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in support of the ban on gambling advertising. ●

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**Return to Centre for Theology & Ministry, 29 College Crescent, Parkville Victoria 3052**

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