



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

We have a stark choice: protect the global commons or give in to special interests

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Few papal proclamations have reverberated more strongly throughout the world than Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*. The anniversary of this clarion call to protect the environment comes as Australia's election is in full swing and, in terms of its message, the contrast could not be greater.

Released exactly a year ago, the encyclical was part of a deluge of statements from the major faith traditions in the leadup to the Paris climate agreement.

Today diverse Australian religious leaders note that Australia was a signatory to that historic agreement, but they ask: where are the policies to match?

In an open letter, they say the tragic bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef should be a wake-up call, yet new coalmines were approved within weeks of the Paris agreement. The harsh reality is that both sides of politics are committed to the continuation of coal and gas mining.

The realities of global warming are being felt more painfully by the year. Polls show there is strong electoral support for climate action and now Australia has international obligations. In the meantime, our national emissions keep rising and climate policy scarcely rates a mention in election debates.

We know why. Both sides of politics have overly close relationships with the fossil fuel industry, and this has a profoundly distorting effect on our democracy. The common good is being sacrificed for political self-interest.

We have a stark choice before us concerning the future of the planet and its peoples. On one side there are civil society, innovators in low-carbon technologies and socially responsible investors. These are working for a transformation of our economies which will protect our life-sustaining ecosystems.

On the other side is sheer inertia, our collective addiction to fossil fuels and industries which are fixated on continuing as usual, regardless of the long-term costs to people and the environment. They have used their wealth to gain political influence and fund climate skepticism and denialism. As Pope Francis says in paragraph 54, "There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected."

At the coming election, the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change calls on political leaders to rise above self-interest, and voters to let their voices be heard for the well-being of the planet and future generations. The protection of the global commons must be our highest priority.

The need for action can no longer be postponed. Australia needs to urgently transition the economy away from fossil fuels to one which is broadly based, innovative and sustainable. We need to declare a moratorium on any new coal, oil or gas mining and expansions of existing mines. It is time to end subsidies and assistance to fossil fuel industries.

We need commitments to large scale renewables projects and incentives for citizens to rapidly escalate the take-up of renewable energy. A rapid transition would not only meet our environmental responsibilities, it would also contribute to a stronger economy now that mining is in structural decline. Renewables are now cheaper than fossil fuels and they create many more jobs.

We need restructuring plans to ensure mining communities are not left behind as Australia transitions from a fossil fuel-based economy to one powered by renewable energy.

Finally, Australia should restore trust internationally by contributing new money, not money from the overseas aid budget, to Climate Finance for developing countries. We are a relatively wealthy nation so we have the capacity.

Pope Francis drew the world's attention to the "urgent challenge to protect our common home" (para. 13). Leaders of the various faith traditions are speaking with one voice: now is the time to act!

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