



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

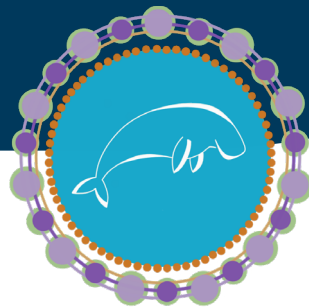
A FLOURISHING *Creation:*

Queensland Synod Action and
Advocacy Plan to 2030
Final Report



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the sovereign First Peoples of the lands and waters where we live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to all descendants of these nations who have cared for this place since creation.

We commit to learn from, work with and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of caring for country, to build a brighter, greener future together.

The following plan has been developed through consultation with many groups and individuals across the life of the Synod.

The Working Group members who authored this report are Rev Dr Adam McIntosh (Convenor – Associate Director of Mission: Pastoral Care, UnitingCare Qld), Simone Elias (Environmental Sustainability Advisor, UnitingCare Qld), Lea Kingdon (Strategic Change Manager, Queensland Synod), Natalie Clements (Disability Royal Commission Project Officer and Social Justice & Advocacy Strategy, Queensland Synod), and Rebecca Riggs (Communications Manager, Queensland Synod).

There were numerous others who provided input at different stages of the development process; the consultation process included feedback from a range of representatives across the life of the Synod including congregations, First Nations Peoples, Presbyteries, UnitingCare, Schools, and Wesley Mission Queensland. Consultation forums were held online and at Presbytery meetings. The paper was distributed across the Synod, with written feedback received from a range of people across the life of the church. This wide ranging feedback has been incorporated into this Final Report for consideration at the 2022 Synod meeting.

Endorsement of this paper is intended as the first step by the Transforming Communities - Environment and Sustainability working group to deliver initiative T12 of the Shared life, flourishing communities *Progress Report*, to: “Develop and promote a care for creation Position Statement and Action Plan”.

Thank you

Special thanks to ZoeBK for creating the beautiful artwork throughout this document. Zoe is a proud young Koa, Wakka Wakka person who is one of many within her family who speak their truth through art. Zoe has a strong faith and a hope that her generation will continue to act for change, so that her children and grannies will enjoy the fullness of beauty and bounty this country has to offer us.

Introduction and background

In these times the environment is in the headlines, on the political agenda, part of business plans, in our school curriculums, and in conversations in the cafés, pubs, and dining room tables from Weipa to Woolloongabba. Some of us receive our livelihoods directly from the environment. All of us receive the benefits of our environment. It is in our stories as office workers, farmers, scientists, miners, tradies, teachers, First Peoples, Second Peoples, mums, dads, brothers, sisters and everyone in between. We all have different perspectives and practices about the environment. The environment matters to us all. We all know that caring for and stewarding our environment is a good thing. The significant question is, how do we do this well? How can our environment, God's creation, flourish in a way that is good for all?

It is in this context that environmental sustainability emerged as a key commitment discerned during the Plenty engagement process throughout the Queensland Synod. It is a core part of the Shared life, flourishing communities strategic vision. This commitment has been central in the Uniting Church since it began, with the Statement to the Nation in June 1977 urging the “wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources”.

The church continues to be called to participate in God's mission, by standing up for what is fair, just, and right for the sake of the whole of creation. In the context of environmental sustainability, this means contributing to a future in which we all work more closely with the regenerative cycles of creation and enjoy a greener, fairer, healthier future for all.

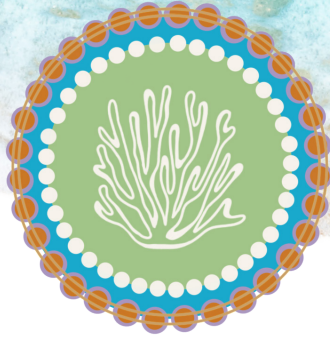
The Queensland Synod has adopted various environmental sustainability initiatives since the Statement to the Nation, including The Queensland Synod Energy Management Policy (2012). The national Assembly has also adopted relevant resolutions on environmental sustainability which called for:

- the Commonwealth Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol
- Uniting Church members to adopt “lifestyles which have a minimal impact on global warming”
- the Commonwealth Government to increase support for renewable energy
- Uniting Church bodies and members to advocate that the government implement policies and actions to address climate change, and
- Uniting Church bodies and members to set meaningful targets to reduce our contribution to climate change.

This Final Report outlines many ways of building on our call to care for God's creation and renews the Queensland Synod's commitment to prioritise environmental sustainability with an action plan to 2030. We recognise that each part of the Synod will engage the plan in different ways.

Every action that is made, over a long period of time, can make a difference.

Our accumulated actions can make a difference.



Theological statement

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him” (Colossians 1: 15-16).

The Queensland Synod seeks to witness to the goodness of God’s creation and to the beginning of a new creation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, through embodying the servanthood of Christ, who is the image of God (Colossians 1: 15). All of creation is loved by God and has intrinsic value. God’s mission in Christ through the Spirit is for the renewal of the whole of creation. As Jesus taught his disciples: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight” (Luke 12.6). This represents a vision for a flourishing creation, in which human beings live in communion with, and stewardship of the natural environment. The *Basis of Union* describes our hope as grounded in the resurrection of Christ in which the Church is called to witness to ‘a new order of righteousness and love.’

We are facing an urgent ecological challenge and there is clear scientific evidence of climate change and its environmental, social and economic implications. This groaning of creation is the consequence of domination, destruction, and exploitation by human beings. We lament our direct and indirect contribution to this. Too often we have forgotten that we are part of creation, dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7), and to dust all return (Ecclesiastes 3:20). In our acts of stewardship, in the image of the servanthood of Jesus and the communion of the Trinity, we are called to live in sustainable ways, caring for and living in community with the natural environment for present and future generations.

First Nation Peoples of Australia have long understood how to live in harmony with creation, using Songlines as a cultural code for the passing on of wisdom from the beginning of Dreaming. In the response to the Covenant Statement at the 1994 Assembly, Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, representing the First Nation Peoples of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), said the following:

“When God created the heavens and the earth He gave humankind his habitation and placed him within his bounds. When He did this He gave humankind stewardship over the bounds of

his habitation. We are also told in the Bible that when God had finished creating it was good ... Our laws were developed by our relationship with the land and our intricate system of inter-tribal government.”

To be in relationship with God is to be in a reciprocal relationship with lands, seas and each other. This includes acting in ways that sustain and promote the natural environment for future generations and all of our neighbours, especially our Pacific and Asian neighbours, who are experiencing the impacts of climate change. What happens to the lands and the sea effects the whole of creation. We are part of an interconnected whole. When creation moans, we are diminished. We must take up our responsibility to honour the balance and harmony of the natural environment through servanthood and interconnectedness, awe and wonder.

Through love of God, neighbour and Earth, we participate in God's mission of the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation, inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ. “The Uniting Church in Australia believes the whole world is God’s good creation. Each person is made in God’s image and is deeply loved by God. In Jesus, God is completing the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.”ⁱⁱ Our actions are shaped by this vision and hope of reconciliation and the renewal of the whole creation. “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it. I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43: 19). This “new thing” that God is doing is central to the mission of the Church. “God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation” (*Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3).

Creation makes known and declares the glory of God and is a source of awe, wonder and joy. The Earth itself bears witness to the glory of God and the Lordship of Christ (Luke 19: 38–40). During the traditional communion service, we say, “with choirs of angels, and the whole creation” that Heaven and Earth are full of God’s glory. “Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.” (Psalm 148: 3–5). Human proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is alongside the proclamation of the natural environment. The Earth bears witness to human beings of the glory of God the creator and bears witness to God’s reconciling and renewing love.

The whole of creation is joined together in relationship through Christ. “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1: 3–5). This interdependence and interconnectedness are the heart of our witness as the church. “The Uniting Church believes that God calls us into a particular relationship with the rest of creation, a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God.”ⁱⁱⁱ In our life as the church, we have a calling to embody a particular witness in the world to be in deep communion with the rest of creation.

We renew our commitment to our care for all creation, to walk together with First Nation Peoples in order that we listen, learn, build friendship, and give of love for all that God has made and First Nation Peoples have cared for as custodians of our vast country.





Principles

In our social witness as the church, we affirm the following key principles for our collective life together across the Synod. These principles give expression to the core belief, in the tradition of First Nation Peoples of Australia, that to be in relationship with God is to be in a reciprocal relationship with lands, seas and each other. They also emphasise a holistic approach to the Synod’s response to care for creation. The principles provide a framework for guiding our decision-making, and for prioritising our resources and actions. They are aimed to assist the Synod as we move forward in progressing the church’s strong commitment to taking action, supporting our people to give expression to their discipleship through choosing sustainable practices and in advocating for social changes.

Hope: In the face of great challenges and uncertainty, we respond with hope.

We are people of hope—a belief that God’s mission is for the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation. Hope enables us to imagine new possibilities and empowers actions resulting in a new future. This does not deny the experience of suffering of all kinds and our lament of the current groaning cries of creation. While still bearing witness to our current reality, we will stay focused on the hope for a future flourishing with all creation and let this guide our actions and advocacy.

Spiritual: We promote a spirituality that cultivates a joyful connection, awe and wonder, and passionate concern for and connection with the natural environment, grounded in a belief that the “earth is the Lord’s and all that is within it” (Psalm 24: 1).

Care for creation is not seen as a burden or sacrifice, but as a deep spiritual and cultural response that enhances our own flourishing and wellbeing. Spirituality, grounded in the convictions of our faith in God as creator, reconciler and redeemer, can motivate us personally and collectively to a deep connection with the natural environment that results in a flourishing natural environment for future generations. In doing so, we can learn from the long tradition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Their wisdom will be a rich resource to guide our practices as a Synod and we must make time to listen and walk together.

Equitable Transition: For rural farming and mining communities that are experiencing economic transitions, we commit to supporting and being with them in advocating for transitions that are equitable and build sustainable local communities.

The Uniting Church has deep roots in regional, rural, and remote communities, many of which are engaged in carbon emitting industries such as agriculture and mining. We recognise the commitment in these places to bring abundant life to their communities, together with an economically and environmentally sustainable future for Australia. Many communities are also feeling the impacts of climate change through extended drought, prolonged fire seasons, higher summer temperatures and increased storminess.^v We will listen, support and advocate for our rural farming and mining communities that are in transition to develop and implement long-term, sustainable and equitable transition plans.

Structural Interconnectedness: We understand and advocate for the interconnection of health, social and environmental outcomes and impacts, and commit to actions that address this interdependence.

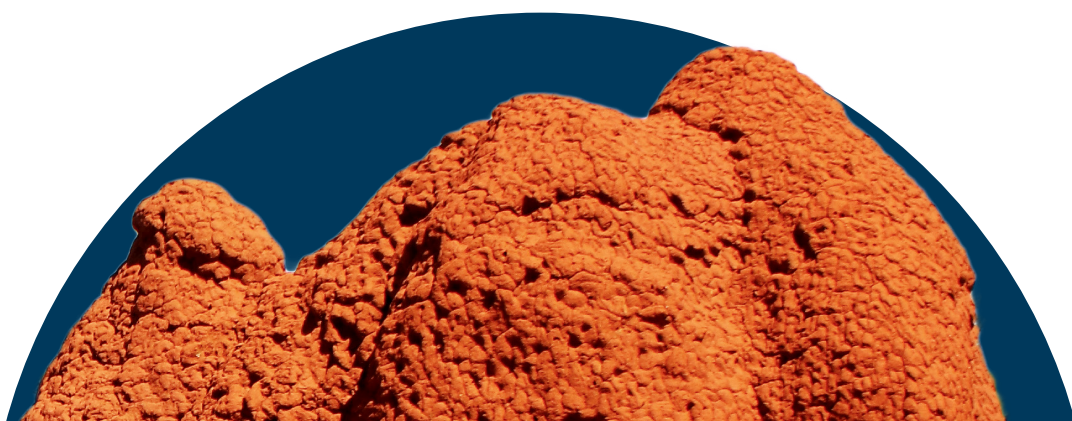
We recognise that acting to renew God's creation is a powerful opportunity to improve human health, well-being, livelihoods, social systems and justice, for both present and future generations. For example, measures such as clean energy, public transport, active transport (riding and walking) and increasing green spaces deliver significant physical and mental health benefits, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. It is also acknowledged that climate change disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable people.^{vi} Advocacy and action to address climate change will therefore prioritise policies and measures that support vulnerable people.

Collaboration: We commit to a collaborative approach in our vision for a flourishing creation: sharing resources, working together and modelling collective solutions.

The causes of, and responses to human-induced climate change and environmental degradation are many and complex and we recognise that no single person, organisation or country holds the whole solution. We will take approaches that invite a model of collective organisational resource participation, working together in local communities and supporting the work of partner churches.

Healing: We commit to a ministry of healing in our relationships in communities, to land and to God.

A flourishing creation requires the healing and reconciliation of broken relationships. These relationships take many forms. Some communities in regional and remote areas have experienced broken relationships over issues related to care for the environment and competing demands for limited natural resources. The church has an opportunity to commit to a ministry that creates spaces for reconciliation and healing in light of God's reconciling mission.





Action and advocacy plan:

opportunities and priorities

We recognise the importance of localised action and solutions, that think globally and act locally. As such, we commit to implementing a 2030 Action and Advocacy Plan that encourages, supports and equips our congregations, individuals, schools, agencies and communities to make positive changes, that address impacts and opportunities within their direct sphere of influence.

We recognise too, that sharing information, integrating efforts, and connecting those who work locally can create change that is felt nationally and globally. It is important that these initiatives are also incorporated into the personal actions of our members and staff. Change in every area of life is required to make a substantial and sustainable difference. For members of our church, this is an expression of their discipleship.

While many of our sustainability opportunities have low or no financial cost, we acknowledge that some actions—such as installing solar panels—may have a higher short-term cost. However, we commit to taking a long-term view in our prioritisation decisions, for the sake of love of God's creation, our role as stewards and our responsibility to future generations. Through this long-term lens, we recognise that investment in sustainability initiatives can support good financial stewardship through reduced operating costs. Furthermore, we recognise that there are significant costs—in terms of financial, social, physical and mental health—of inaction.^{vii}

In responding to the environmental challenges and opportunities in our communities, we have identified six themes to focus our actions and advocacy efforts up to 2030.

A 'commitment' and 'pathway' is outlined under each of the six action themes. This plan proposes that these **commitments** will act as shared goals that unite the environmental sustainability hopes of all congregations, presbyteries, agencies, and schools. But, we recognise that the way forward to achieving these commitments will look different across the life of the church. Thus, the **pathways** suggest a menu of options to empower all parts of the church to contribute to a flourishing creation in ways that are meaningful and feasible for them.



EMPOWERED PEOPLE AND CONNECTION

Commitment: Encourage and support individuals and groups among our congregations, presbyteries, schools and agencies to connect with creation, take action to support a flourishing creation and leverage the health and social benefits of improved environmental outcomes.

Pathway

- Promote resources and opportunities for individuals and households to explore and celebrate ways to live differently that supports the healing of creation
- Create community food gardens at our congregations to foster connections with nature, promote health and social outcomes, and develop community
- Encourage group meditation and prayer practices in nature
- Establish a voluntary pledge program to encourage congregations, households, schools and agencies, to commit to local actions that are important to their community

- Share stories of successful initiatives implemented by our Uniting Church community
- Build relationships with other communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and learn from the environmental sustainability initiatives of other groups
- Encourage congregations and groups within the Synod to participate in other local groups' initiatives in caring for the local environment (e.g. bushcare, repair cafes)
- Establish a forum for young people's action and advocacy including Covenanting with First Nation Peoples
- Encourage employees of Uniting Church entities to dedicate a day each year to contribute to this Action Plan in some way
- Support worshipping communities with liturgical resources related to "Caring for Creation", such as Seasons of Creation (September).

MOBILITY

Commitment: Support climate-friendly and healthy mobility options.

Pathway

- Post timetables for public transport and schedule worship services to suit local transport timetables
- Provide bicycle access and parking
- Set up a carpooling or car-sharing system
- Install charging points for electric vehicles
- Establish incentives for leaders to take up electric vehicles, modelling the way
- Incorporate remote meeting practices into everyday activities
- Advocate for active transport facilities in local communities.

ENERGY

Commitment: Use energy efficiently and source from clean energy providers, focusing on a target of 70 per cent greenhouse emissions reduction by 2030, with a further aim of net zero by 2040, in line with targets set by the National Assembly.^{viii}

Pathway

- Support and resource congregations and households with ways to monitor and reduce energy consumption
- Purchase appliances with a minimum 5-star energy efficiency rating
- Install solar panels and battery storage at facilities, where possible
- Purchase electricity from large-scale renewable energy projects
- Switch as much energy-using activities to electricity (e.g. hot water, cooking).

WATER

Commitment: Be good stewards of water through acts of conservation and protection.

Pathway

- Purchase appliances with a minimum 5-star water efficiency rating
- Install low-flow taps, shower heads and toilets
- Use native drought-tolerant plant species in landscaping projects
- Install rainwater and/or stormwater collection systems at facilities, where possible
- Host or participate in clean-up events to prevent litter pollution in waterways
- Establish process for measuring and monitoring water usage
- Set targets for water use reduction.

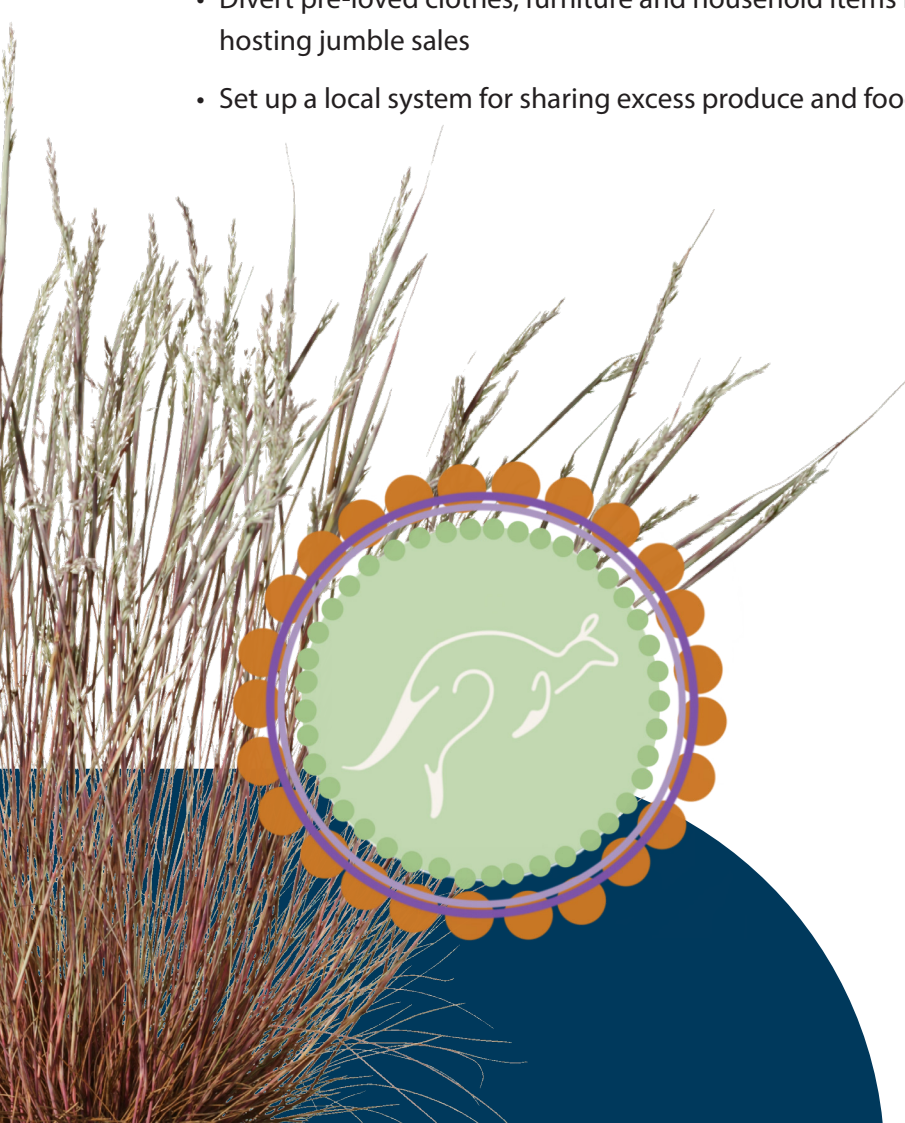


REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Commitment: Reduce our demand on Earth's resources and generation of waste by supporting the transition to a circular economy.

Pathway

- Organise exchange circles that bring people together, help to save money and reduce consumption and waste
- Foster a "sharing economy" through the establishment of community tool libraries
- Establish community recycling points at our facilities for recovering specialist recyclable items (e.g. batteries, oral care packaging)
- Adopt a "digital first" approach for meeting materials, forms, etc.
- Equip our facilities with reusable foodware and phase out single-use items (e.g. cups, cutlery, plates)
- Establish onsite food composting or worm farms in conjunction with community food gardens
- Install community native beehives
- Divert pre-loved clothes, furniture and household items from landfill by donating to op shops or hosting jumble sales
- Set up a local system for sharing excess produce and food.





ADVOCACY

Commitment: Develop an Advocacy Plan that enables us to leverage our collective wisdom to contribute and influence the direction of economic and ecological issues, as well as the interconnection of health, social and environmental outcomes in our communities and beyond.

Pathway

- For rural farming and mining communities that are experiencing economic transitions, advocate for transitions that are equitable and build sustainable local communities
- Advocate for stronger government action on climate change
- Speak out about the impacts of climate change—and opportunities of climate action—on vulnerable groups in relation to social, economic and health outcomes and impacts
- Amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in their calls for greater efforts to heal country
- Amplify and support the environmental advocacy efforts of young people in our communities
- Align external communication of Synod’s environmental sustainability efforts with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals
- Accelerate progress towards an environmentally sustainable future through collective advocacy, such as inter-organisational and cross-sectoral climate action and advocacy networks like the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC)
- Encourage ministers and congregational leaders to preach and teach in relation to climate change
- Embed eco-theology in theological teachings, for example through short courses and degree level subjects at Trinity College Queensland.



Next Steps

To achieve this advocacy and action plan to 2030 requires resourcing, encouraging and supporting the different parts of the Synod to engage this plan. It also requires collaboration by building on the knowledge and resources of different parts of the Synod and the wider community. This is a long term plan taking the Synod to the year 2030.



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- ⁱⁱⁱ Uniting Church in Australia (2018), [For the Whole Creation](#)
- ^{iv} United Nations Global Compact (2021) [An Empowering Narrative and Call for Health Resilient Climate Action](#)
- ^v Department of Environment and Science (2021), [State of the Environment 2020](#)
- ^{vi} Department of Economic & Social Affairs (2017) [Climate Change and Social Inequality](#)
- ^{vii} Deloitte (2020), [A new choice: Australia's climate for growth](#)
- ^{viii} Based on (incomplete) FY19 energy and emissions reporting data from Synod, schools, Wesley Mission Queensland and UnitingCare, it is conservatively assumed that at least 70 per cent of our carbon footprint is attributable to electricity usage. Therefore, it is feasible to deliver on a 70 per cent emissions reduction commitment by moving to 100 per cent renewable electricity (through installing solar panels and purchasing remaining electricity from large-scale offsite renewable generators).

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