

# METHODIST CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND - TE HĀHI WETERIANA O AOTEAROA

## Climate Justice Background Information

Prepared by the Public Issues Working Group updated Feb. 2020



Climate Justice Workshop led by Lusía Taloafulu at Tauíwi Youth gathering February 2020

### Climate Change

Our Earth's atmosphere is made up of greenhouse gases which keep the temperature of the earth stable enough to support life on earth as we know it. Greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide and methane, trap some of the radiation and heat from the sun and, acting like a blanket, hold the atmosphere of the earth in a stable state. Without them, too much heat would escape and the surface of the earth would freeze. The ozone layer is part of this atmospheric blanket and filters ultra-violet radiation, which is toxic to humans and crops if not sufficiently filtered.

The temperature of the earth has been stable within a 2 degrees range for 10,000 years and has made life on earth and the development of settled civilizations possible. In the last 150 years or so human activities from industrial development have caused pollution from burning fossil fuels, from land-use changes like deforestation, and the growth of the human population has intensified impacts bringing a dramatic rise in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Higher temperatures from industrial gas emissions and pollution are causing the Earth's climate to change.

The industrial activities of our modern civilization have raised atmospheric carbon dioxide levels from 280 parts per million to 400 parts per million in the last 150 years. The IPCC (international Panel on Climate Change) are intensifying their warnings of the ecological destabilization of the climate from the growing concentrations of greenhouse gases – mainly carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) stays in the atmosphere for over a thousand years; methane stays for a shorter time of 15-20 years.

The nations of the world have made some progress in their commitment to tackling climate change. In 2015 the global community entered into The Paris Agreement to make the commitment to reduce emissions and hold atmospheric warming to 2 degrees and if possible 1.5 degrees. But when aggregated recently at the 2019 Conference, the commitments of the nations are insufficient to keep the rise in global temperatures to below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels.

### Climate Change in Aotearoa New Zealand

New Zealand 's commitment for the Paris Agreement is to cut our greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030.

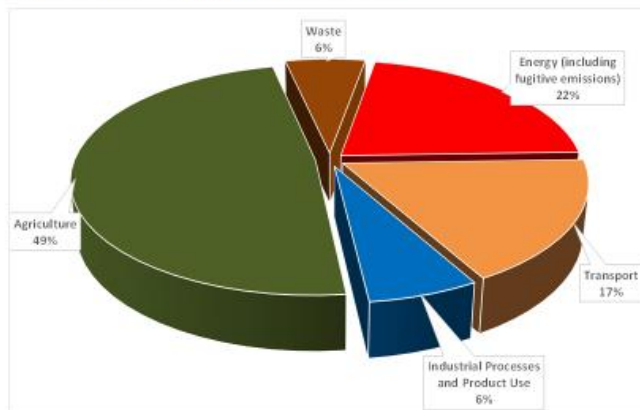
“If most other countries were to follow New Zealand’s approach, global warming would exceed 3-4 degrees C, a world that would see oceans acidify, coral reefs dissolving, sea levels rising rapidly, and more than 40% species extinction,” says Bill Hare, CEO and Senior Scientist at Climate Analytics, one of the science partners in Climate Action Tracker.

Our greenhouse gas emissions are rising not falling. The key causes are a failure of government, business and wider society to devise and implement effective policies, strategies and responses.

New Zealand policy makers face some challenges with an unusual emissions profile by comparison with other developed countries: we have a high renewable energy profile from hydro-electricity, at the same time we have high numbers of cars per person, and very high emissions from agriculture with almost 50 per cent of emissions coming from non-CO2 gases, principally methane and nitrous oxide from livestock agriculture (Fig.1). Globally, agriculture is one of the biggest sources of emissions – with animal production and fertilizers contributing to long-lived CO2 and the shorter-lived and more potent methane and nitrous oxide. Alongside emissions is high use of water and degraded waterways. So the call to eat more plant-based food is to reduce the effects of animal-based agriculture.

**Figure 1: New Zealand Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2013**

Note that agriculture accounts for half of NZ's emissions. The share of agriculture would increase further if other sectors mitigate their emissions strongly



Source: MFE (2015)

New Zealand has been slow to develop effective climate change policy, but things are changing. In 2018 the Labour-NZ First-Green coalition government announced there will be no new fossil fuel exploration, and in 2019 passed the Zero Carbon Act, and the Climate Commission now begins the task of setting emissions reduction budgets, and the policies and progress towards meeting them.

There is a clear shift in the business community with an increasing number of companies large and small adopting emissions reduction strategies. There are strong signs of climate change responses in civil society, especially from students and youth organizations.

New Zealand’s response to climate change will lead to very substantial changes the nature of our economy and society over the coming years. The Productivity Commission offers a sense of the enormity of the changes in this quote from its first Issues Paper August 2017:

“...the shift from the old economy to a new, low-emissions economy will be profound and widespread, transforming land use, the energy system, production methods and technology, regulatory frameworks and institutions, and business and political culture.”

## Climate Justice and the Church

The science has led to much broader concerns from theologians and religious leaders, educators, business people and legal thinkers. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si* said, "If we damage the environment we damage the poor". He also said, "There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation." The poor will be least able to protect themselves against severe impacts because their land and crops are most at risk, and because of having fewer financial resources. Climate justice means including social issues in climate change actions and policy.

The Methodist Church has begun the journey. MTA has stopped investments in fossil fuels. We are involved in an ecumenical Churches Climate network, the 2018 Conference passed a policy on Climate Justice and now we are taking the next step of looking at our activities as a church and how to make changes to lower emissions from our operations and activities – what we eat, what we buy, services we use, our travel and our buildings.

Climate change brings to the fore our global and regional interdependence. Pacific Island nations are at the forefront of the effects of climate destabilization and have alerted the world to responsible transitions in energy, agriculture and transport from industrial and developing economies. As a Pacific nation Aotearoa NZ has a particular role in collaborating with Pacific nations and supporting a 1.5 degree goal.

One of the issues of climate justice for the church and wider society is relocation of many Pacific Island peoples. While the first imperative is to reverse the warming of the atmosphere with a goal of no more than 1.5 degrees, the trajectory of warming is already in place. Policy for climate relocation is an area for attention by the church, recognizing the need to retain the identity, languages, culture and spirituality of peoples threatened with displacement.

## Methodist Church Vision

The Methodist Church Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa envisions a world of people where their societies are oriented to living in harmony with the environment and where natural ecosystems flourish.

Our climate justice vision recognizes that all forms of life are interconnected and that caring for the earth goes hand in hand with working for social equity. This means fair distribution of resources so that all people can meet their needs for wellbeing and social participation. Climate justice means we work with cooperation and dialogue to undertake action for the common good for the present and for generations to come.

We have an obligation to care for vulnerable and climate displaced people, particularly Pacific Island Peoples.

We seek practices of living well with the earth and replace pollution producing life styles with values of community building, interdependence and accountability for our use of resources.

Together as people of the Methodist Church in Aotearoa NZ, we recognize earth is our common home and we will embark on transition pathways to bring the church into alignment with a zero-carbon goal by 2030 in its operations, the management of its property and assets, and in activities both individually and collectively.

## Strategy

1. Convene a Climate Justice Council with representatives of church bodies, and resources to enable the Council to meet regularly.

The Council will have a co-ordinating role to give coherence and oversight to the policy as a whole, working with Te Tahī Māori and alongside Synods, plus Methodist Trust Association, and Methodist Church Property Committee, Trinity College, Women's Fellowship, Airedale Property Trust and the Methodist Alliance.

2. By Conference 2020 each body of the church is asked to have in place a dedicated climate justice representative/enabler /facilitator.
3. Consultation with each of the entities will enable practical policy in each sector of the church to be developed, with a view to achieving an integrated approach. For example, the Responsible Investment policy will be considered for alignment with the framework of climate justice. Such plans can be living documents and can be expanded as commitment and information grows.
4. Each entity of the church is asked to share their actions, initiatives and challenges they face with Conference.
5. Actions for climate justice are multifaceted, and include “worship”, “Information, Education and Social Care”, “Procurement and Purchasing”, “Energy Use”, “Transport” and “Waste Reduction and Management”.
6. Develop links with Pacific Island communities in the Pacific; For example:
  - i. Church teaching and education on climate change that links Aotearoa NZ with Pacific Island nations
  - ii. Attention to migration for Pacific Island communities in response to climate change
  - iii. In worship, share what is happening in Pacific communities from Pacific viewpoints
7. Support media communications within parishes, synods or Connexion.
8. A monitoring procedure prepared to track the progress in achieving this vision over time.

Guidelines for Processes and Actions include:

#### ***Joining with others***

Joining with others enables us to achieve focus and actions together. Working together enables us to share information and encourage focus, resolve and capacity for sharing skills and the varied contributions of all.

#### ***Long-term***

Taking account of immediate and long term effects of actions as far as these can be assessed. Risks of unforeseen consequences, both beneficial and harmful can be better addressed with indigenous knowledge and scientific research based on an ethics of living well with the earth. Decisions to address shorter-term priorities must align with long-term *responsibility* for the earth and generations to come

#### ***Decision Making***

Decision-making will benefit from including church interests and wider public interests in justice. All institutions must be accountable for public good and for earth’s ecological well-being.

#### ***Diversity***

Our Common Home benefits from indigenous knowledge and diverse cultures. Different traditions bring richness to church life, theology and policy. Gender diversity is vital in care for Common Home

#### ***Integrated Approach and Policy***

The church will endeavour to establish an integrated approach to climate justice so that this becomes a cross-cutting priority woven into all areas of church life: governance, policy, worship, use of land, property decisions, Christian education and with ventures associated with churches such as preschools.

#### ***Technology***

Solutions based on technology can incline us towards continuing development patterns without due limits. For all its benefits and social possibilities technology can dominate the drive for solutions to climate change and overlook the fundamental approach living in harmony with nature, as part of the whole community of life.