

Ethics and environment closely linked” – Anglican bishops call for action on climate change

Anglican bishops in New Zealand and Fiji have added their voices to the growing call to developed nations to make serious attempts to tackle the threat of climate change.

The bishops’ issued the following statement in early April 2006 following a conference in Wellington titled Climate Change and Governance.

Climate change is a real and present danger to the future of this planet and the survival of the species. We welcome the recent conference on Climate Change and Governance as one opportunity for the thinking that needs to be done about the relationship between science and policy. We do this because of our belief about the care of God’s creation and the sacred integrity of the earth.

We wish to affirm this church's support for the exploration and cross party development of policy measures to that seek to address, contain and limit the extent and impact of climate change. We believe this development needs to explore both containment and reduction strategies, and that all parties must work together on reducing climate change in recognition that this is a long term problem affecting us all, and solutions cannot afford to be compromised by the electoral cycle.

We emphasise the important role local governments and local communities play in addressing climate change, and emphasise this church's commitment to creating and cooperating with initiatives at a local level that seek to contain and reduce the impact of climate change and our part in it as human beings.

We are a part of our environment, and have the power to change it for good or ill. Our country and all that is in it needs to be managed and cared for, to prevent any plundering of our ecological base. Ethics and the environment are closely linked. Therefore, we are opposed to political and economic initiatives which would further contribute negatively to climate change and the needless destruction of our environment. We wish, with many others across our nation, to help build solutions to the crisis that humanity has created for itself.

As bishops, we are now committed to commending a policy of carbon neutrality, and for the sake of us all we call upon governments, local governments, businesses and faith communities to work together in this important area to both contain and reduce climate change.

The statement was signed by Archbishop Whakahuihui Vercoe and 16 bishops, including Bishop Richard Randerson who was formerly assistant bishop of our diocese.

One of the bishops who signed the statement, The Rt Rev David Moxon, Bishop of Waikato, acknowledges that some people may question whether Christian leaders should involve themselves with such issues.

But Bishop Moxon is convinced that there is a clear and inescapable obligation for Christians to speak out on issues affecting our natural world. “God’s world,” he said, “needs God’s people to act for the redeeming of God’s creation.”

The Social Justice Commissioner for the New Zealand Anglican Church, the Rev. Dr Anthony Dancer, endorsed the bishop’s statement.

“At Easter,” Dr Dancer said, “Christians recall that through Christ the whole of creation is reconciled or restored to God, and that this places a moral or ethical imperative upon us. To continue to live in a relationship to creation which is distorted, to subject ourselves to all manner of structures and systems which cause us to utilize the planet in a way which destroys it, is completely contrary to the Gospel.”

“At the very least,” Dr Dancer said, “we’re called to be good stewards of that which is given to us. Committing ourselves to carbon neutrality – managing and offsetting our carbon emissions – is an important first step for the Church to take.

“The reality of climate change is without dispute. It’s a reality that we cannot afford to ignore.

“The time to act has been with us for some time,” he said, “We need to make brave decisions, bold decisions, and be willing to stick our necks out.”

Dr Dancer is the head of the New Zealand church’s Social Justice Commission which seeks to encourage all Christians to think and live justly, and encourages debate and action on local, national and global issues.

The Social Justice Commission’s website (www.justice.anglican.org.nz) is worth a look. It provides more detail on climate change and a range of other social justice issues.