

## PEACE SESSION YEARLY MEETING 2023

### **Notes on Session held from 11.15am to 12.45pm on Tuesday 4 July 2023**

*The session was held on-line via zoom. It was clerked by Julian Robertson, with note-taker David Purnell and zoom host Gerry Fahey. There were 55 Friends present.*

After a welcome and acknowledgement of country, the meeting held silence for several minutes. Then a series of short presentations was made as follows:

1. **Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee (QPLC).** David Purnell (CRQ) outlined the role of QPLC in monitoring international and national legislation and government policies to keep Friends informed of issues of concern. He highlighted its current focus on the dangerous trends in the arms race, the decline of diplomacy, and the commitment to offensive strategies and threats. He gave examples of the briefing papers issued by the committee in recent months, on subjects including the militarization of foreign policy, the increase in anti-protest laws, the nuclear weapons ban treaty, the plight of Julian Assange, refugees, and the age of criminal responsibility. The committee has applied to the Jan de Voogd Fund for employing a part-time peace worker to develop contacts with MPs and Senators about Quaker concerns. Further details of QPLC work and publications can be found on the [www.quakersaustralia.info](http://www.quakersaustralia.info)
2. **Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP).** Di Bretherton (VRM) said the AVP is organized in each state on a basic model. There is to be an in-person gathering in Perth in October this year. As well as working with prisoners, AVP also runs training for refugees and trauma survivors, and hosts social events to enable refugees to use their own languages and share music. The Peace-Meal program was mentioned in particular. Many young people are involved in AVP. See [www.avpaustralia.org](http://www.avpaustralia.org) and [www.peace-meal.org](http://www.peace-meal.org)
3. **Friends Peace Teams (FPT).** Valerie Joy (QRM) spoke of the new Global Friends Peace Teams network now established in 5 regions of the world, including Asia. AVP models are used, along with other training, communication and development tools. FPT is spiritually based and located

in grass-roots locations. The AYM Peace and Social Justice Fund has helped fund Myanmar participants attend workshops. Friends are encouraged to join FPT projects as individuals or groups. See [www.friendspeacetams.org](http://www.friendspeacetams.org)

4. **Regional Meetings.** (a) **Queensland**. Christine Venner Westaway spoke of the active role in peacemaking by Friends in conjunction with the Peace Convergence network, which plans activities throughout the year, especially in opposition to the Land Forces Campaign. Extinction Rebellion and Blockade Australia have been supported in direct nonviolent actions by young people. A monthly Quaker vigil in King George Square in Brisbane has a different theme each time, and this has attracted wider public attention.
- (b) **NSW**. David Swain said a major focus has been on discernment of grants under the Jan de Voogd Fund. Wies Schuiringa explained that the Raising Peace Network arose during COVID and had attracted many participants each year on-line on a wide range of peace-related topics. Speakers have been drawn from across the world, and podcasts are being made for posterity. See [www.raisingpeace.org.au](http://www.raisingpeace.org.au)
- (c) **Canberra and Region**. Greg Parkhurst reported on a threshing meeting about climate change, which led to follow-up action by individuals and CRQ. A fortnightly *Conversation Café* is held at the Turner Meeting House to share concerns and ideas. Fourth Sunday monthly discussion have been held after Meeting for Worship by QPLC on topics including engagement with politicians, global peace index, and the IPAN report on public attitudes to defence and foreign policy.
- (d) **Victoria**. Bev Polzin referred to the ongoing peace and social justice network that allows Friends to bring and share concerns and raise awareness. There is a weekly vigil in the CBD to support first nations justice.
- (e) **Tasmania**. Margaret Bywater spoke of regular meetings on peace and justice, often in cooperation with students from Friends School. Specific public witness occurs on days like Hiroshima Day and with Women in Black. Students have been active on climate change rallies. QPLC material is made available.
- (f) **SANTRM**. Jo Jordan mentioned the deep concern about militarism in the 'defence State'. Friends have worked with Churches Together to hold events under the theme 'Imagining a Safer World' to raise awareness. Friends have made clear their strong objection to recent State legislation to

punish protesters severely, seeing this as a regression to repression of challengers to established authority. (g) **WARM**. Adrian Glamorgan joined the concern about militarisation, and linked it with concerns among British Friends. He sees opportunities for shared action by Friends across our region and beyond, using audio-visual material to highlight the connections between peace and climate change.

5. **Integrity Project.** Wies Schuiringa (NSWRM) outlined the way the concern had arisen during the time when the previous federal government was exhibiting behaviour of ethically questionable kinds in its decision-making. As a result she and Sue Ennis (VRM) prepared banners affirming integrity in public life, and (along with other Quakers) displayed them at the entrances to Parliament House in Canberra in 2022 so that MPs and Senators and staff could notice them. They also used e-mails and public statements to get the message across. Response increased the second time they demonstrated, and they plan further presence in September 2023 and February 2024. Friends are encouraged to join them. See [www.ourdemocracy.com.au](http://www.ourdemocracy.com.au)
6. **Peace and Social Justice Fund.** Lorraine Thomson (CRQ) reminded Friends of the work of the committee in distributing funds for peace-related concerns. The support given this past year has included – language training for Afghan refugees settling in Portugal; Wellspring project to support ‘care of creation’ dialogue involving Indigenous wisdom and others; a Blockade Australia campaign to stop mineral extraction and destruction of earth; regional justice training; and ICAN hosting of atomic weapons survivors in a visit to the Australian Parliament.
7. **Independent and Peace Australia Network (IPAN).** Margaret Clark (CRQ) reported on the activities of IPAN in lobbying politicians about the outcome of the IPAN survey of public opinion on foreign and defence policies. She also foreshadowed a tour by Pacific peoples (from Okinawa, Vanuatu and Guam) to Australia in August-September for a conference in Brisbane and meetings with politicians and community groups in Sydney, Canberra and Darwin. See [www.ipan.org.au](http://www.ipan.org.au)

8. **Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN).** David Purnell (CRQ) reminded Friends of the ongoing links with APAN, including its use of the Melbourne Meeting House for its office. There is now a new president of APAN, Nasser Mashini. The new Labor Government has moved to change the official policies about Palestine and Israel to recognize Palestine as a state, restore Jerusalem as the capital, allow greater international investigations into human rights abuses in the occupied territories, and increase overseas aid to the UNRWA. The meeting agreed that a draft letter of support to the Government for its changed position should be put to the Yearly Meeting for approval.
  
9. **Other Business.** There was time for several Friends to mention specific matters of interest – the importance of recognizing our own privilege and being prepared to accept the costs of standing for justice and peace; a range of webinars being conducted by various organisations in the coming months; the value of working with Quakers in New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific on peace concerns, especially AUKUS and the QUAD; the value of Religions for Peace as a vehicle of combined action for peace; the weekly global on-line prayer vigils for peace held every Sunday; and the dangers in the current trends in North Korea for the peninsula and beyond.

The session closed with thanks to all the participants and contributors, and a period of silent worship.