

Quakers Australia Committee, Working Group or Associated Body Report

Name of committee/working group/associated body/concern/group

QUAKER PEACE AND LEGISLATION COMMITTEE (QPLC)

Membership of the Committee/Working Group/Associated Body:

Harold Wilkinson (convener), Margaret Bearlin, Margaret Clark, Ronis Chapman, Gareth Knapman, Alex Nicolson, Greg Parkhurst, David Purnell, Shobha Varkey.

Part A – Report

Progress

The committee continues its monthly meetings (via Zoom) to consider concerns relating to the peace testimony. The agenda ranges from domestic matters to international relations, and includes monitoring legislation of federal parliament. Activities include researching issues to prepare briefing papers, drafting letters for the Presiding Clerk to send to Ministers, MPs and Senators, supporting initiatives of other peace-related agencies and movements, holding periodic sessions for CRQ Friends on current themes, and conducting lobbying workshops for Friends in Regional Meetings. There are also opportunities a few times each year to interact via zoom with RM correspondents. It was especially helpful to link with QRM Friends for webinars on Korea and Myanmar, leading to Watching Briefs.

The following range of topics illustrates what has been published in the past year:

Action Alerts (matters requiring urgent attention): AUKUS; Gaza; Immigration detention.

Watching Briefs (longer papers on concerns): Aust/Palestine; Korea; Youth and Crime; Rights of Indigenous Peoples; Russia/Ukraine; ICJ and Israel; Whistleblowers; Myanmar.

Flutters (short notices of upcoming events/issues): Teachers for Peace; Force Posture Agreement.

The appointment of Holly Dhynes to help with QA Communications is enabling us to find better ways to spread news and comment via the website and social media. A strategic plan for several years ahead has also given us a focus on building relationships with other national peace organisations, increasing advocacy and lobbying work by Quakers, and creating a political action network. We are especially pleased that Margaret Clark has been able to share with many Friends the lobbying experience gained from her connections with the Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington DC.

A major decision this year has been to seek and appoint a peace worker with particular focus on working with MPs and Senators on peace concerns. A grant from the Jan de Voogd Fund has enabled the committee to advertise, interview, and select a peace worker, **Jessica Morrison**. Her long experience in advocacy work for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) gives us confidence that she will bring extra energy to our work. She is already familiar with Friends' ways through her links with Melbourne Friends, and will be attending YM 24 to become better known among Friends and to share our plans for the coming year.

We continue to have ongoing links with the Independent and Peace Australia Network (IPAN), the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), the Raising Peace festival (NSW), Pax Christi, WILPF and the National Council of Churches. We have also supported the Integrity in Public Life witness led by Wies Schuiringa and Sue Ennis. More generally, our members participate in webinars and similar events when we can, to keep ourselves informed.

Issues (if any)

1. Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility. We have lobbied all States about this, and received responses from most indicating overall commitment to the goal but reasons for not achieving it. The ACT government has gone furthest by raising the age from 10 to 12 this year and then to 14 a year later, putting in place additional resources to help young people at risk.
2. Russia/Ukraine War. We have joined with statements supporting the people of Ukraine, maintained limited contact with the Russian Embassy in Canberra, and participated in Quaker vigils for peace (on-line and in person).
3. Palestine/Israel. We have drafted letters/statements for the Presiding Clerk to issue expressing deep concern among Friends about the violence, the suffering of civilians and aid workers. We have joined with the international efforts of Friends (eg through FCNL, AFSC, UK, Ramallah) to urge a ceasefire, an end to the blockade of Gaza, the release of hostages, cessation of the arms trade with Israel, and encourage moves for a negotiated peace.
4. National Peace Dialogue. We are seeking ways of building stronger opportunities for dialogue among government agencies and NGOs. We envisage regular gatherings in Canberra on foreign affairs and defence matters, along the lines of the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament that operated in the 1980s. The response so far indicates a possible opening as Australia seeks greater involvement in the UN Peacebuilding Commission and might value greater NGO input.
5. QPLC and CESE. We have been seeking light and clarity on how best to respond to Friends' wishes for closer links between earthcare and peace concerns. Margaret Clark has done some work with lobbying training for CESE, and we will continue to keep seeking a way forward that is positive and enriches each committee.
6. The committee is aware that the challenges of the current global scene are very difficult for peacemaking initiatives. The appointment of the Peace Worker (Jessica Morrison) creates new openings for Friends' peace witness. We ask all Regional Meetings to assist the committee and the peace worker in our forthcoming journey to increase the impact of Friends' work. Ideas are welcome to support our planning for this new chapter in our journey.

**Part B Items for consideration by
Standing Committee or Yearly Meeting Business Meeting**

Nil