

Quaker Earthcare Epistle on Climate Emergency & Species Extinction Yearly Meeting 2019, Hobart Tasmania

This Epistle arises from Australian Friends' concern about our own –and others' – further response to key environmental crises. We balance the outer urgency of these darkened times with the necessity of inward listening to the Light.

The space between these many words of our Earthcare Epistle are for the silent-soundless-voiceless ones who hold us all in the vast complex matrix of Life. If you find your quiet disturbed by this call for Friends and others to change our language and action, please note the clear need for kindness to self and all others is a soft insistence – we want you to be well in all ways, along with our planet. We are together finding friendship and new ways of being.

Friends may find it useful to read this epistle within Meeting in three parts over several weeks, allowing time for the journey: a lament for the world as it has become, a need to reconnect with our source, and practical ways forward.



Friends, in response to concerns about the climate emergency and species extinction, we offer this Quaker Earthcare Committee Epistle as a call to action shared at Yearly Meeting, Hobart 2019.

From Quaker Earthcare Statement (Australia Yearly Meeting 2008)

*We are called to consider the world as an en-Spirited whole,
to accept no boundary to repairing and sustaining the Earth for the future,
and to appreciate more deeply the creative energy in all living things and life processes.*

*We seek to mend what has been hurt,
and to strengthen our courage to discern and bear witness
to this spiritual care for the Earth.*





Acknowledging the Great Harm
[A Lament for the world as it has become]

Decades of warnings about rising global temperatures have not led to sufficient political, community, or personal action, that would reverse the effect of greenhouse gases affecting life on earth. Nor have we acted to halt the major species extinction event. We face great harm.

Through global heating we expect serious diminishment to our predictable planetary climate dynamics; affecting ice caps and glaciers (particularly those feeding five of Asia's most significant rivers); our global conveyor currents, and regional weather patterns. We face acidifying oceans affecting marine life; and rising sea levels that will affect islands, estuaries and coastlines (particularly the islands of Asia and the Pacific. On land these rising temperatures brings shifts to timing and extent of rainfall, heat and seasons.

These geophysical effects of global heating interact in complex ways, disrupting life processes, threatening innumerable species on land and sea, with the prospect of a mass extinction event across the Earth. In Australia this means we face the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, further deterioration of the Murray Darling River Basin, loss of snowfields, and dislocation of other bioregions and habitats across the country. This also accelerates species loss.

The climate emergency and loss of biodiversity undermines in complex ways everything from agricultural viability and public health, to social stability, human development, and international peace. Rising greenhouse gases and species extinction remain insufficiently addressed. This lack of action undermines people's trust in political processes.

Global heating exacerbates species extinction. The rapid disappearance of species around the Earth is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate. More than 27,000 species are threatened with extinction, more than 27% of all assessed species. Australia has more than 1800 plants and animals on the threatened species list, with the highest rate of mammal extinctions in the world. Government promises of no more species extinctions have not been sufficiently guaranteed.

There are some signs of hope found in new technologies, in the 2016 Paris Agreement, broad statements of good intention by some business groups and the cautionary warnings of risk assessors and financial regulators. These have not stopped global heating. The valuable project work of volunteers and crowdfunding is no substitute for system wide intervention.

For all we can find to inspire and keep us hopeful, we acknowledge the painful truth: we are involved in a climate emergency and extinction crisis. In despoiling the earth, we have worked against the Spirit. Friends must listen anew; and more urgently prepare to aid each other and the wider world.



Strengthening our Courage to Discern and Bear Witness
[Reconnecting with Source]

Our 2008 Australia Yearly Meeting Quaker Earthcare Statement points us towards a better relationship with creation. Friends' Testimonies, and our work with silence, stillness and spiritual discernment encourages us to celebrate:

- Wonder and appreciation for life on Earth;
- Stewardship, that fosters development based on environmental capacity and human need;
- Peace and social justice, including right relationship with Indigenous people;
- Restorative practices that build trust one-to-one, socially, and between nations
- Creativity, ingenuity, and love in our work;
- Informed, inclusive decision making;

Australia Yearly Meeting adopted its Earthcare Statement in 2008. We found “delight in the grace of creation” and warned “we have ignored our interconnectedness with other living things.” As a Society we promised we would “seek to transform this culture of domination and exploitation....and develop a culture of caring for the planet.” We knew then that it would be required of us to “commit to the demanding, costly implications of radically changed ways of living.”

Friends are aware of the pressing issue of climate action and accept that concern for the environment needs to underpin all of our decisions and actions both individually and corporate. It is true many Friends support organisations which publicise and promote environmental change. Many Friends also have made dramatic adjustments to their lifestyle as a personal response. But it does not seem to be enough.

Others show the way. In the face of insufficient corporate action and political neglect, we see a multitude of communities around the world declaring a state of climate emergency. Young people in particular are demanding authentic action from decision makers as well as their elders: challenging the overly-accommodating policies towards corporations. Their school strikes for climate, along with nonviolent groups such as the Extinction Rebellion, remind us of the immediacy of the crisis. They reject half-hearted gestures, unfulfilled promises and willful neglect. They refresh the world with their calls for greater integrity, simplicity, community representation, and equality of all beings.



We thank the young and not-so-young campaigners for their inspiring leadership. They deserve our respect, and loving, practical support for their concerns. We also draw to the Light the polluters and despoilers. All need the care of the Spirit.

Deepening our Resolve to Mend What Has Been Hurt *[Practical Ways Forward]*

We take our share of responsibility for the global climate crisis. We resolve to mend what has been hurt. We must prepare to be both en-Spirited and practical. We draw again to the ways of Friends, seeking direction from the Inward Light, confident this way we will find the best ways forward to offer service.

Thus, Australia Yearly Meeting:

- 1) **Resolves** to more accurately name the environmental crisis affecting the planet as a climate emergency, crisis, or breakdown, preferring phrases such as global heating over global warming. The mass species extinction occurring is also a threat to life on Earth. Our plain words must communicate the catastrophe honestly and accurately, prompting both love and truth in our hearts;
- 2) **Reminds Friends** of the necessity of spiritual discernment based in silence and stillness. We are more likely to know how best to act when we each:
 - a. hold gratitude for all: our aim is not to frighten people into action, but to draw them to a vision of the Earth which engenders joy, trust and generosity;
 - b. keep open to the Spirit through daily practice, weekly Meeting for Worship, regular attendance at Meetings for Worship for Business, and by testing leadings;
 - c. trust in nonviolent methods and gentle steady speech: this also eases anxiety, despair, doubt, fear, uncertainty, blame, loss, grief, isolation or disorientation, much of which can arise once the extent of the climate emergency and species extinction is understood;
 - d. expect diversity in our individual and organisational responses, while remaining united to reduce climate harm;
 - e. meet to study and reflect on the workings of the Spirit and Quaker Ways;
- 3) **Calls on all Friends** to collectively support each other to:
 - a. deepen Friends' personal and committee understanding of the material, spiritual and practical dimensions of the climate and extinction crisis;
 - b. listen to and support our younger Friends in their calls to act promptly, mindful not to shoulder them with the full burden of effort, and to encourage them to find hope despite adversity;
 - c. consider changing our individual and Meeting behaviours, including habits of a lifetime, to come to new decisions and practices that contribute to solutions; these may be concerned with shelter, transport, energy, food and other issues of human need, production, trade and consumption;
 - d. experiment together as you address the causes of the crisis, sharing your findings, material and spiritual;
 - e. foster a sense of belonging, appreciation and interdependence in the wider natural world; for example, by the Meeting trying such means as:
 - i. walking country together;
 - ii. engaging with permaculture design principles;
 - iii. applying the science and arts to develop ecological literacy and insight;
 - iv. cultivating community gardening; and
 - v. forging regional and international friendships as a Meeting;
 - f. listen well to the traditional owners of the land on which Friends meet; cultivate meaningful relationship; learn more about the original custodians' ways and language; be prepared to discover what it is to belong to country;
 - g. actively cultivate and learn those skills in which Quakers have a reputation for expertise: building peace, justice, trust, hope, reconciliation, listening to the Spirit and developing the capacity of groups to take strategic nonviolent action; be prepared to teach these skills more widely, as they build community resilience and enable shared security.

- 4) **Recognises** that the climate emergency will require much more of Friends as individuals and as a Society.
- a. In most cases we will need to change the way we live and our expectations. Together we may find ways to switch from fossil fuel consumption, plastic packaging (derived from oil and contributing to overconsumption and species extinction); wasteful transport; and to remove ourselves from fossil fuel investment; participation in destructive agriculture; problematic production, and unnecessary consumption;
 - b. Time is in contention. Our technologies have cut many processes down to microseconds, but in so doing humanity has upturned geological epochs. Living in the Anthropocene requires us to re-evaluate what we can each achieve in a day and a lifetime. The stillness we find in worship allows us to know what is to be done, and what we must be let go;
 - c. Changes may feel like loss: we may sense inconvenience, sadness, grief and pain, or personal injustice. Mutual, communitarian support of each other has the power to console, empower and inspire;
 - d. For those who lapse into despair, loneliness or fatalism, we offer informed hope, bold companionship and cheerful practicality;
- 5) **Recognises** that both within and beyond our Meeting the impacts of the climate emergency are being unevenly experienced by people who are poor, and so encourage Friends to:
- i. specifically address the social justice emergency arising from the environmental crisis;
 - ii. be friends to those marginalised in the community. Their resilience has much to teach us, but climate crisis impacts them in disproportionate ways, and sometimes when they are without the means to respond. We seek to listen to people who are members of First Nations, or have experience being refugees, or older, or managing disability or sickness, or being homeless, unemployed or experiencing disadvantage in some way, so that they experience the full promise of community;
 - iii. bring compassionate attention to those who have not awakened to the need for global healing and trust in the spirit;
 - iv. learn more of the role played by militarism, racism, gender dynamics, social or economic policies, trade agreements, distributional systems, or political and corporate governance frameworks, which may be aggravating the climate and extinction crisis;
- 6) **Asks** the Australian Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee, First Nations Committee and associate organisations such as Quaker Service Australia and Silver Wattle Quaker Centre to hold the climate emergency and extinction crisis in their hearts and minds as they undertake their business. Junior Young Friends have in turn asked Australia Yearly Meeting to cater events guided by the ethics of a plant based vegan or vegetarian diet.
- 7) **Supports and where appropriate, affiliates with** coalitions of climate action and species' protection groups. In particular, we ask Friends to support young people's groups as they make their voices heard. This may involve us joining school strikes and similar actions. We must avoid unnecessary busyness, but seek closer connection with transition town, community garden, local bushcare, landcare or species protection groups to apply and learn together what belonging to the land means locally. Australia Yearly Meeting is already affiliated with the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, a multi-faith network committed to action on climate change, especially for religious people who tend to underestimate their carbon footprint. If your Regional Meeting has not joined yet, this may be the right time. Friends are encouraged to download a Climate Change Action Kit and apply it together as a Meeting, and create or join a Living the Change session inviting other faith groups. Volunteer groups like the State Emergency Service and the Red Cross provide training for trauma support and referral: Meetings would benefit from a number

of their members undertaking training, and considering ways in which the Meeting House may be made available to the wider community in times of disaster. In our work with other groups, we should seek to be models of the change we want to see.

- 8) **Asks the Yearly Meeting Presiding Clerk**, supported by the Quaker Earthcare Committee, to write to key decision makers, including:
- a. *the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, State Premiers, and State Opposition leaders*, requesting support for the declaration of a climate emergency, and to take appropriate action to quickly phase out fossil fuels and to hasten the introduction of renewable energy power sources, and public transport;
 - b. *the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Future Fund, and the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia (which represents and develops policy for the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, with members from corporate, industry, retail and public sector funds)* asking these bodies to value investment towards biophilic (life affirming) outcomes and divest from fossil fuels and other corporate activities which undermine climate viability;
- 9) **Asks Regional and Local Meetings to:**
- a. *write to, and where appropriate visit, local political parties, state and federal elected members, mayors and shire presidents and corporate leaders* to express your Meeting's concern about the immediacy of the climate emergency and threatened species extinction, and the urgent need for action. Seek to establish trust and foster long-term conversations.
 - b. *regard themselves as the most active part of Yearly Meeting action on climate emergency and species extinction;*
 - c. *learn and be guided by Quakers' methods of faithful advocacy which has a long history of sustaining campaign movements*
 - d. *continue to find ways to reduce energy consumption (through reducing or eliminating fossil fuel use) and increase appropriate energy production (through renewable energy)*
 - e. *report to next Australia Yearly Meeting 2020 on their actions on the climate change emergency, and species extinction, and reflections on the way forward.*



If these new directions seem peculiar to a business-as-usual world, they still represent the deepest truths and convictions of Quaker faith and practice – to find spiritual guidance in order to live simply; in peace; with integrity; working justly in community; upholding equality; and respecting earthcare – in a time of climate emergency and species' extinction like none has ever seen.

**Quaker Earthcare Committee
Hobart 2019**

RESOURCES:

- **Friends are invited to refer to the Quaker Statement 2008 in full at <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Earthcare>**
- **The AYM Earthcare Committee ‘invitations’ comprising sections on Pray, Read, Act and Celebrate are at <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Earthcare/earthcare-invitation-newsletters-0>**



Australian Quaker Advices & Queries are also useful:

44. All life is interrelated. Each individual plant and animal has its own needs, and is important to others. Many species in Australia and worldwide are now extinct and many more are endangered. Do you treat all life with respect, recognizing a particular obligation to those animals we breed and maintain for our own use and enjoyment? In order to secure the survival of all, including ourselves, are you prepared to change your ideas about who you are in relation to your environment and every living thing in it?

45. Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

46. The land of Australia is not our possession. We are no more than temporary guardians of it; neither the first nor, probably, the last. In the brief time of European settlement, vast areas of this country have been damaged. Do you try to live in harmony with the land, knowing that you are part of it? Do you protect and husband its water and other resources? Do you look with respect on the claims and rights of others to share in the wealth and freedoms of Australians?

47. We live in a land of unique grandeur and beauty, harsh and majestic, but at the same time fragile. Have you discovered its wonder and mystery, and has this awareness quickened your spiritual insight and helped you to recognise that of God in everyday life? Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing Creation

Contact the Australia Yearly Meeting (Quaker) Earthcare Committee on cearthcare@quakersaustralia.info.

Photos: Swan/Avon River in the South West of Australia, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Art, sculpture and weaving have been a key part of our four-year long river journey. (Images: A Glamorgan)