

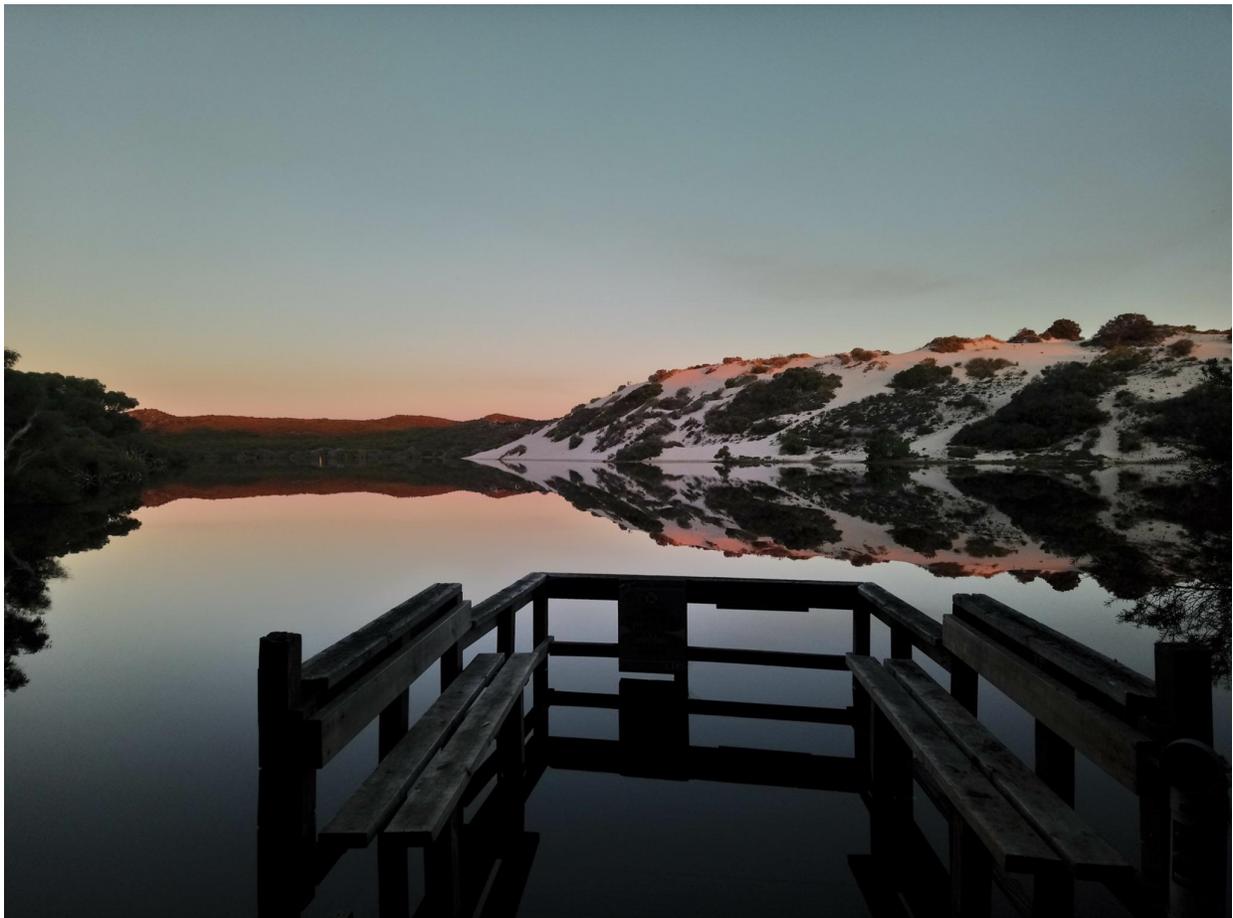
Report on the Questionnaire

from

Australia Yearly Meeting's

Climate Emergency & Species Extinction Working Group

30th April 2022



Moore River, WA in flood

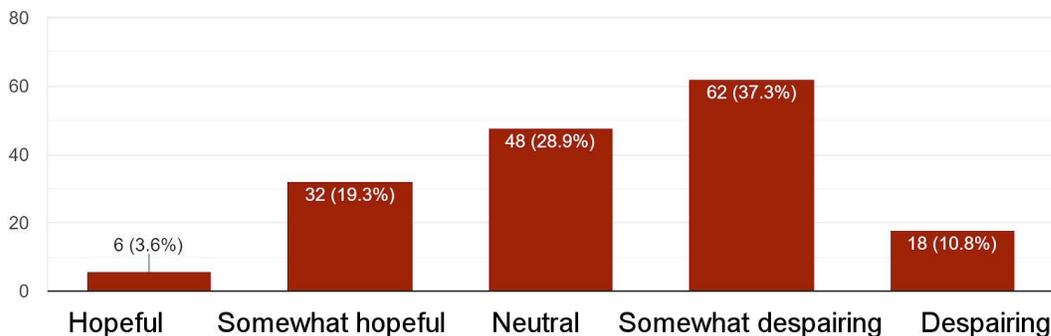
Side by side, questions 3a and 3b

The questions on “levels of comfort” around our personal, and Friends’ corporate activities to address the climate emergency and species extinction revealed that Friends recognise there is a need to work on these problems at multiple levels, from the personal to the local, corporate and policy levels.

The responses also show that some Friends felt they could do more at a personal level - this suggests that providing information in the developed CESE Working Group plan on what we can do at a personal level would be welcomed.

How we feel about problems, and how we feel about our ability to do something about those problems, impacts the ways we may respond to a crisis. The **revolutionary** response, where someone takes radical action aimed at a sweeping change, tends to be pursued by those who are hopeful. Meanwhile, reformists, who attempt to improve society without changing the basic structure and use methods such as petitions and community sit-ins, also need a degree of hopefulness. Those who lack hope, who cannot even envisage change, may find their responsiveness limited to **expressive** actions: songs, diet, art and clothing choice become a means for expressing dissatisfaction with the status quo, and a belief that the only power one has for change, is the power to change oneself.

The questionnaire asked about how hopeful or despairing people were, in relation to climate change and our shared future. It is possible to feel despairing about a prospect of extinction, while still remaining hopeful of one’s ability to do something about it, and such fine distinctions are not easily captured in a multiple choice questionnaire. So the strong skew towards despair apparent in the data should not be taken to mean that Friends feel unable to do anything about the issues. Rather, it may be an expression of “climate grief” where we are grieving for those species and places that are already lost, or will soon be.



If this is the case, the graph above may represent a modern example of the Stockdale Paradox. James Stockdale, an American aviator, spent seven years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam where he was tortured repeatedly. When discussing those who did, and did not,

make it through the long incarceration he pointed out that it was the optimists who fell by the wayside. He said, *“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality.”*

This thread of realising that clear-eyed understanding of the magnitude of a problem must lead to dedicated action if we are to resolve it. We have heard from various Quaker sources for many years, and the call to action has been highlighted throughout society, including in this article by Angela Manno from NYYM: *“What is the source of this sense of separation that pervades our religious society and society at large, that keeps Friends mostly silent and immobile in the face of the poisoning of our planet? I noted that Friends were able to step up to the plate when the immorality of slavery finally became clear. What, then, makes the destruction of the Earth—the living host of all we know, the very source of the next breath we take—somehow less offensive in the eyes of Friends?”*¹

In the case of Australian Quakers, despite the despair expressed in the graph, the evidence of motivation to act in this space, the identification of what strengthens many individual Friends, and their clear and ongoing actions by themselves and with others, outlined in the following questions, speaks to both faith and discipline.

While a small number of Friends specified they had no hope, felt paralysed or were resigned to the extinction of humanity and many other species, most responses fell into the categories of being motivated by their spiritual beliefs (God, the Spirit, Source, Hope or Faith), or by a love of humanity and/or the non-human world, as well as being motivated by the presence of risk, inequality or injustice. And there was a strong thread in many of the responses that tied our faith to our concern for the world and its occupants, a thread that recalls the famous line from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: *“He prayeth well who loveth well, both man and bird and beast.”*

Humans are social animals. Others’ actions and acceptance matter to us. Numbers of responses said the respondent was inspired by others or motivated by the unity and support of Friends.

“Doing something” is an important way we prevent ourselves from becoming hopeless, and taking action, or determination that we can make a difference, were mentioned as motivating and strengthening.

Friends' works undertaking earthcare, environmental and landcare activities are very diverse. Many Friends work with both Quaker and non-Quaker organisations, while some work mainly on their own. The range of activities those groups undertake is equally diverse and covers the full gamut of activities from personal carbon emission reduction and species

¹ When Will We Wake?
February 11, 2013 by Angela Manno, Fifteenth Street Meeting (NY)
<https://quakerearthcare.org/when-will-we-wake/>

restoration work, through community empowerment to lobbying for government governmental policy change.

Friends appear to already work with many organisations that have strengths in lobbying for policy change and advocating for people, species or ecosystems being affected by the climate emergency and species extinction. Habitat restoration was also a focus, then interfaith and wider community awareness raising, with smaller numbers of groups working on building community resilience either within local communities or more widely. The small number of groups Friends are associated with that undertake direct action protests were mentioned repeatedly.

Friends' evaluations of their own strengths in the same classes of activity were interesting.

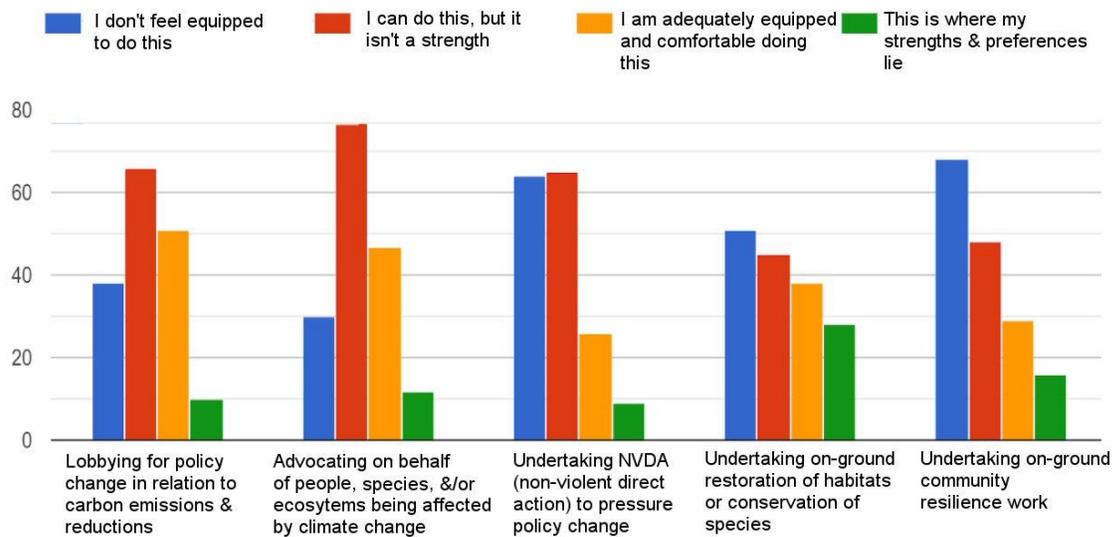
Lobbying appears to be something most of us know how to do but very few of us feel comfortable doing. Many Friends work with groups (both Quaker and non-Quaker) that undertake lobbying as a main activity and it may be that there is an opportunity for our specifically Quaker organisations with lobbying "know how" to provide ongoing training.

Friends' historic witness includes **advocating** for people who are marginalised in numerous ways. So the lack of confidence in this area (for both people and the non-human world) may speak to a need for provision of resources to help Friends identify which peoples, species and ecosystems are already in trouble, and what we may suggest, by way of solutions.

Specific training in **direct action** may also be helpful, with many respondents stating they felt ill-equipped to undertake this.

On-ground restoration was commonly mentioned, especially where Meetings and Quaker properties have active restoration groups. Often, people who mentioned their landcare work on Quaker properties noted they were also members of other nearby Landcare groups. People who listed working with groups doing habitat restoration often also listed working with groups advocating for species/habitats/people, lobbying, or doing community resilience work.

The **community resilience** response highlights the area where most people said they felt under equipped. The expression may not be one in common use and may sound more complicated than it is. Established practices like permaculture, and movements like Grow Free and the sharing economy, community and home gardening, and community focussed arts people may all open a path to stronger, more resilient communities here in Australia. On the international scene, community resilience may be addressed through lobbying and advocating, so that the wealthy world provides mitigation and migration options for communities that are impacted by climate change.



Our human societies have brought us to a position that threatens all life on our beautiful blue planet. Friends enthusiastically provided the CESE Working Group with ideas on how Quakers in Australia could, as a group, work to address that threat. Many of us recognised that we are small in number and that working with other groups would be an effective strategy. Beyond the environmental NGOs and other groups we are already working with, specific groups we could engage with more fully were mentioned, especially First Nations people and young people.

We identified that we have a unique capacity to build on our history of speaking out, publishing our truths and demonstrating our testimonies. We have existing committees like the Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee or Quaker Service Australia that could further this work at a corporate level while individually Friends could “live the change we want to see.”

We acknowledge many of us are very privileged and that we have capacity to financially support those undertaking work to address the climate emergency and species loss. We could support those already taking action.

Some Friends felt that we could concentrate on personal work to demonstrate “right relationship” with the world, providing spiritual support and gathering for others, especially those working to enable cultural and societal change leading ultimately to communities reflecting that right relationship.

Specific actions were mentioned by some Friends: providing training, engaging in non-violent direct action, lobbying and letter writing.

End of document notes:

AYM Climate and Emergency Working Group 2021- 2023

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Photo on front page - Moore River WA in flood, Elizabeth PO'