

NCCA Engagement Project: Final Report

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1 Orientation to this report

NCCA Directors can turn up to their January meeting with a clear conscience if they read the Executive Summary of this report. It summarises all recommendations and the reasons they are given.

For Directors who have the time and interest, the full report provides nuance and context. Interview quotes provide insight into how others are thinking and feeling about the NCCA.

The recommendations have variable weight and urgency. Some are best initiated in the lead up to the 2019 Forum. e.g: *What will we communicate about decision-making at the Forum?* Others might be stepped out over years. As such there is merit in revisiting aspects of this report periodically, particularly around non-urgent but strategically important priorities: e.g.'s: *Are we still aligned with our core purposes? Are we being effective in deepening church relationships? How are we going with the engagement of younger people? How can we help ensure the long-term financial viability of the ecumenical movement?*

The Project Officer has endeavoured to contact all member churches, but has not been able to interview all national leaders. The Project Officer's knowledge of the NCCA is partial. Recommendations are therefore offered humbly in the hope of stimulating robust conversation.

The Project Officer has sought to preserve anonymity in relation to interviews. The Faith and Unity Chair gave permission to be quoted, as did Emily Evans in relation to the engagement of younger people. The source of quotes or document extracts are colour-coded according to the key below:

Board members (Directors)



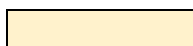
State ecumenical officers (AEON – Australian Ecumenical Officers' Network)



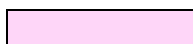
Staff



National church leaders (Sometimes called "heads of churches" by interviewees)



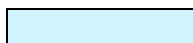
Faith and Unity Chair



NCCA Constitution



Quotes from a Queensland Churches Together document



2 Executive Summary

Board members feel there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of NCCA. Strategic planning is challenging under such circumstances.

Recommendation One:

That the NCCA Board reflect on the NCCA Basis and Objects, and draft a purpose, plan and list of priorities for circulation to the member churches for discussion at the Forum.

The Board might consider re-expressing the NCCA Basis and Objects in the form of a draft mission and vision statement for consideration by the member churches.

Diverse ideas exist about what ecumenism is and how it should function. A common theological language will assist alignment across the NCCA.

Recommendation Two:

That the NCCA Board task the Faith and Unity Commission to write a condensed 1500 word document explaining the key ideas of ecumenism, preferably for discussion and adoption at the next Forum.

The NCCA is a member organisation and relationship with its members is foundational. It is also a council of churches. Facilitating relationships between the churches is its core business.

Recommendation Three:

That one of the measurable priorities for the NCCA should be relationship-building activities with and between the member churches.

The NCCA will have the greatest impact for ecumenism and the Australian church through positive relationships with the wider ecumenical movement.

Recommendation Four:

That the NCCA adopt facilitation of relationships and collaboration across the wider ecumenical

movement as a strategic priority.

As expressions of this priority, the NCCA might assist in organising gatherings of AEON leaders with NCCA staff, and consider how to strengthen ties with the WCC and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture into the future.

That the NCCA recommend a conversation between AEON and an Act for Peace representative around mutual support.

Investing in a renewed communication strategy will facilitate relationships and help build alignment across the NCCA.

Recommendation Five:

Following a process of clarification of the purpose and priorities of NCCA, that the Board invest in a communication review and new strategy. The time frame for this will depend on the progress of Recommendation One.

The Board might consider staffing a communication position for NCCA (potentially sharing time and expense with a state council and/or Act for Peace and/or a member church) at some point in the future.

That the NCCA initiate a conversation with the Bible Society around public faith.

NCCA decisions should reflect the will of its member churches. NCCA structures and the process of decision making should be clear and participatory.

Recommendation Six:

That the Board clarify, document and communicate how decision making operates at the Forum, the purpose of the NCCA Assemblies, and the role of the national church leaders' meetings.

That the NCCA General Secretary continue to take the initiative to organise and support national church leaders' meetings.

The NCCA Board would benefit from greater clarity on its distinct purpose, model, skill requirements, recruitment and induction processes.

Recommendation Seven:

Board Development

That the Board engage in self-reflection on its distinct purpose and the tasks of Directors.

That the NCCA Board evaluate its skill needs and plan professional development training accordingly.

That the NCCA Board consider adding communication to its skills matrix.

That the NCCA Board develop an induction process for new Directors. This should include governance training for Directors with no prior Board experience or relevant training.

That the NCCA Board develop a recruitment and succession planning strategy, conscious of skill gaps identified and the need for age and gender diversity.

That the NCCA Board develop a risk matrix and provide a regular risk report at Board meetings.

The NCCA President has both a relational role in a church council and a key governance role as Board Chair of a Company. This can make finding suitable candidates challenging.

Recommendation Eight:

That the Board clarify the process for identifying potential NCCA Presidents.

That the Board consider splitting the role of President if required to ensure both relational and governance functions are performed with excellence.

The General Secretary role is complex. The role may need fine-tuning as the Board develops a new strategic plan aligned around relationships. Providing support and professional development opportunities will help the General Secretary function effectively.

Recommendation Nine:

That the Board identify and rank priorities for a future General Secretary role after developing a strategic plan, and draft a job description with clear organisational expectations.

That the Board consider investing in professional support for the General Secretary (examples: executive coaching, supervision, support groups, a professional development budget).

Many Australian churches have barriers to NCCA membership. However, they are open to engagement and may participate in networks. Pentecostal churches are growing and are potential new NCCA members.

Recommendation Ten:

That the NCCA Board develop a long-term strategy to build relationships with non-member churches.

One of the options in the Project Officer's first report was seeding new networks of specialist ministry leaders. Further feedback is required on this model and on possible new networks.

Recommendation Eleven:

That the NCCA initiate a discussion with national church leaders on a networking model and seek further feedback on the Project Officer's November report.

That the NCCA discuss with National church leaders connecting church indigenous ministry leaders.

There is vulnerability in the church and ecumenical financial space as some churches deal with shrinking budgets.

Recommendation Twelve:

At some point in the next triennium, that the Board discuss options to diversify NCCA income.

There are relatively few young people involved in the NCCA. A strategy to invest in younger people will help ensure a healthy future for the ecumenical movement.

Recommendation Thirteen:

- NCCA facilitate more engagement with young adults to explore receptive ecumenism based on the model of QCT
- NCCA ensure that all its programs and activities consider input and the perspective of young adults
- Potentially consider quotes of young people
- Consider representation at Forums/ the Board etc
- Investment on Ecumenical Formation and mentorship

Emily Evans may be a helpful person to discuss this with the Board.

3 Explanation of the project:

3.1 Purpose:

The purpose of this project was to conduct research into aspects of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) to inform strategic thinking.

3.2 Methodology:

A series of questions were developed by a reference group. Interviews were largely conducted by face to face interview, along with some phone or teleconference interviews.

A more detailed outline of the project is in Appendix One.

3.3 Scope:

Numbers of interviews:

- Four NCCA Directors (a fifth Director was interviewed in his capacity as a national church leader but was not asked Board-focused questions.)
- Fifteen national church leaders (two from observer churches)
- Four NCCA staff members
- Five state ecumenical officers (AEON group)
- Two chairs of commissions (Act for Peace and Faith and Unity)
- Five non-member church leaders (by phone or email)

Surveys were sent out with the Project Officer's first NCCA report. Five responses were returned from National Church Leaders, and two from staff.

The Project Officer also observed meetings of Safe Church, Faith and Unity, and Social Justice. The Project Officer attended all 2018 Assemblies.

The Project Officer received policy documents from Liz Stone. The NCCA constitution was referenced from the NCCA website. Emily Evans provided background material from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Queensland Churches Together (QCT).

This second report focuses on feedback from NCCA staff, Board and Commission members, and state ecumenical council officers.

4 The big picture: the NCCA purpose and theological framework

4.1 Clarifying a Purpose, Priorities and a Plan

Summary: *Board members feel there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of NCCA. Strategic planning is challenging under such circumstances.*

The strongest theme that emerged from Board interviews was a need to clarify the purpose and priorities of the NCCA and develop a clear plan to fulfil these.

Board comments: (Green text box)

What would help the Board work better?

“Define exactly what we’re trying to do . . . We are still grappling with ‘what is our purpose?’”

“It is really hard to be able to say . . . what the council is actually trying to do.”

“There has been no clarity around what Board members do. A clear strategy and vision is just not happening.”

“We’re now having to face what is the essence of the task? How do we add value to the member churches?”

This concern around purpose and focus was echoed by NCCA staff:

Staff Comments: (Salmon text box)

[The NCCA might be improved by] “time and will, clarity – a clear purpose and clear goals.”

“We need to start naming our purpose, being strong about it: this is who we are, this is what we do. Fantastic work is being done – we need to talk about ourselves more confidently.”

“One of the challenges of NCCA is that there are so many different elements to the NCCA tasks. Liz has attempted to amalgamate some of the networks but not all can be amalgamated. There are *lots* of things to keep on top of: does the Board understand the work required to keep all the networks running? How do we determine NCCA *focus*? What are the highest priorities?”

The Basis and Objects of the NCCA are in its constitution. However, there seems to be a lack of clarity what the purpose or vision of the NCCA is in practical terms. Some Board and staff members struggled to identify the highest priority functions.

Many organisations use a mission and vision statement for strategic planning and communication. It may be a helpful exercise to reframe the Basis and Objects of the NCCA constitution in this language. Simply engaging in this process may help to clarify the NCCA purpose for Board members.

2. BASIS

2.1 National Council of Churches in Australia gathers together in pilgrimage those Churches and Christian communities which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and commit themselves

(i) to deepen their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church, and

(ii) to work together toward the fulfilment of their mission of common witness, proclamation and service,

to the glory of One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

7. OBJECTS AND PURPOSES

7.1 The Objects for which the Company is established are to:

(a) encourage and enable the Member Churches to develop their existing relationships by:

(i) raising awareness among their people of Christ's gift of unity and of his call to express that unity through prayer, dialogue and shared engagement in mission; and

(ii) coming to know each other better in all respects, including the areas of spirituality, liturgy, theology, history, sociology and culture,

(b) encourage and enable the Member Churches in the light of the Gospel to give prophetic leadership to each other and the community by:

(i) developing a deeper understanding of evangelism/ evangelisation in Australia's cultural context;

(ii) addressing moral issues;

(iii) speaking out against injustice, violence and oppression

(iv) acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and

(v) working to uphold the dignity of all people and the flourishing of all creation,

(c) promote relationships:

(i) with non-member Churches, state ecumenical bodies within Australia, regional and national ecumenical bodies in Asia and the Pacific, and the World Council of Churches; and

(ii) with people of other living faiths,

(d) undertake joint activities as determined from time to time by the Member Churches;

(e) establish any number of subsidiary companies for charitable purposes;

(f) act as the member of, establish and manage any number of overseas aid agencies; and

(g) establish and act as a trustee of one or more charitable trust funds.

Recommendation One:

That the NCCA Board reflect on the NCCA Basis and Objects, and draft a purpose, plan and list of priorities for circulation to the member churches for discussion at the Forum.

The Board might consider re-expressing the NCCA Basis and Objects in the form of a draft mission and vision statement for consideration by the member churches.

4.2 Clarifying a Theology of Ecumenism for NCCA

Summary: *Diverse ideas exist about what ecumenism is and how it should function. A common theological language will assist alignment across the NCCA.*

“We need clear, baseline theological and practical principles on which we agree. ‘This is what we’re on about’.”

Interviews with a range of people have revealed when people use the words “ecumenism” or “ecumenical” they may not mean the same thing, ranging from any kind of loose connection, to specific kinds of joint endeavours facilitated by ecumenical organisations. Some see the Lund Principle as critical, others Receptive Ecumenism, others Mutual Accountability, others stimulating formal or informal Dialogue, others express a Conciliar approach, and others some ill-defined view of relationship, cooperation, or good will between churches.

Articulating a theological framework may be extremely helpful in orienting all stakeholders to the purposes and ethos of the NCCA.

This concern was strongly articulated by state ecumenical officers:

State ecumenical officers (Blue text box)

“It may be helpful to have a theological statement defining ecumenism. Some of our regional centres have younger bishops who don’t understand the nuances of ecumenism.

“Mutual accountability is an important value; Tvet spoke on this in 2015 and Putney spoke of this also. How do we translate this into an organisational setting? How can we hold each other accountable as state and national bodies? We can’t say ‘we are ecumenical’ with integrity unless we put this into practice with one another.

“The NCCA has a pivotal place in terms of first responsibility to keep alive the value of ecumenical relations. Perhaps less programs, but *increased* conversation and exploration leading to action across structures, systems, practices and processes in the churches. How can NCCA assist churches to assume this responsibility? The role of Receptive Ecumenism is, I suggest, vital for the movement: both for the disposition it engenders and the possibilities it elicits.”

“The new ecumenism . . . says there is one hope, one faith, one baptism, one salvation for all, and out of that, all participants who sign up to that deal are in the game. It is therefore relationally imperative that we play together. So, the new ecumenism is deeply theological and deeply relational. We are the body of Christ, therefore we live, work, taste, touch, smell, feel, and

behave, as the body of Christ. I don't think that there is an intention to be anything other than friends, and so therefore the *Missio Dei* is missing from the ecumenical conversation. If we're going to be serious about being church, then we've got to work out there is only one church. And if there's only one church, then it's incumbent on all of us in leadership to work out what it looks like . . . to be a church. That doesn't mean homogenization, but it definitely doesn't mean competition. I have a friend who I've been thinking and working with . . . he has a phrase, 'reconciled diversity', and I think it really is beginning to capture for me a way forward.

"I think what would be really helpful is to have a foundational conversation that goes back to how do we read John 17? How do we read Ephesians 4 in the first six verses? For those of us who are creedal, what does it mean to read and affirm the Nicene Creed? The World Council of Churches in the book *The Church Towards a Common Vision* is based around the notion that one of the things that holds the church in tension is the fact that we say we believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And then we go on to say that we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church, and baptism for forgiveness of sin. So if we say this, what does it look like? To link to those other three things then I would say, how seriously are we engaged in the lived expression of the Lund principle?

"Olav's book reads back over 60 years of faith and order and says what are the key triggers over faith and order over 60 years – and he goes through the changing emphasis from the very early was about understanding doctrine, (e.g. you can explain to me a Protestant evangelical doctrine and I'll explain to you a high church doctrine). And he gets to the point where he says it's now about mutual accountability, it's about the recognition of together we are . . . and therefore there is both a responsibility to and responsibility for everybody else."

Articulating a condensed theological framework will help ground NCCA values. It will act as a reference point for decision making and functioning across the NCCA. Providing a common language may assist alignment. It will also be a helpful induction tool for any new church leader, church representative, staff member, commission member and so on.

One national church leader expressed the hope churches together might work on public theology. A document around the key ideas of ecumenism might form a good reference point for such work.

National Church Leader (beige text box)

"We need a mechanism for churches to know one another and learn to trust one another. Whether that could be done by some sort of 'public theology' space where we reflected on and responded to the changing nature of society and the role of the church in it?

"What has happened to the NCCA's relationship with the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton? Has that gone the way of all flesh? There were once hopes of research scholarships etc."

Recommendation Two:

That the NCCA Board task the Faith and Unity Commission to write a condensed 1500 word document explaining the key ideas of ecumenism, preferably for discussion and adoption at the next Forum.*

* The Project Officer passed on this recommendation to the Faith and Unity Chair, who made the following response:

Faith and Unity Chair (purple text box)

“I am inclined to agree that we do need agreement on baseline theological and practical principles. Let me make a few comments – and these are not meant to suggest that you change this recommendation:

- We might be talking about providing a commentary on the Constitution.
- Reflection (maybe at the Forum) on *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* may be a useful way to achieve the recommendation. Faith and Unity wrote a response to this a couple of years ago.
- Getting some of these definitions right is in fact the ecumenical challenge. We don't all agree on what church unity should look like. I don't think we will reach this at one Forum or one study document. But we have to keep working on it.
- Faith and Unity also wrote a paper a few years ago on Mutual Accountability. It was presented to the Executive, but nothing much came of it. In the light of the book by the WCC General Secretary, it might be useful to go back to this theme and explore it in a new context.
- To expect Faith and Unity to write a 1 – 2 page document before the next Forum might be a bit tight. There is only one meeting before the Forum. The only way this would work is if one (or some) Commission member(s) drafted a document before the meeting in April, so that it could be finalised at the meeting.”

[Response via email]

4.3 A Key Priority: Relationships

4.3.1 Relationships with and between member churches

Summary: *The NCCA is a member organisation and relationship with its members is foundational. It is also a council of churches. Facilitating relationships between the churches is its core business.*

The Basis of the NCCA begins with deepening relationships. One starting point for a strategic plan is enhancing relationships across the NCCA and between its member churches. Board members clearly stated the need for this relationship focus:

“A strategy that leads to an intentional period of relationship building would help.”

“Perhaps if we can engage the Board and the Church leaders more often for conversation as part of a three-year strategy. I think we should employ a General Secretary whose role is primarily relational . . . Perhaps our strategic plan needs to be relational . . . we will measure performance in terms of visits, contacts, engagement, and inviting others into those spaces.”

“Noting the struggle with the Orthodox churches, perhaps we could invite them to host something, and the NCCA could assist in inviting others. Perhaps we can employ someone . . . or maybe have the General Secretary, or the President, to be about relationships.

“Perhaps if the General Secretary hosted a relationship-building exercise, they could ask Board members to come. We could do this a few times a year . . . Perhaps in a three-year cycle each member church could host something in their space and invite the others . . . especially for the mid-East communities.

“If we don’t recast our job as relationships, we’ll only move incrementally.”

“A lot of our work in this period ahead will be that quiet work, hidden to some degree. I don’t think this is the era for big, flashy announcements. That might be the most important thing we can do... and I think that’s going on quietly, so we’re just talking about articulating to ourselves and each other in conversations that are healthy and necessary.”

“Whoever is the executive leader of the council has to take initiative to build relationships with member churches and their leaders. Something that I think has never happened with [my

church].”

Best hopes?

“I would see the council taking initiatives to build relationships with member churches, being a servant at that point rather than a destination. I'd probably look for the council to be more engaged in the stuff that the churches themselves are discovering and learning. It just seems to me that there's this huge distance between the way the council thinks of itself and the way the churches actually function.”

Board member feedback indicates the most helpful priority for the next triennium will be to rebuild relationships, and potentially form new ones. Through a process of listening, priorities for member churches will emerge. These can be explored in national church leader meetings, and responded to in Assemblies, working groups, and via other initiatives.

In order to “measure performance in terms of visits, contacts, engagement, and inviting others into those spaces” it may be helpful to reference how other analogous organisations measure engagement. In the light of the Objects of the NCCA, activities that allow church representatives to interact with one another would be heavily weighted.

Recommendation Three:

That one of the measurable priorities for the NCCA be relationship-building activities with and between the member churches.

4.3.2 Relationships across the wider ecumenical movement

Summary: *The NCCA will have the greatest impact for ecumenism and the Australian church through positive relationships with the wider ecumenical movement.*

“I hope (NCCA) can consolidate its relationship with the state councils.”

“We’re a big country, and the role of the state councils of churches and the NCCA – it’s really important to keep those conversations going and healthy and supported. It’s very important do what we can so no one feels isolated or marginalised in what they’re doing, so everyone feels a sense of participation and belonging. Partly that’s facilitated by the way people are with one another, but it also means checking in on each other, to see how people are going.”

“We need to be in a dialogue with the wider ecumenical movement, and one of the things I've observed in the last five years is a distancing of Australia from that wider dialogue. We don't seem to be engaged in global ecumenical initiatives. We don't seem to share that within the networks or even within the council itself.”

State ecumenical officers expressed a strong desire to build relationships across the whole Australian ecumenical network. They hoped to work as an integrated ecumenical movement across Australia functioning interdependently:

“There needs to be a space where the six states in partnership with a national space can actually work for the mutual benefit of all.”

“The richest and most energizing thing is having the conversations which then inform and shape action in whatever context.”

“For ecumenism to work as a dynamic in Australia, we hold each other accountable, because as states and as a national body, the members of each organization hold each other accountable to uphold ecumenism, and the theological Basis of ecumenism, and the whole rationale behind ecumenism. In other words, you can't become a member of an ecumenical body and then turn around and not work with anyone. You can't say 'I'm a member of an ecumenical body, but don't expect me to be working ecumenically with anyone.'”

“You've got to find someone who is willing to coordinate that side of bringing people together on the phone, or bringing people together over a skype call, or bringing people together face to face. I mean, Liz has certainly been trying to do that... how do we work intertwined with each other in order to achieve the best outcome for ecumenism?... We can try to get a more cohesive ecumenism going that really helps the national, States and individual congregations... And that relates to the World Council of Churches.”

“I think one of the roles where there would be a real cost plus benefit would be for the NCCA to take seriously the facilitation and empowerment of the AEON group... if the NCCA had a budget which was able to facilitate a two or three day national gathering... you know, chaired by the national exec... That invited the state AEON people to a conversation for a couple of days around, how you're tracking, you know, doing some pastoral stuff. Asking what's on your radar, what's going forward.”

“The role of the NCCA is to work in partnership with many like-minded organisations. For

example, you've got the NCCA with the state ecumenical councils - what projects we might do collectively that defines us as the ecumenical bodies? (I) hope that the NCCA re-engage with the state bodies, with the projects - that way it's unified, a strong body."

"Maybe if national is going to do something, maybe we should all get together and discuss and do something together, so we're not just meandering in our own way.... it would be nice if we could collaborate more, especially for national conferences, and we can have one across the board, and everyone has a bit of an input."

[What about] "the Centre for Culture and Christianity, [can it] talk to the NCCA and say, 'Hey, can we do this as a mutual event? We'll bring our academia skills, you bring your heads of Churches.'

"Can we do together things that are actually worthwhile, like prevention of domestic violence? Indigenous representation in Parliament? Interfaith work? Our attitude needs to be 'how can we help?' We need to be at the table. Can we feed state-based interfaith activity back up to the NCCA?"

It will help to manage travel costs if any AEON (Australian Ecumenical Officers Network) gathering is held immediately before or after a NCCA Forum. Other AEON gatherings might be held before or after an Assembly once a year.

Note that Emily Evans' current role creates a current strong link between the NCCA and the WCC. The appointment of Bishop Philip Huggins as Director of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies (CES) in 2019 creates another strong relational link. John Gilmore has a longstanding involvement with the Christian Conference of Asia. The NCCA Board might consider how to maintain communication beyond the life of these appointments.

There are potential new synergies that may be unlocked for the NCCA and the ecumenical movement through investing in broader relationships.

4.3.3 A conversation between Act for Peace and the State Council representatives

"We had an ecumenical MOU, but then one body changed direction significantly: Act for Peace became more centralised. Alastair suggested a new arrangement whereby the states could keep a percentage of the funds they raised, but then he resigned. Our executive felt it wasn't the way to go. So we've been in a 'wait and see' mode while Act for Peace is in a process of change."

... "if (a) MOU can be renewed, with a perhaps a new way of looking at things, that may help.

And that I hope would stop state bodies from regarding the NCCA with suspicion”

“If we are seen as ecumenical officers, they automatically see us as representing Act for Peace, Christmas Bowl, Ration Challenge, Safe Church policy, because we are promoting all of this.”

The relationship between AEON and Act for Peace appears to be somewhat unclear at present. The MOU that existed in the past with State Councils no longer appears to be relevant.

A process of dialogue, eventually leading to documenting ecumenical relationships (perhaps new MOUs) should promote greater alignment for the NCCA, Act for Peace and the State Councils.

A related issue is potential Act for Peace financial support of state ecumenical bodies in exchange for their promotion of Act for Peace work. This appears to have been a sore point for some AEON officers, as states receive less Act for Peace income than occurred in the past.

Act for Peace fundraising expenses must withstand external auditing and comply with all relevant legislation. While some state ecumenical officers feel their promotion of Act for Peace initiatives should be recompensed in some way, at present there is no clear (auditable) mechanism by which this might occur.

Act for Peace might discuss with the AEON group possible new compensation arrangements for state-based fundraising. Act for Peace holds the expertise to delineate legitimate fundraising expenses from normal collegial referencing by state officers. As such, Act for Peace will need to shape any process whereby the states receive financial support in return for fundraising activity.

At a minimum, a clear conversation will build understanding.

Recommendation Four:

That the NCCA adopt facilitation of relationships and collaboration across the wider ecumenical movement as a strategic priority.

As expressions of this priority, the NCCA might assist in organising gatherings of AEON leaders with NCCA staff, and consider how to strengthen ties with the WCC and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture into the future.

That the NCCA recommend a conversation between AEON and an Act for Peace representative around mutual support.

4.4 A Key Strategy: Communication

Summary: *Investing in a renewed communication strategy will facilitate relationships and help build alignment across the NCCA.*

4.4.1 Communication with Stakeholders

“There's two things that have got to happen. One is - there's got to be something to communicate, and there's got to be a way of communicating that something.”

“How do you do communication and networking in the modern context? There's a bigger piece of work that comes first. Board skills in communication and relationship building are limited. What would be a helpful next step for strategic planning?”

The Project Officer's first report focused entirely on feedback from national church leaders. As noted:

“Church leaders expressed concerns about inadequate communication with member churches. It is noteworthy that significant numbers of church leaders said they knew little about the NCCA. It is also important to note that the leaders of some member churches are so disengaged from NCCA they have been difficult to contact. This is not healthy for any member-organisation.”

Staff feedback reinforces that communication about the NCCA is an area of challenge:

“NCCA does not have a high profile: many people in churches haven't heard of it. Even people who work in the office in Act for Peace don't all understand what NCCA does and its purpose.”

How might the NCCA might be more effective?

“Improve how we are communicating what is happening on the ground.”

How to increase engagement of the member churches?

“I guess it's about brand recognition and engagement. How well are we 'selling' the story and purpose of the NCCA? How are member churches also selling the story?”

“We may not have been good at communicating with the member churches. Do they understand what their contributions do, and the work? Do they feel they are getting value for money? Communication with our member churches must be a priority.”

It has become apparent there is diversity and confusion about the purpose and activities of the NCCA among member church representatives, commission members, Directors, and even staff.

One staff member commented that the illustrated annual report Liz prepared for the AGM revealed previously unknown NCCA activities.

At a Faith and Unity meeting earlier this year, there was a discussion about what the purpose of the NCCA was and how it works. A representative who had been on Faith and Unity for some years scrolled through the website and found the Objects of the constitution while attempting to answer this question.

Most organisations have their purpose prominent on their website and in other communications.

The Project Officer recommends a strategy be developed to address communication with NCCA stakeholders.

A [5C's review](#) of the organisation ([Company, Collaborators, Customers, Competitors, Climate](#)) might be a useful precursor to developing a communication strategy. The Project Officer informally completed one of these as a point of reference.

Developing a simple tagline that communicates the essence of the NCCA could be helpful. (eg's: “churches working together” or “expressing church unity”). This could be on every email, letterhead, webpage and so on to help alignment and convey the key purposes of the NCCA.

A summary document describing the mission, history, structure and values of the NCCA would be helpful. Providing this documentation could form part of the orientation process for new Board members, national church leaders or representatives, and staff and commission members. This will help alignment by orientating all parties to the purposes, values and activities of the NCCA. It would be a partner document to the proposed theological document of Recommendation Two.

4.4.2 Communications specialist on staff?

“It would be great to have a comms person across the whole of the NCCA. If we want to go to the next level, it's all about communication.”

A communications specialist may be able to assist in developing a communication strategy. They may also help to measure engagement, craft media statements, update the website, and revamp NCCA social media.

As the Safe Church network looks to transition to more web-based communication, access to specialist communication expertise will help ensure excellence.

4.4.3 External communication and public faith

A Christian voice in society? Some state ecumenical officers expressed the hope that the Australian church and the ecumenical movement might function as a prophetic voice:

“The NCCA purpose is to be a prophetic voice, the one that engages at national and international levels. The churches I see from what I gather is that they're complaining about ecumenical bodies (if it's the state, the national or WCC) is that it's not voicing for international issues.”

“I think it's not just what will make NCCA effective, but what will make the whole ecumenical body effective. It will be constantly engaging with society, and integrated in society, and voicing things in society, and advocating things in society.”

“We need just to go back to basics... to engage with society, to raise the profile of the church.”

“(we need) a point of contact for government departments, and to be the public face of the church. This raises the question of what communications capacity do our churches have internally through their dioceses, state bodies etc. This conversation is critical.”

As noted in the Project Officer's first report, a number of church leaders, especially from Orthodox traditions, would like churches together to be promoting the Christian faith to the broader Australian public.

However, there was feedback from the Board that significant investment in external communication might be stretching beyond the capacity of the NCCA. This seems prudent. There was also pushback against any connection with the ACL. There may however be merit in conversation with the Bible Society around the public face of Christianity in Australia.

The Bible Society has considerable resources. The [Bible Society group](#) oversees the Centre for Public Christianity, Eternity Magazine, and Koorong Books. It is hoping to work on a “brand church” project around the reputation of the church in society. The NCCA might benefit the Bible Society by being a point of contact for many different church traditions. The Bible society may be able to address the concerns of many church leaders I interviewed around raising the profile of the church and its ministries in Australia.

Recommendation Five

Following a process of clarification of the purpose and priorities of NCCA, that the Board invest in a communication review and new strategy. The time frame for this will depend on the progress of Recommendation One.

The Board might consider staffing a communication position for NCCA (potentially sharing time

and expense with a state council and/or Act for Peace and/or a member church) at some point in the future.

That the NCCA initiate a conversation with the Bible Society around public faith.

5 NCCA Structure and Function

5.1 Clarifying Decision-Making in NCCA Inc.

Summary: *NCCA decisions should reflect the will of its member churches. NCCA structures and the process of decision-making should be clear and participatory.*

“We need to look at the charter, delegations of authority, governance, risk management. We have challenges ahead. We need to be focused and clear and have a good structure.”

It is apparent there is a need to bed down the new NCCA structure. Concerns have been raised in relation to decision making, member engagement, and organisational clarity. Board members have noted areas of confusion:

When you say the Council, what do you mean?

“Well, that's one of the least clear things about the NCCA. What is it? Because it doesn't seem that the Forum actually directs anything, and I'm not quite sure what the Assembly is meant to do. The Board is meant to run it from a governance point of view, but there doesn't seem to be any sort of clear unifying mandate, which I would have expected to come from the Forum: ‘this is what we want to do.’”

“I think there's got to be some level of buy-in from the heads of churches. At least with the old executive there was a recognition that that's where there would be some contact, and the assumption was that the heads of churches and all their delegates would be present. The new structure and the creation of a Board has enabled that to be lost. I'm not quite sure why this wasn't thought through at the time, but it just seems to me to be cumbersome. There's three sorts of meetings . . . a Forum and an Assembly, and then there's something else, there's a Board . . . it doesn't feel like this dynamic.”

“I remember getting the memo about who our three official reps are for the Assemblies – but the Assemblies so far have been entirely issues-based. I'm not sure whether our (church leaders) should go to these. We have been sending people appropriate to the issue. It's all a bit unclear. What is the function of the assembly? What did the ‘three delegates’ even mean?”

5.2 National Church Leaders

Some Board members feel there has been some distance between the NCCA and national church leaders:

“I think there's got to be some level of buy-in from the heads of churches.”

“There seems to be limited intentionality about linking the Board with the national church leaders.”

The Project Officer's first report identified the national leaders group as key stakeholders.

If we look at NCCA through the prism of being a member-based organisation, national church leaders are a key connection point with the NCCA members.

If we look at the NCCA through the prism of being a council of churches, the relationships occurring at the national church leader level are critical for building deeper relationships and expressing unity.

In response to the suggestion of a stronger relationship between the NCCA and the national church leaders group, one national church leader noted:

“I am especially keen on seeing the linkage developed between national church leaders and the NCCA. I believe that for an effective NCCA, church leaders must have it in their line of sight, and this is one way of achieving that. It's also an important part of the ecumenical vision, and that the NCCA doesn't become people working around the blockages caused by the leaders, but actual churches working together.”

Some state ecumenical officers were critical of the new constitution, feeling it had contributed to disengagement by national church leaders:

“I have no idea why on earth we went from what we were, to what are now . . . No one understood. It was sent to us and I struggled with trying to understand a model that is secular in nature . . . a model of Directorship and company law.”

[In 2016] “The rest of us sat there and just didn't read it properly. I remember sitting with Sister Margaret, from Brisbane, and we're going: ‘There's something fundamentally wrong with this’ and we couldn't work it out. And we worked it out. About six weeks' later Margaret wrote to me and went ‘I was talking with Richard, and we just worked out why we felt uncomfortable. It's a complete disempowerment of the leadership of the member churches.’

“For me, anything going forward needs to be a reconstitution of a body of some remit that is empowering the most senior members of the member churches, to want to be together, to have conversations around policy, process, planning. That takes seriously the theological and ecclesiological differences that exist within the body of Christ. If I had any say at any level, I'd be

wanting to reconstitute the Australian church leaders' forum as the most senior governing body of the NCCA, and then under that I would have a number of working groups. One of the working groups would be governance, which would be the current board. Another one would be Act for Peace. And a third one, I think would be around life and witness. And life and witness would then become the facilitating body of all the commissions, etc. of Council. I'd have three clear streams, but I'd flip the model. So the leadership and the power and the ownership would lie in the member churches.

“No input. No responsibility. No value!”

The national church leaders group has been in relative malaise over the past few years. It is timely that the NCCA secretariat can take the initiative to organise these meetings, as occurred in 2018. This is helpful to busy national church leaders. It is an important point of connection for the NCCA with its member churches.

Consideration could be given as to how to amplify the influence of National Church Leaders in the NCCA decision making processes.

5.3 The Assembly

The NCCA Assemblies in this triennium have been focused around issues. In 2017 they explored the theme of mission in a post-Christendom context. In 2018 Assemblies adopted the theme of responding to the Royal Commission recommendations. Assemblies in 2018 had higher levels of participation and involved many representatives who were responsible for their church's responses to the Royal Commission. They were not necessarily national church leaders, although few church leaders did attend.

The practice of Assemblies in this triennium has involved sharing useful information through theological reflection, expert input and through discussion groups. It has been of service to participating churches.

In feedback on the Project Officer's first report, one church leader posed the question how learning at Assemblies might be disseminated:

The Assemblies are the one regular platform for discussion on issues of common interest. They are rewarding for participants and we have recently seen an increase in participation, but how do we further this? How do we facilitate the results being disseminated? How do we put together recommendations and feed them into NCCA?

The NCCA constitution appears to use some of the language of the old executive meetings in relation to Assemblies:

22. DELEGATES TO THE ASSEMBLY

22.1 Each Member Church must appoint no more than 2 persons to act as its Delegates at an Assembly. Where possible, the Head of each Member Church will be a Delegate. For the avoidance of doubt, a Delegate can also be a Representative or Member Nominee.

22.3 Each Delegate shall be entitled to attend the Assembly, have one vote each and shall be entitled to exercise all the powers on behalf of that Member Church which s/he represents.

It is noteworthy that the constitution refers to delegates voting at Assemblies. In practice this has not been a focus in the current triennium. It is a point of confusion that requires clarification.

5.4 The Forum

At present the constitution states the Forum must occur once every three years, and it outlines the purposes of this gathering (20.2). It notes who may attend (20.4 – 20.8). However, the constitution is silent on how decisions should be made at the Forum. Minutes from the 2016 Forum were never distributed to the member churches. Whether intended or not, this may have sent the message that the Forum is not significant in the current structure.

“I'm not sure that for our Commission there was a clear agenda for the triennium from the Forum.”

The Board should clarify and document how decision making should occur at the Forum.

Decision making practices do not need to be in a constitution. However, there should be a policy around how recommendations are formalised at the Forum. The process should be communicated clearly to the churches and Forum representatives. Any policy should ameliorate the risk that member church representatives will feel disempowered. It may be helpful to reassure member church representatives that the Board will only fail to adopt Forum recommendations under exceptional circumstances.

The NCCA constitution does note:

20.9 Irrespective of whether funding from the Company is required, any business ideas, project public statements generated at a Forum must be taken to and be considered by the Directors at a Board meeting for approval before implementation.

5.5 The AGM

The AGM appears to function adequately. The date of the 2017 AGM was rescheduled twice (24th October, then 31st of October, then the 3rd of November). The AGM in 2016 records only 5 voting attendees, which appears to be below a quorum. This is likely to be due to management issues from this period.

Recommendation 6:

That the Board clarify, document and communicate how decision making operates at the Forum, the purpose of the NCCA Assemblies, and the role of the national church leaders' meetings.

That the NCCA General Secretary continue to take the initiative to organise and support national church leaders' meetings.

5.6 The Board

Summary: *The NCCA Board would benefit from greater clarity on its distinct purpose, model, skill requirements, recruitment and induction processes.*

5.6.1 Board Self-Reflection and Role within the NCCA

"We are a relatively new Board. What self-reflection has been done about what our role is?"

"We need to think about governance itself (corporate vs church governance). What model are we applying to this Board? Do we want to emulate corporate governance?"

"I'm interested in my role (as a representative of my church). This hasn't been spelled out . . . I'm flying blind on both sides."

Directors expressed the concern that they turn up to meetings with a very full agenda and leave without asking high-level reflective questions: "What is the purpose of the NCCA? What is our role? What governance model should we follow? How do we get input from our members, including member churches not represented on the Board? What principles or theological themes guide us?"

One Director suggested a Board Retreat might be a helpful way of building relationships and focusing on high-level questions that are difficult to address in normal meetings.

One Director summed up a tension for the Board succinctly:

“We are governing the organisational part of NCCA – finance, strategy, policy – of a relationally purposed organisation. How do these two things relate?”

The Board would be wise to engage in a self-reflective process about its role and its limits. This might involve an external facilitator so all Board members (including the President) can engage fully in the process.

5.6.2 Board Professional Development:

Some concerns were raised around the current Board skills mix:

What kind of extra expertise might the Board need?

“We sort of have a skills matrix for the Board but come with a mix of representative and governance responsibilities. We could get into trouble with more serious problems.”

“We don’t have especially strong finance people on the Board. We really need more expertise on strategy that can be governed.”

“How do you do communication and networking in the modern context? There’s a bigger piece of work that comes first. Board skills in communication and relationship building are limited. What would be a helpful next step for strategic planning?”

“There are wise heads around the table. I took up the role with finance in mind. We should have a treasurer, but this hasn’t been ratified – the constitution suggests a treasurer should be formally appointed.”*

***58. APPOINTMENT AND ROLE OF TREASURER**

58.1 The Company must have at least one Treasurer, who may also be a Director.

58.2 A Treasurer must be appointed by the Directors (after giving the Company their signed consent to act as Treasurer of the Company) and may be removed from that role by the Directors.

58.3 The Directors must decide the terms and conditions under which the Treasurer is appointed, including any remuneration.

58.4 The role of the Treasurer includes:

(a) Preparing and presenting annual financial statements for the Company to the annual general meeting;

(b) Ensuring that all money due to the Company is collected and received and that all payments authorised by the Company are made, and

(c) Ensuring that correct books and accounts are kept showing the financial affairs of the Company, including full details of all receipts and expenditure connected with the activities of the Company.

While the Board has highly capable individual Directors, feedback indicates potential skill gaps.

The Board should engage in self-reflection as to where skills gaps might lie, what training will be most helpful, and where recruitment will enhance the Board.

The NCCA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. It is subject to the [Corporations Act](#), and has reporting responsibilities to the [ACNC](#) and [ASIC](#). All Directors have significant [legal obligations](#). Note the AICD has [professional development requirements](#) for members. While NCCA Board members do not require AICD membership, some ongoing professional development would be helpful to ensure Directors give the best possible leadership to the NCCA.

Some potential NCCA Directors may have no prior company Board experience. The NCCA should be willing to organise or subsidize some governance training for new Directors in such circumstances. It is also possible that member churches will subsidize their representatives to undertake governance training.

Groups such as the [Australian Institute of Company Directors](#) offer training, but their courses can be unreasonably expensive for NFP organisations the size of the NCCA. [Christian Management Australia](#) offers training for Directors at a more accessible price point. The [Institute of Community Directors Australia](#) offers many free resources, including useful [policy drafts](#) the NCCA Board might utilize.

It may be helpful to assign the Board professional development portfolio to one Director, who can refer other Directors to relevant documents, webinars, or other training opportunities.

Professional development might be planned and included in the schedule of Board meetings. This may require longer meetings than currently occurs. Possibly holding a working dinner the night before a daytime meeting will work for interstate Board members. A periodic retreat may be useful. Expertise to deliver training may exist within the Board, or it might be accessed via other expertise in member churches. It may be helpful to add communication or public relations to the skills matrix of the NCCA Board in the light of the need to enhance NCCA communication.

5.6.3 Board Induction Process

When asked about their experience of the Board, several Directors expressed the need to develop a more robust induction process for new Directors:

“There was no formal induction. I had to try to pick up on our terms of reference, what we are overseeing.”

“There was very little orientation as to what the NCCA is.”

“I think everyone on the Board should do at least the reduced version [of the AICD Company Director’s course]”.

An economical way of orienting new Directors will be to utilize relevant expertise of volunteer lawyers and business executives connected to member churches to conduct governance training. Mentoring by existing Directors is another way to induct new Board members.

An overview document about the NCCA, and a document on NCCA’s theology of ecumenism, may help orient new Directors to the NCCA.

5.6.4 Board Diversity

“It would be good to have younger people on the Board, and a better gender balance.”

A couple of interviewees noted the challenge of increasing gender and age diversity on the Board. This desire can be expressed to member churches in the lead up to a general meeting for elected Directors (constitution, 25), or be proactively addressed by the Board for appointed Directors (constitution, 26)

5.6.5 Risk Report

“What are we doing about risk issues for churches? Where is the risk report?”

“I’m not sure the reputational and financial risks have been adequately addressed.”

“What is the risk in our Safe Church standards and training? We are being helpful to smaller denominations, but what risks are we taking on? It’s tempting to say our risk is low. We need a robust conversation.

“Some ideas suggested in your report... raise the question of what does it mean to auspice something? If we initiate interactions, that doesn’t mean we have auspiced something.”

Clarifying and documenting the major risks to the NCCA may help Board decision-making.

Recommendation 8: Board development

That the Board engage in self-reflection on its distinct role and purpose and the tasks of Directors.

That the NCCA Board evaluate its skill needs and plan professional development training accordingly.

That the NCCA Board consider adding communication to its skills matrix.

That the NCCA Board develop an induction process for new Directors. This should include governance training for Directors with no prior Board experience or relevant training.

That the NCCA Board develop a recruitment and succession planning strategy, conscious of skill gaps identified and the need for age and gender diversity.

That the NCCA Board develop a risk matrix and provide a regular risk report at Board meetings

5.7 Executive Roles

5.7.1 President (Chair) Selection and Expectations

Summary: *The NCCA President has both a relational role in a church council and a key governance role as Board Chair of a Company. This can make finding suitable candidates challenging.*

Board members interviewed did not have clarity about how potential new Presidents can be identified and recommended to the Forum.

According to the Constitution (19.1), the President must be a Clergy leader.

An ideal President will have high-level relationship skills, provide theological leadership, and articulate the purpose of the NCCA with clarity.

As a Company Limited by Guarantee, the ideal Board Chair will have extensive Board and management experience and have completed a Company Directors' course or equivalent.

33. DUTIES OF DIRECTORS

33.1 The Directors must comply with their duties as Directors under legislation and common law (judge-made law), and with the duties described in governance standard 5 of the regulations made under the ACNC Act which are:

- (a) to exercise their powers and discharge their duties with the degree of care and diligence that a reasonable individual would exercise if they were a Director of the Company;
- (b) to act in good faith in the best interests of the Company and to further the charitable purpose(s) of the Company set out in clause 7.1;
- (c) not to misuse their position as a Director;
- (d) not to misuse information they gain in their role as a Director;
- (e) to disclose any perceived or actual material conflicts of interest in the manner set out in clause 32;
- (f) to ensure that the financial affairs of the Company are managed responsibly; and
- (g) not to allow the Company to operate while it is insolvent.

The pool of clergy who have significant experience in leading a company is not large.

It is possible a highly relational leader with company leadership experience cannot be identified. If so, the Board might approach a potential President who would be a strong ambassador to member churches and the wider community. They might suggest this person adopt the relational functions of the role, but need not take on Board Chair responsibilities. Some potential Presidential candidates may prefer this.

There is provision in the constitution for someone other than the President to act as Chair if they "are unwilling to act" as Board Chair. (38.1)

An alternative is for the NCCA to pay for governance training for an incoming President.

Recommendation 9

That the Board clarify the process for identifying potential NCCA Presidents.

That the Board consider splitting the role of President if required to ensure both relational and governance functions are performed with excellence.

5.7.2 The General Secretary

Summary: *The General Secretary role is complex. The role may need fine-tuning as the Board develops a new strategic plan aligned around relationships. Providing support and professional development opportunities will help the General Secretary function effectively.*

The Project Officer did not ask pre-prepared questions in relation to the General Secretary role. However, several noteworthy comments were made.

One interviewee noted the breadth of the General Secretary role might contribute to a sense of overwhelm:

“It just strikes me that the council for number of years now, has been struggling to resource itself, and you might ask if it's trying to do more than it's capable of doing with the resources that it has, and you end up with people in these roles basically exhausted, depleted or something. That's attributable to a number of factors. I don't think there's a sole factor.”

Acknowledging the complexity of the General Secretary role, the Board might invest in personal and psychological support (external supervision, peer support groups) and professional development support (executive coaching, appropriate professional development training) for the General Secretary.

NCCA’s ownership of “Safe Church” behoves it to offer demonstrate high quality employment practices. The General Secretary role can be considered a senior ministry leadership role. The NCCA should model efforts to adopt all Royal Commission recommendations, including **Recommendation 16.45:**

“Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.”

While the [return on investment](#) for executive coaching is difficult to measure in financial terms for a not-for-profit like the NCCA, investment in this kind of professional support should enhance leadership effectiveness.

One interviewee expressed the view that the General Secretary’s authority appears unclear in relation to Act for Peace:

“I mean part of the issue has been who is in charge of whom at that level? [NCCA and Act for Peace] I think that's a tension that occurs at all commission levels . . .

“But I think that one of the key elements in relationships is defining well what the General Secretary (if you retained that position) is going to do in relation to the different commissions – one of which is an incorporated body – which is unusual.”

Project Officer: "I'm not sure the level of clarity that exists on that. It would be a good thing to have really clear expectations about what the Gen Sec's role is and isn't in relation to Act for Peace."

"I think we need to have that. In fact, if you don't you are really silly."

There may already be clarity in relation to the General Secretary and the Act for Peace CEO relationship. The comment above suggests this relationship has the potential to cause conflict if the lines are not clear. This may need to be part of shaping a future General Secretary's job description.

A Board member was very clear about the kind of General Secretary the NCCA needs:

"We need someone who can run an organisation."

The General Secretary needs to manage a small staff team, work with the Board Chair and the Board, and implement the strategic plan of the Board. Experience and expertise in leading an organisation seems a non-negotiable.

Another Board member commented:

"Elizabeth Stone is technically interim – why is she not staying on? She's doing a great job."

As noted earlier in this report, communication is a key challenge facing the NCCA.

Liz Stone opted not to be interviewed for this project. If she wished to continue to work as General Secretary in a part-time role in the next triennium, and the Board wished to offer her this, filling the other two-days per week with a communications specialist might be a helpful strategy for this season.

Note no direct questions were asked about the Board's intentions in relation to the General Secretary role, nor Liz's intentions in relation to NCCA, nor whether she would prefer a part-time or full-time role. This is simply an idea of the Project Officer.

Recommendation 10

That the Board identify and rank priorities for a future General Secretary role after developing a strategic plan and draft a job description with clear organisational expectations.

That the Board consider investing in professional support for the General Secretary (examples: executive coaching, supervision, support groups, a professional development budget)

6 Non-Member Churches: Barriers to NCCA Membership

Summary: *Many Australian churches have barriers to NCCA membership. However, they are open to engagement and may participate in networks. Pentecostal churches are growing and are potential new NCCA members.*

One of the research tasks was to identify barriers to NCCA membership. This involved face-to-face interviews with observer church representatives, and phone or email feedback from other non-member churches.

6.1 Observer Churches

The Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist churches have been observer churches over several years. They have their own distinct barriers to NCCA membership.

Note there is no mention of the term “observer church” in the new constitution, but it is used verbally by staff.

6.1.1 Baptist Ministries Australia

Baptist churches require unanimous support from their state bodies to affiliate with the NCCA. This has not occurred to date. A senior NCCA staff member might request permission from Keith Jobberns to visit the annual Baptist national gathering. They might then hear any concerns from state representatives and answer questions about the NCCA. If this was received favorably, state reps might then take back a positive recommendation to their own state voting bodies. Such a process may take time.

6.1.2 Seventh Day Adventist Church

The Seventh Day Adventists have an international structure that has not been traditionally involved with the international ecumenical movement. It would probably never affiliate with the NCCA. They

are open to observer involvement. Michael Worker appreciated a national church leader gathering earlier in 2018. Staying connected with whomever is functioning in a national leadership role is the best way to achieve observer involvement with this church.

6.2 Other non-member churches

6.2.1 “Reformed” Churches

For a couple of reformed tradition churches, formal connection with churches with which they have significant theological differences is off the table.

“Membership with NCCA has never been discussed by our church as far as I can remember. A key reason I would think is that it only relates officially with those who have the same theological/confessional outlook.”

“It’s too wide a group of churches- probably more so than other churches, it matters to (us) what churches believe (ie doctrines from Bible) and we’re hesitant to identify with wide group of churches where some believe differently about the gospel of grace and how God’s grace operates. As an aside, but illustrative for you: we dis-fellowshipped with our mother church over their adoption of a practice clearly at odds with biblical teaching (ie homosexuality)”

Any formal approach would need to emphasise and find simple ways to communicate the essence of Part 3 of the Constitution*. It appears very unlikely this will be productive any time soon. However, these churches are open to involvement in relevant Assemblies and workshops.

*** 3. THE CHURCH, THE CHURCHES AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA**

3.1 The National Council of Churches in Australia is not a Church. Rather by bringing its Member Churches into a living contact with each other it desires to give expression to the significant bonds which already exist between them: what they share with each other as Christians because of their union with God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit [often called communion or koinonia]. It recognises that each Member Church brings to the National Council of Churches in Australia its own understanding of the nature of the Church.

3.2 No Member Church is being asked to forsake or compromise its own ecclesiology. However, the National Council of Churches in Australia provides a framework within which Member Churches are encouraged to enter into dialogue, at all levels, about the understanding of "church" which each Church holds.

3.3 While some Member Churches may not be able to recognise each other as churches in the full and true sense, they nevertheless acknowledge in each other important elements of both doctrine and practice that belong to the Church which Christ founded. It is hoped that through further dialogue the Member Churches will broaden their knowledge of each other, extend their recognition of each other, find ways of giving greater expression to what they hold in common, and move towards a more visible expression of the unity Christ has given to his Church.

6.2.2 Independent churches

The comment below from a Christian Community Church (CCC) representative is indicative of a barrier for a number of traditions that practice local church autonomy:

“Our governance structure means all we do is facilitate interaction between local churches in the network. All the local churches are independent legal entities. They may affiliate with our network of services but we’re not in a position to represent all our churches structurally at a national level. We do engage in ministers fraternals at the local level and learn about what’s going on that way.”

Even national church leader representation can be problematic for the NCCA in relation to CCC: it seems nominal leaders rotate around the country, making long-term relationships challenging. While unlikely to affiliate with the NCCA, groups like the CCC may be open to Assemblies on particular topics.

6.2.3 Pentecostal churches

A more promising avenue for potential NCCA membership are the Pentecostal Churches.

i) Hillsong

Hillsong is the newest [Australian denomination](#), although it retains close ties with the Australian Christian Churches. Hillsong sent a number of representatives to the last Assembly. As a new denomination they may be open to a membership conversation.

ii) Australian Christian Churches

The Australian Christian Churches are the largest Pentecostal group in Australia. The box below is a summary of barriers to NCCA membership:

- Historically there were experiences with NCCA which indicated that some participants ‘looked down the nose’ at Pentecostals as not being a ‘proper’ denomination, or as theologically unsophisticated.
- There is a problem for the ACC in identifying with groups with which they have significant doctrinal concerns (eg Quakers).
- ACC key national leaders serve in a volunteer capacity whilst being Senior Pastors of their own churches, hence time is at a premium.

However, the ACC may be open to a conversation with a senior person around possible NCCA benefits and possible ACC contribution.

The ACC National Executive meets quarterly, and Jeffrey Bartlett is the best contact person when and if the NCCA would like to pursue a conversation around NCCA involvement.

As noted for some reformed churches, assurance that NCCA membership does not indicate theological assent on the position of other member churches may be helpful. The ACC does have a concern for Christian Unity.

iii) Apostolic Church

The National leader of the Apostolic church Wayne Swift gave the following response:

“Great question. It’s not one that’s been raised with us, I don’t know that we’ve been invited to be part of NCCA. It’s also something we’ve never considered. We are part of the Australian Pentecostal Ministers Fellowship, an annual meeting of the National leaders of all the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements.”

iv) Other Pentecostal

Wayne Swift chairs the Australian Pentecostal Ministers Fellowship. They will meet in April in 2019. He also noted:

“If someone was invited to come they would want to know who it is and what they would like to discuss. We protect the agenda as the guys are all busy”

Ian Smith’s insight from being in dialogue with independent, charismatic-flavoured churches suggests that scriptures around unity in the body of Christ are a good starting point for ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostal church leaders:

“I’ve had the privilege, the honour of spending 18 months with a bunch of guys who are very senior and run very large, independent churches who have stumbled across two texts in the scriptures that are inconvenient truths for them. One text is John 17:20-26, and they read that text and they go: ‘Fractured unity leads to a disengagement and a disempowerment, and a falsification of the narrative of the God who so loves and creates. So how do we fix that?’ Then they stumble over the inconvenient passage in Ephesians that says that there is one hope, one baptism and one God. And so they’re asking the question, really intentionally: ‘What does it mean to be the body of Christ?’”

The World Council of Churches strategic plan notes that:

“Growth is not taking place equally in all Christian traditions. It is well known that growth takes place primarily in Pentecostal and charismatic churches. It is expected that Pentecostal churches will have 115.2 million members in 2020 compared to 14.5 million in 1970. The Charismatic churches will in 2020 boast 281.9 million members, compared to 4.3 million in 1970. Finally, the Independent Charismatic churches are projected to grow to even 312.7 million members, compared to 43.9 million in 1970.⁴ These churches have grown fastest in Asia and Latin America and are expected to grow further in Asia and Africa in the coming years. In other regions, for instance North America and Europe, Pentecostal and charismatic churches are also growing as members of other churches search for a new spiritual home.”

It is also noteworthy that Pentecostal churches in Australia have a [younger average demographic](#) than many other church traditions.

This simply reinforces the notion that Pentecostalism will be a growing presence in the Australian church scene. Beginning a process of dialogue may help bring the Pentecostal movement into greater unity with other Australian churches. NCCA may have a role to play here.

6.2.4 Orthodox Churches: another membership challenge

In the first Project Officer report to the Board, it was recommended a meeting be held with the Middle Eastern Bishops Council. This suggestion was not in the version circulated to member churches.

Note that there are several non-member churches that participate in the Middle Eastern Bishops Council meeting. Building relationships with this Council is one possible way to increase NCCA membership, and to re-engage with Orthodox member churches that are distant from the NCCA.

Building these kinds of relationships are a long-term challenge for the NCCA and the ecumenical movement.

Recommendation 11:

That the NCCA Board develop a long-term strategy to build relationships with non-member churches.

7 The Project Officer's first report

Summary: *One of the options in the Project Officer's first report was seeding new networks of specialist ministry leaders. Further feedback is required on this model and on possible new networks.*

This report is a companion piece to the earlier report that focused on national church leader feedback. This report was sent to national church leaders, representatives, and staff on the 8th of November.

7.1 Feedback on the Project Officer's First Report

All feedback received on the report via the surveys is in Appendix Two.

It is disappointing to note that relatively few responses have been received. Six national church leaders and two staff have responded.

Continuing to seek feedback on the Project Officer's first report may be helpful as the Board and Executive continue to plan the Forum.

7.2 Forming new networks: Further reflections

The idea that the NCCA might function as a hub stimulating new networks was explored in the Project Officer's first report.

Only three church leaders attempted to rank the suggested networks in returned surveys. It is not possible to identify potential networks of greatest interest based on such a small sample size. Identifying possible new networks may be an option for ongoing discussion and consultation.

Stimulating networks is a way of thinking about how national churches might work together. It reflects a broader shift in workplaces (and society in general) away from formal and hierarchical approaches, towards informality, empowerment, team work, collaboration, and innovation.

The model of forming networks of specialist practitioners is not new. Throughout the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse, a group responsible for their church's responses gathered periodically to share information. This was very helpful to the participants. It did not become a formal commission. This was a short-term network formed around a particular need.

As noted in the earlier report, meetings of church aid agency representatives gradually evolved into the [Church Agency Network](#), which allows a coordinated response to international human need.

Might other networks serve member churches in the future?

In 2018 the Project Officer helped to pilot three networks (although one of these, FRANC, began in November 2017).

Three Case Studies:

i) Case Study One: FIRM (Faith Insurance and Risk Managers)

In May the Project Officer invited a group of insurance representatives to have a lunch together, which occurred on the 22nd of August. Names for this were identified from FRANCO, and from discussion with the Churches of Christ insurance manager.

This proved extremely helpful. Neil Bull from the Anglican National Insurance Program (ANIP) became aware other churches were receiving cyber fraud insurance, which his broker had told him was unavailable. This put him in a good negotiating position for his next insurance renewal.

Neil became highly enthusiastic about the potential of networking and has been the driving force behind a gathering of church insurance representatives on the 15th of February. Thirty-three people have already registered for this insurance gathering, after only two emails of invitation to 200 people.

The original insurance group have met for a second lunch and discussed the parameters of the FIRM gathering. Neil acts as the leader of this informal group.

ii) Case Study Two: Youth and Young Adult practitioners

On July the 5th this year an Assembly was held focused on young adult formation. Sixteen people attended this (largely practitioners plus one church leader), as well as three presenters and NCCA staff. A Facebook discussion group formed out of this, and an online conversation began around a follow up gathering.

A small group has formed who are in the process of shaping a gathering on the 2nd and 3rd of September 2019 at the Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre in Brisbane. The current organising group consists of Rowan Lewis (Whitley College) Tom Smidt (Lutheran), Brad Case (Church of Christ), and John Marion (Salvation Army). They are looking to grow this leadership team to have broad representation.

The key idea is to bring together leaders of youth and young adult ministries (at the diocese, state or national level; not local church practitioners) and those teaching youth or young adult-focused subjects in theological colleges.

Their plan is for peer practitioners to take turns presenting on:

- A problem they are working on (or a solution they have found)
- An experiment
- A good news story / case study

Followed by discussion and questions and answers.

This is a unique kind of forum. Several youth specialists have expressed enthusiasm around this opportunity.

iii) Case Study Three: FRANCO (Financial Representatives of Australian National Churches)

[FRANC](#) (Financial Representatives of Australian National Churches) actually began last year. Its first gathering was on the 30th of November 2017, initially at the suggestion of a couple of Churches of Christ members.

This was followed by a gathering on the 20th and 21st of March 2018, followed by the most recent gathering on the 17th and 18th of October 2018. Each of these events has involved around 35 participants from a range of church traditions. The most recent event had breakout groups around:

- Banking & Finance
- Property (Development & Management)
- Corporate Services

The core FRANC committee currently consists of Stuart Campbell (leader, Churches of Christ), Matthew Cassin (Catholic), David Pietsch (Lutheran) and David Patterson (UCA) and Janet Woodlock.

This committee envisions the next steps as conversations around shared banking services or even a church bank.

7.3 Insights from the pilot networks

These case studies highlight that networks of practitioners can largely run themselves if an issue of sufficient interest appears.

As such, establishing new networks need not take up a great deal of staff time. In fact, a volunteer from a church may do this if a gathering of representatives (national church leaders, Assembly or Forum) expressed the desire to start a new network. Resources lie within the churches, and networks can be established in a way that any risk primarily sits with the churches. As noted by one of the interviewees:

“There's always a temptation for a council of churches to behave like a church. So, to provide all of the services that a church would provide, rather than facilitating the churches to help each other do things.”

The next step may be a discussion about whether this model of operating (stimulating new networks of specialists that the churches run themselves) is something the churches wish to explore.

As church leaders and representatives discuss areas of concern, NCCA leadership might be alert to acting as a catalyst to for new networks.

As previously noted, there is insufficient feedback at this stage to have any clarity about what the next most promising new network might be. This may be a good thing; it permits conversation about what are important issues where church collaboration might be explored.

The NCCA might support an emerging network by providing contact details, or by requesting national church leaders and church representatives suggest appropriate contacts for a new network.

This model is a more agile way for churches to collaborate than the formal establishment of a new commission. Networks may ultimately evolve into commissions, spin off into their own entities, or may simply be short-term arrangements.

7.4 A Way Forward for NATSEIC?

As noted in the Project Officer's first report, church leaders have little idea (or diverse ideas) about the best way forward for NATSEIC. The network model, in which leaders of indigenous ministries from different churches get together, might provide a way of discernment.

A possible way forward may be for NATSEIC trust funds to be used to underwrite a retreat, whereby leaders of church indigenous ministry areas gather together for several days to share, reflect, and pray.

A first step may be to raise these possibilities with national church leaders. If they affirm the idea of a network or retreat, church indigenous leaders could then be contacted to discern if this is of interest.

Recommendation 12

That the NCCA initiate a discussion with national church leaders on a networking model, and seek further feedback on the Project Officer's November report.

That the NCCA discuss with national church leaders connecting church indigenous ministry leaders.

8 Other Issues for NCCA

8.1 Financial vulnerability

Summary: *There is vulnerability in the church and ecumenical financial space as some churches deal with shrinking budgets.*

The Project Officer's first report noted church leaders feeling under significant financial pressure.

This sense of financial pressure was echoed by some state ecumenical officers. There is some financial vulnerability across the ecumenical movement.

"I think with all the Ecumenical Councils the greatest difficulty that I've seen is financial, the budgeting to keep our offices open. I think that is the real crux of all ecumenical councils, including the NCCA and all of the state bodies. Church people don't like to engage the world of money . . . but I think at times we need to discuss that, and see how we are going to . . . keep our offices open. [Ecumenical work in] Tasmania is all finished. Funding was the major issue. Don't

ever say it won't affect us. It will. It's affected the World Council of Churches and they've got to downsize. We have to find income in the time to come."

As the NCCA provides benefit to member churches, communicates its work, and contacts church representatives, this will help to generate loyalty from member churches (and ongoing affiliation income for the NCCA).

Another means of securing income is inviting new churches into membership. This is likely to be a slow process.

The church financial space is changing. A number of churches are finding creative ways to finance their mission. The [Eporo Tower](#) is a recent dramatic example of a creative use of property to release finance for church activities. There are many other [examples](#) of [multi-use space](#) generating income for churches. Some church bodies are using schools or [retirement living](#) to subsidize worship spaces, especially in some green fields areas with restricted spaces (and challenging price-points) for worship facilities. Apps for online giving and direct debit systems are replacing or complementing cash in a plate. Church bank accounts provide another source of revenue.

Finding creative ways to generate income is neither a short-term nor an urgent issue for the NCCA. However, the NCCA Board has a responsibility to ensure the longer-term viability of the organisation.

The Project Officer had hoped groups like FRANC and FIRM might provide a form of sponsorship, analogous to a dividend return on savings achieved for churches. This remains a future possibility.

One of the interviewees noted "the ecumenical generation" is getting older. Targeted requests for bequests may prove productive. Consulting with (or employing) professional fundraisers may be another way to diversify income.

Recommendation 13: At some point in the next triennium, that the Board discuss options to diversify NCCA income.

8.2 Ageing Ecumenical Champions and the Challenge of Succession

Summary: *There are relatively few young people involved in the NCCA. A strategy to invest in younger people will help ensure a healthy future for the ecumenical movement.*

Emily Evans was the sole interviewee in this project who is under 35. While this is not unexpected given the focus of the project was national church leaders, it is one sign there is a challenge in engaging younger people in the ecumenical movement.

Emily's responses are below:

How might the NCCA could be improved?

“Be realistic about the context that we are in and not to be afraid of taking risks and trying something new. Better communication. Better and genuine engagement of young people. Politely encourage the passing of the knowledge of the ‘ecumenical elders’, while they vacate their chair for a fresh perspective and energy.”

What are your hopes for the future of the NCCA?

“That they are visionary and not too focused of the glory days.”

Emily referred the Project Officer to an ecumenical youth summit organised by Queensland Churches Together. This involved gathering two young people from each of the member churches for twenty-four hours together to explore ecumenism.

Participant comments from the *Christian Youth Summit 2018 Report for Heads of Churches* are referenced below:

“I feel very strongly that the ideas of ecumenism (and especially receptive ecumenism) are where God's Spirit is calling things. I think it is vital to engage we young people in trialling these efforts now, so that we can be prepared for future challenges. Don't give up on ecumenism.”

“To the Heads of Churches, I want to invite you to continue bringing Young People into the heart of ecumenism. Lay people can be a driving force in this movement if we are invited in. Help us strengthen our full Christian Communities.”

“It has been great learning more about each other and the gifts we can all bring to the table. I pray this conversation continues in a public way so that you, and us, can model how to be an ecumenical community. This needs to trickle down more to local churches because there is so much that can happen there.”

This kind of gathering is one possible model for how the NCCA might invest in younger people.

Engaging younger people in ecumenism is a long-term challenge with many possible approaches.

In the short term, asking that churches send at least one younger person to NCCA events (Assemblies or the Forum) may help engage a younger generation in the ecumenical movement.

Emily's full list of recommendations in relation to engaging younger people were as follows:

Recommendation 12:

- NCCA facilitate more engagement with young adults to explore receptive ecumenism based on the model of QCT
- NCCA ensure that all its programs and activities consider input and the perspective of young adults
- Potentially consider quotes of young people

- Consider representation at Forums/ the Board etc
- Investment on Ecumenical Formation and mentorship

Emily may be a helpful person to discuss this with the Board

9 Future Vision

Proverbs 29:18

AMPC: Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish; but he who keeps the law [of God, which includes that of man]—blessed (happy, fortunate, and enviable) is he.

ESV: Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

A vision provides hope. It channels energy. It provides direction. It stimulates creativity. It fires up the imagination.

Organisations can build trust by improving their management, but they can only inspire by presenting a compelling vision.

A risk for the ecumenical movement may be to think small; to lose sight of the compelling reason for its existence.

Interviews suggest that a compelling purpose for the NCCA needs to be reclaimed, refined and re-communicated. The fact the NCCA leadership is strongly aware of this challenge is deeply hopeful.

Many church leaders have been pondering the question: “What is the Spirit saying to us?” This is also a hopeful impulse. The prayerful discernment of churches together may reveal new ways of working together. It may re-energise existing ecumenical endeavours.

One translation of Proverbs 29:18 may indeed be a message for us: *If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.*

The challenge of this season is to attend to what God is revealing about the Australian church and the ecumenical movement, and to respond faithfully.

10 Project Officer concluding comments:

Writing in December, I still echo the sentiments recorded earlier this year (below). I am very grateful to Liz for giving me wings to pursue this project, to Philip for discerning the significance of consulting NCCA stakeholders, to the honesty and thoughtfulness of all my interviewees, and to the NCCA Board for granting me this amazing opportunity.

I remain deeply optimistic about the potential of the NCCA to shape the future of Australian churches learning and working together. I write this with my best hopes and prayers for the NCCA and its leadership.

Rev Janet Woodlock
December 2018

“To say participating in these interviews has been a privilege is an understatement. It has been an amazing opportunity to sit up on the mountaintop, so to speak, and look over the big picture of the Australian church.

This is a challenging time for the church in Australia. The profile of an average church member is ageing as youth and young adults drift from churches. The proportion of people claiming Christian faith continues to decline. The sins of the church have been dragged across the media for 5 years through the Royal Commission on child abuse, and a looming new Royal Commission may highlight lapses in care for vulnerable elderly people in church care facilities. We recognise we are in an increasingly post-Christendom context.

These challenges are causing church leaders to ponder anew what God might be saying to us. I have been inspired by the conversations I have had with you.

“We talk about the need to actually *do* stuff together, but the difficulty is we're all so busy in our own patch, we don't have time and energy to think about what might we do together. Somehow we need a new kind of ecumenical imagination.”

A national church leader

I have a sense the ecumenical movement is moving into a new era. Sectarian conflict is largely behind us, dialogues have built understanding and good will between churches, receptive ecumenism helps us to appreciate difference, external challenges provoke churches to work together for mutual benefit, and a post-Christendom context calls us shift our focus from internal issues toward mission and evangelisation.

I have recently been involved in a series of gatherings with representatives from church development funds. As they have shared together, they have dreamed of a shared services model, where back end banking compliance for churches is managed jointly. They have even floated the idea of a Christian bank that could offer fair banking products to the public, and direct profits to welfare work. These are simply thought bubbles, but who knows what might evolve for the good of churches and society as God's people talk explore collaboration?

What if we gathered leaders of our welfare or aged care services to explore what could be done together for the common good? What if we gathered our best mission practitioners, or church

planters, or fundraisers, and stimulated conversations about how to reach Australia with the gospel? What might God do in our midst?

The Holy Spirit is moving through the church, drawing us to work together as one. The Holy Spirit is drawing us to prayer. The Holy Spirit is provoking us to mission. This season may be one of rebirthing pains, but also of enormous potential and new life through practical ecumenism.”

Rev Janet Woodlock
August 2018

11 Appendices

11.1 Appendix One:

Engagement Strategy for NCCA Project: Strategic Directions.

Project: Strategic directions

Prepared By: Janet Woodlock

Date: April 2018

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) was formed in 1994, arising from the earlier Australian Council of Churches. The NCCA and its eighteen member Churches work in collaboration with state ecumenical councils around Australia. NCCA is an Associate Council of the World Council of Churches, a member of the Christian Conference of Asia and a partner of other national ecumenical bodies throughout the world. In 2016 it became a Company Limited by Guarantee. It has a Board of Governance with Directors nominated by member churches.

The NCCA exists to assist its member churches to

- i) deepen their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church
- ii) work together toward the fulfilment of their mission of common witness, proclamation and service, to the glory of One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Decisions are made at the triennial Forum.

Assemblies are held three times a year, to explore issues of common concern to the churches and issues that brings churches together.

NCCA facilitates meetings of national church leaders once or twice a year.

Our works include:

- Act for Peace
- Safe Church Program
- Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce
- Faith and Unity
- Justice Network (combining Social Justice and Eco-mission mandates) EAPPI (now a program of Act for Peace)
- Interfaith relations
- Australian Volunteer Emergency Chaplaincy Alliance (AVECA)
- Prayer resources

In early 2018 the Board commissioned the appointment of a Project Officer: Strategic Directions.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

In consultation with the Associate General Secretary - to conduct research into aspects of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) to inform strategic thinking.

KEY RESULT AREAS

1. Research

- 1.1. Consult with NCCA stakeholders, especially representatives of member churches in order to identify key needs, hopes for NCCA, ways each member might contribute further to NCCA.
- 1.2. Interview representatives of selected non-member churches; identify key needs and barriers to NCCA membership.
- 1.3. Interview selected other NCCA stakeholders, such as Chairs of the Commissions, senior staff, selected Board members, and State Council of Churches officers.
- 1.4. Report findings to NCCA Board to assist in refining the NCCA strategic directions.

PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

- The project will bring key recommendations to the NCCA Board to assist its strategic planning

- This will involve Consultation with NCCA stakeholders – member churches, chairs of commissions, senior staff, state council leaders, and selected Board members. The project will identify key needs, hopes for NCCA, ways each member might contribute further to NCCA.
- In addition, there will be consultation with selected members of non member churches. This will identify key needs and barriers to NCCA membership

Questions for Member Church Representatives: (Face to Face interviews)

- Why are you part of the NCCA?
- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA. When has it been most helpful to your church?
- What are some good things your church is doing you might like to share with other churches?
- What do you see as the purpose of NCCA?
- What do you know about the change of structure of NCCA? Do you think this has helped or hindered the engagement of the member churches? How?
- What other issues are you experiencing as a church? In what ways could the NCCA serve you and your church in this area? What issues are you anticipating?
- What are your hopes for the NCCA?
- Are there any new initiatives you'd like NCCA to do?
- Can you comment on how the NCCA and its member churches might engage with first peoples?
- How might you or your church contribute to the development of the NCCA?
- What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at the moment?
- How might NCCA help your church respond to the Royal Commission recommendations, and help your church in implementation of the 10 Childsafe standards?

Questions for Non-Member Church Representatives:

- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA, if any. What would you like it to do in an ideal world?
- What are some good things your church is doing you might like to share with other churches?
- What other issues are you experiencing as a church? In what ways could the NCCA / other churches serve you in this area? What issues are you anticipating?
- What do you think God is up to in Australia now?
- How is your church responding to the Royal Commission recommendations? (Note that helping churches respond to these is a key priority for NCCA in 2018)
- How important is church unity in your church? In what ways is this expressed?
- What are barriers to NCCA membership for your church?

Questions for Board Members:

- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA
- What would help the NCCA Board work better?
- What kind of extra expertise might the Board need?
- What issues is the Board facing, or anticipating?
- How do you think the new structure has impacted the engagement of the member churches?
- What might be done to increase the engagement of the member churches?
- What are your hopes for the NCCA?
- Are there any new initiatives you'd like NCCA to do?
- How might the NCCA could be improved?
- What are your hopes for the future of the NCCA?

Questions for Chairs of Commissions

- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA
- What would help you do your work more effectively?
- What are your hopes for the NCCA?
- Are there any new initiatives you'd like NCCA to do?
- How might the NCCA could be improved?
- What are your hopes for the future of the NCCA?
- How do you think the new structure has impacted the engagement of the member churches?
- What might be done to increase the engagement of the member churches?

Questions for NCCA staff:

- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA.
- What is the best thing about working for the NCCA? The worst?
- What would make the NCCA more effective in your view?
- How might the NCCA could be improved?
- What are your hopes for the future of the NCCA?
- How do you think the new structure has impacted the engagement of the member churches?
- What might be done to increase the engagement of the member churches?

Questions for state ecumenical officers:

- Please comment on your experience of the NCCA.
- What is the best thing about the NCCA? The worst?
- What would make the NCCA more effective in your view?
- Other possible improvements?
- What are your hopes for the future of the NCCA?
- How has the new structure impacted you?
- How might the NCCA support you?

- How do you think the new structure has impacted the engagement of the member churches?
- What might be done to increase the engagement of the member churches?

Appendix 2: Combined survey feedback

Respondents one to six are national church leaders, respondents seven and eight are staff members

Respondent 1

Dear Janet,

Thanks for sending through the draft copy of your report. It has been a big project. The only suggestion I make is to give some more attention to the sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 and the 13 network possibilities that are raised there. I think that there needs to be some more shaping of the priorities in this area and a consideration of how this idea might be developed and what would need to go from the existing structure. Without that it will run the risk that you identified of being undeliverable.

Respondent 2

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

I am especially keen on seeing the linkage developed between National Church Leaders and the NCCA. I believe that for an effective NCCA Church Leaders must have it in their line of sight, and this is one way of achieving that. It's also an important part of the ecumenical vision, and that the NCCA doesn't become people working around the blockages caused by the leaders, but actual churches working together.

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

For some of the reasons above. Churches need each other, Christians need each other. We have a common Lord and a common salvation. To be entirely separate, without recognition and cooperation, is a scandal. The NCCA is one means (not the only one) of combatting that scandal.

If the NCCA were to stimulate new networks, rate out of 10 how highly you would prioritize starting a conversation / network / learning community in the following areas:

Dear Janet, I find this list very hard to grade by priority, and I don't have time right now to do it justice. They all look important, but they may not all be equally relevant to all churches. I would, very much, like us to find a way of reimagining NATSIEC, but I suspect it may be one of the more difficult ones to take on.

What other kind of conversation/network would you recommend?

We need a mechanism for churches to know one another, and learn to trust one another. Whether that could be done by some sort of 'public theology' space where we reflected on and responded to the changing nature of society and the role of the church in it?

Please indicate any topics or issues you would like to have raised at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies.

Perhaps the one I have just mentioned, about 'public theology' or church in the marketplace

What are topics or issues that you do NOT want discussed at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies?

I've not thought of it that way. I guess I would know one when I saw it. Sorry I'm not more help here.

Final comments?

How is the NCCA building connections/bridges with non-member churches (beyond common topics at Assemblies) and groups saying they represent the Christian voice in society – e.g. the Australian Christian Lobby? Is their space for that kind of activity?

What has happened to the NCCA's relationship with the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton? Has that gone the way of all flesh? There were once hopes of research scholarships etc.

Is the Faith & Unity Commission still functional? What interest do the churches have in this multi-lateral space?

Respondent 3

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

1. Evangelisation and public witness in a post-Christendom context.
 - a. The post-Christendom context: Some Christian strands tend to ignore current religious pluralism or regard issues as a war between Christianity and the world. These approaches are affirming for their adherents and appears successful as they attract some people with specific needs but discredits the church in general in the eyes of many people.
 - b. Public witness: Where possible we need to be seen as united in belief and action and not allow extremists or groups with an agenda to dominate the public stage.
2. A renewed member engagement strategy
 - a. There may be a difference between what members say are priorities and what they will commit to support, or perhaps what representatives feel passionately about as individuals and what their churches will back.
 - b. Consider flexibility of approach with the groups. Rather than only setting up permanent commissions think about short-term networks for specific purposes and co-ordinating networks where churches have their own well-developed structures (for example, youth engagement?). These may involve non-NCCA members.
 - c. NCCA entities are often working well. How often are they identified as part of NCCA and could closer connections make them more effective?
 - d. Consider the needs of the small churches as opposed to the large. A commitment to the NCCA is often a major undertaking and for them the major advantage is what they get by contact with the wider Christian world.
 - e. How do we re-engage the Orthodox churches with their unique component in the Christian faith? There are belief and cultural issues to be overcome.
3. Facilitating high-level conversations of National church leaders and other leaders of agencies or leaders of specialist ministry areas

- a. The current national church leaders' meetings can be valuable but are infrequent, not attended by many leaders and the outcomes are limited. The NCCA might be able to co-ordinate more powerful meetings, but this would involve a high level of trust among the leaders and would have to balance the relationships that have developed within a small group and the effect of a larger group with new members.
- b. Much of the value of inter-church conversations comes from agencies and individuals within the churches rather than the leaders. NCCA brokered networks would facilitate this. The recent meetings of Church development funds is an example. It would also bring a consciousness of NCCA to more people.
- c. The Assemblies are the one regular platform for discussion on issues of common interest. They are rewarding for participants and we have recently seen an increase in participation but how do we further this? How do we facilitate the results being disseminated? How do we put together recommendations and feed them into NCCA?

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

Yes: As the body of Christ we not only have to say that we are but demonstrate it through mutual action, prayer and support.

If the NCCA were to stimulate new networks, rate out of 10 how highly you would prioritize starting a conversation / network / learning community in the following areas:

Potential network	Priority out of 10 (10 = highest priority, 5 = moderate priority, 0 = not a priority at all)
1. Care agencies (aged care)	12 / 10
2. Care agencies (welfare)	13 / 10
3. Church schools and discipleship	11 / 10
4. Church support services:	
a) Banking	8 / 10
b) Insurance	9 / 10
c) Corporate services	10 / 10
d) Property	17 / 10
e) Superannuation	7 / 10
5. Mission and evangelism	4 / 10
6. Church planting	16 / 10
7. Youth and young adults	5 / 10
8. Church financial summit	6 / 10
9. Theological education	1 / 10
10. Leadership development and clergy supply	2 / 10
11. Church and parish revitalisation	15 / 10
12. Responses to the Royal Commission Recommendations	3 / 10
13. Indigenous leaders conversation	14 / 10

What other kind of conversation/network would you recommend?

Please indicate any topics or issues you would like to have raised at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies.

The reason churches belong to the NCCA is in my opinion the elephant in the room. Getting honest answers here would provide a framework for future action which churches would commit to. This would have to be more than a single session and would have to be structured so that the answers are genuine. This member engagement project is a good start.

Respondent 4

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

- High level conversations and listening of church leaders
- Being a faithful witness to the gospel by what we say and do
- Building a stronger public profile
- Having a stronger public voice on current social issues
- Clearer communication within NCCA

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

No, our membership and financial resources are far too low

If the NCCA were to stimulate new networks, rate out of 10 how highly you would prioritize starting a conversation / network / learning community in the following areas

Potential network	Priority out of 10 (10 = highest priority, 5 = moderate priority, 0 = not a priority at all)
1. Care agencies (aged care)	0 / 10
2. Care agencies (welfare)	0 / 10
3. Church schools and discipleship	5 / 10
4. Church support services:	

a) Banking	9 / 10
b) Insurance	10 / 10
c) Corporate services	0 / 10
d) Property	0 / 10
e) Superannuation	0 / 10
5. Mission and evangelism	0 / 10
6. Church planting	0 / 10
7. Youth and young adults	5 / 10
8. Church financial summit	0 / 10
9. Theological education	0 / 10
10. Leadership development and clergy supply	0 / 10
11. Church and parish revitalisation	0 / 10
12. Responses to the Royal Commission Recommendations	8 / 10
13. Indigenous leaders conversation	8 / 10

What other kind of conversation/network would you recommend?

No additional recommendation

Final comments?

Thank you for this work Janet. It is good to have this feedback to the challenges facing churches in Australia

Respondent 5

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

Evangelism and mission with Social concerns – Holistic mission

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

We have

If the NCCA were to stimulate new networks, rate out of 10 how highly you would prioritize starting a conversation / network / learning community in the following areas:

Potential network	Priority out of 10 (10 = highest priority, 5 = moderate priority, 0 = not a priority at all)
1. Care agencies (aged care)	8 / 10
2. Care agencies (welfare)	7 / 10
3. Church schools and discipleship	10 / 10
4. Church support services:	

a) Banking	6 / 10
b) Insurance	6 / 10
c) Corporate services	6 / 10
d) Property	5 / 10
e) Superannuation	5 / 10
5. Mission and evangelism	8 / 10
6. Church planting	9 / 10
7. Youth and young adults	9 / 10
8. Church financial summit	6 / 10
9. Theological education	8 / 10
10. Leadership development and clergy supply	9 / 10
11. Church and parish revitalisation	10 / 10
12. Responses to the Royal Commission Recommendations	7 / 10
13. Indigenous leaders conversation	7 / 10

What other kind of conversation/network would you recommend?

none

Please indicate any topics or issues you would like to have raised at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies.

Holistic mission – Biblical understanding of mission

What are topics or issues that you do NOT want discussed at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies?

Respondent 6

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

Public profile/engagement/communication. Like one of the respondents, it is unfortunate that the Australian Christian Lobby is seen by the media to be the spokesperson for the Australian Christian church. I understand that they have been better at media engagement and that they make easy and quick media grabs, but this organisation does not represent in anyway the majority of Christians. It would be great if the NCCA could somehow position itself to better speak on its members' behalf to the wider public. Obviously this will be difficult because there is a wide divergence of views across the member churches on all sorts of topics, and nuance and balance and not particularly attractive to the main stream media, but anyway...

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

I think Ecumenicalism is important. Personally, I would rather see my local church engage in conversation with other local Christian churches as a first priority, and with other churches of

our diocese as a second priority. And this also applies at the higher levels. Cooperation & conversation is so much better and more productive than competition.

Respondent 7

You are invited to respond to the following questions:

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

- The desire of many church leaders to still see the need for the NCCA
- That the NCCA is/can be a place to facilitate conversations with and between member churches. The NCCA 'bringing its Member Churches into a living contact with each other....
- The diminished public profile that currently exists.

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

Yes, because it's required if we are going to live out the unity, that the churches are called to participate in.

If the NCCA were to stimulate new networks, rate out of 10 how highly you would prioritize starting a conversation / network / learning community in the following areas:

Potential network	Priority out of 10 (10 = highest priority, 5 = moderate priority, 0 = not a priority at all)
1. Care agencies (aged care)	3 / 10
2. Care agencies (welfare)	5 / 10
3. Church schools and discipleship	5 / 10
4. Church support services:	
a) Banking	5 / 10
b) Insurance	5 / 10
c) Corporate services	5 / 10
d) Property	5 / 10
e) Superannuation	5 / 10
5. Mission and evangelism	8 / 10
6. Church planting	5 / 10
7. Youth and young adults	7 / 10
8. Church financial summit	?? / 10
9. Theological education	8 / 10
10. Leadership development and clergy supply	5 / 10
11. Church and parish revitalisation	3 / 10
12. Responses to the Royal Commission Recommendations	8 / 10
13. Indigenous leaders conversation	8 / 10

What other kind of conversation/network would you recommend?

Sharing of what is happening already within each space, identify common areas and support processes that could be valuable.

Please indicate any topics or issues you would like to have raised at the 2019 Forum, or in any future NCCA Assemblies.

Domestic and Family Violence too (#ThursdaysinBlack)

Respondent 8

You are invited to respond to the following questions:

Which of the themes in this report had particular resonance for you? Why?

Public profile/engagement/communication. Like one of the respondents, it is unfortunate that the Australian Christian Lobby is seen by the media to be the spokesperson for the Australian Christian church. I understand that they have been better at media engagement and that they make easy and quick media grabs, but this organisation does not represent in anyway the majority of Christians. It would be great if the NCCA could somehow position itself to better speak on its members' behalf to the wider public. Obviously this will be difficult because there is a wide divergence of views across the member churches on all sorts of topics, and nuance and balance and not particularly attractive to the main stream media, but anyway...

If you did not have the National Council, would you create one, and why?

I think Ecumenicalism is important. Personally, I would rather see my local church engage in conversation with other local Christian churches as a first priority, and with other churches of our diocese as a second priority. And this also applies at the higher levels. Cooperation & conversation is so much better and more productive than competition.

