



24-27 June 2016  
Mary MacKillop Place  
80 William Street  
North Sydney

## NCCA EcoMission Project

### Report to 2016 National Forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia

#### Background

At the March 2011 Executive meeting, the National Council of Churches of Australia instituted an Eco-Mission Project as a vital extension of its ecumenical role within the churches of Australia with a view to setting up a network. This report sets out the progress made by the NCCA EMP in its second triennium and proposes a new mandate for the Eco Mission Project and that the EMP effectively become a Network as a possible future direction. Please note that the proposed mandate (below) would replace the EMP Terms of Reference.

**The original purpose of the Eco Mission Project was to discern the feasibility of having an ecumenical network that would enable the Australian Churches to work together on ecological concerns in the Australian context. The EMP proposes that it become an Eco Mission Network under the NCCA at the 9<sup>th</sup> Forum, 2016.**

#### Context

Given the current ecological and social crisis we face (biodiversity loss, unsustainable consumption of resources, climate change, inequality and maltreatment of vulnerable communities), there is an urgent need for the Australian churches to address publicly the ethical, moral and spiritual questions posed by this crisis. There is also a growing awareness that **the church has a genuine mission to love, care for and protect God's creation as a holistic and vital expression of our faith (this is our definition of Eco Mission)**. In this context, the Eco Mission Project has developed a new mandate to facilitate this mission.

#### Evolution of the EMP

Following a strategic visioning process in 2011 the Eco Mission Project Team discerned that the best possible way to develop a network for Eco Mission in Australia would be through two sequential processes:

1. To begin developing a database of members through Project members inviting colleagues within their churches and ecumenical connections in each state to be part of a new network under the NCCA Eco Mission Project. This group was sent e-newsletters every quarter from June 2014 – June 2015 to share information, events, newly released resources and books, stories from communities and advance dialogue on ecology. Due to a decreased capacity to compile and circulate the Eco Mission E-Newsletter in the second half of 2015 it was decided that information such as stories be submitted for publication in the NCCA E-Newsletter. This means that the database that has been developed is not currently active and would only become active again if there were resources to develop and nurture this uniquely established network. Please note that the NCCA EMP submitted a funding proposal to the Glenburnie Trust Fund recently for the purpose of providing a human resource to continue building relationships with the churches to foster engagement with resources, events and development such as dialogue in the area of eco mission. This application was not successful as it did not meet the criteria.

2. A second significant step towards developing Eco Mission in Australian Churches has been through the Eco Mission Project members forming grounded relationships in their respective locations to form state and regional Eco Mission networks in Queensland (initiated in 2011), New South Wales (initiated in 2012), South Australia (initiated in 2012) and Western Australia (initiated in 2013) to develop local relationships for learning, dialogue and action. Where possible these groups have linked with existing ecumenical state groups. This grassroots approach to growing the network has effectively enabled the NCCA Eco Mission Project team to establish the first phase of a national network for Eco Mission in Australia as a specific forum for ecumenical dialogue and action on ecology. These state groups have developed differently in each location with some that meet every month (NSW and Qld) and others that meet less frequently (SA and WA). The other States and Territories (VIC, TAS, NT) unfortunately have not developed in this way because there has been no direct member of the NCCA EMP located in these parts of Australia to develop the network.

### **Report on Activities for this Triennial Period (2013-2016)**

The Eco Mission Project Team has met 19 times in this triennium period. Initially we had 12 meetings by telephone link up and since February 2015, 7 meetings have taken place via Skype. The current key priority of the EMP Project is to share information across the churches and across the represented biogeographic regions that members work within in Australia. Please note: some members work nationally and others work only in particular States or regions and therefore have not been able to report or work directly with their church at a national level. The NCCA EMP would like to suggest that future representation for the NCCA Eco Mission be people actively working at a national level of their church if at all possible.

Whilst simultaneously working on the two strategies outlined in the previous section of this report has at times been a struggle, the NCCA Eco Mission Project group would like to report a summary of major achievements during the three year triennial period since the 8<sup>th</sup> NCCA Forum 2013:

At a National level:

- A face to face meeting was held in conjunction with a National Ecumenical Church Ecological Conference event which dovetailed nicely to provide opportunities for the group to reflect and discern its next steps around resourcing the work moving forward
- Paper presented by NCCA EMP at ecumenical ecological conference 'Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation' March 2015 (attached) at the Serafino winery, SA. The Serafino Declaration (2015) was produced as an outcome of the conference and hard copies of this report will be provided at the NCCA Forum.
- Production of an NCCA EMP flyer 2015 as a way of inviting churches and individuals to participate in the Eco Mission network through receiving information via the newsletter and website, and being invited to relevant state based meeting.
- Media Releases by NCCA EMP on World Environment Days, Ecumenical Prayer events, such as Lights for Lima, and the launch of Laudato Si' celebrating and stimulating the call for dialogue about an ecological worldview being integrated into our Christian Churches in Australia.
- Production of an Eco Mission Newsletter, produced quarterly during 2014 and 2015.
- Participation of people from church communities at key events such as the Peoples Pilgrimage and the Peoples Climate March in 2015.

- Being signatories on an Interfaith Statement that was signed by over 250 Faith leaders including NCCA and NCCA EMP that was presented to the United Nations in New York on Earth Day 2016 which called for governing world leaders to ratify COP21.
- A funding opportunity was identified in 2015 and a submission was made to the Glenburnie Trust in 2016 that would enable resourcing for the key work of relationship building and communicating across the Eco Mission network.

### **Developing a grounded Eco Mission Network across Churches in Australian States**

The NCCA Eco Mission Project meetings have enabled dialogue between churches to share information across the State/Regional Eco Mission network groups operating on the ground. Each Eco Mission State group has focused on priorities or projects that relate to the EMP broad Terms of Reference according to their members' interests and talents. New members have been invited to join the state/regional groups and entry points were actively set up through the webpage, through the Eco Mission newsletter, the Eco Mission flyer (which was circulated at a national conference event) and through existing members reaching out with personal invitations as the opportunity arises.

Each state and regional group provided a different mode to engage with the development of an Eco Mission network being developed – some met monthly by telephone link up, others meet face to face and all are part of an online database that received the Eco Mission Newsletter which began in 2014. These various modes of networking provide diverse, open and flexible approaches so that the network continued to grow and adapt as needed.

A summary of some of the work that the State Eco Mission Groups have realised can be found below. Please note that the bold highlights make reference to a particular Terms of Reference which was originally established for the NCCA EMP.

1. **Raise ecological consciousness and clarify the importance of facing the current environmental crisis as vital to the role of the church in society.** For example, the NSW Eco Mission Network has met over 30 times in this triennium period and members are part of this network from rural, regional and urban locations across the state and include over 13 denominations. Current dialogue within the network is focused on learning about changes to legislation relating to biodiversity in NSW. The NSW Eco Mission Network has chosen to respond to the proposed legislation changes in a number of ways including informing NSW members of the relevant information, making submissions to the NSW State government and some have attended peaceful protests outside State Ministers offices. The Queensland Eco Mission Group, called 'Queensland Churches Environmental Network' (QCEN) is a Commission of Qld Churches Together (QCT) and includes 4 member Churches. It has met 30 times in the triennium and in the process has developed a strong sense of common purpose and trust. QCEN has worked on a significant range of activities including regular sharing of information, meeting with leaders of member Churches, a community consultation in Toowoomba on mining and regional communities, a Position Statement on Mining approved by QCT, various seminars, worship events, and community actions. A major research project on the health impacts of CSG is at an advanced stage of consideration.
2. **Encourage church bodies and congregations to become public advocates against practices that pollute, degrade or destroy domains of God's creation.** The NSW Eco Mission network has advocated alongside secular organisations in the 'Stand Up for Nature' campaign as one example. Members of NSW Eco Mission Network have met

with the NSW Environment Minister and Planning Ministers in this triennial period. In 2015 a retreat was held in the Pilliga Forest to listen to the Earth and discern the way forward with regard to advocating to save the forest from development of a proposed coal mine.

- 3. Explore best practice models for the sustainability of God's creation that would be appropriate for local churches to adopt.** The Uniting Church and Catholic Earthcare Australia have developed their annual resources for World Environment Day, June 5 each year and shared these with the churches. The resources are designed to model new ways of reflecting, praying and moving to action that churches and parishes can adapt and adopt to integrate God's Creation throughout the life of the Church. Similarly, the Season of Creation resource, is made available every year in September for churches to focus on a theme and integrate ecology into their theology and practice.
- 4. 'Contribute to national events and create resources that will publicise, promote and help facilitate a program of ecological mission among the church bodies of Australia.'** As mentioned, at the Peoples Climate March, members of the Eco Mission Project walked with the faith communities in December 2015 and effectively helped organise our communities to take part in this global event calling for a 1.5 degree Celsius buffer alongside our pacific island nations and many others. Eco-faith on air is a radio program held on Wednesday evenings on 2BBB Mountains to Sea that involves a member of the NCCA EMP and guests from churches to speak on topics and themes relevant to celebrations during the church year as well as personal, global, national and local issues. Members of QCEN participated in the Climate March with a newly prepared banner.

#### **Future Direction**

Over the next triennium the work of the Eco Mission Project will focus at the national level of engagement with the NCCA Church Members. Members would only continue towards creating a strong and vibrant network on the ground at the State level if funding is received to resource and support this additional level of work.

It is hoped that in this next triennium period some funding will be accessible for a couple of face to face meetings of the group and again possibly a national event dovetailing such a meeting that would invite all members of the network to a significant gathering.

In conclusion, the Eco Mission Project is enabling the Churches together to make their unique voice and position heard on ecological matters and we hope that this will become stronger in the third triennium and embedded in the life of each Church. We believe that it is timely for the NCCA to consider the Eco Mission Project ready to become a Network with the following proposed mandate.

#### **Proposed draft Mandate for NCCA Eco Mission for the next triennium**

The Eco Mission Network exists to assist the National Council of Churches in Australia in its commitment to encourage and enable the member churches, in the light of the gospel, to give prophetic leadership to each other and to the community in caring for God's creation.

The Eco Mission Network assists the member churches to uphold the dignity of all people and the flourishing of all creation.

The Eco Mission Network is mandated to:

1. Provide a means of communication between member churches on issues of ecological importance;
2. Share resources that will assist our member churches to deepen understanding of the ecological implications of our Sacred Scripture;
3. Facilitate cooperation and joint action between churches to care for our common home.
4. Advise the National Council of Churches in Australia on resources and actions which might appropriately be taken by the Council and/or severally by member churches.
5. Propose issues and occasions when either the NCCA or its members might advocate on behalf of God's Creation.

### **Eco Mission Project Participants and Attendance Record**

Anglican Church	Bishop Tom Wilmot, Chair Anglican Eco-care Commission (Retired end 2015) Gerard Siero, WA (2015-present)	15	19
Catholic Church	Mrs Jacqui Remond, Director Catholic Earthcare Australia	19	19
Lutheran Church	Rev Dr Andrew Ruddell, SA,	15	19
Uniting Church	Rev Dr Clive Ayre, Qld	18	19
Savation Army	Captain Melanie Anne Holland, NSW	13	19

Jacqui Remond  
Convenor, Eco Mission Project, NCCA.