

Seminar Report

plus additional resource material



Hunter Catholics – a response to Climate Change & Global Warming

Thursday 15th May 7.00 – 9.30 pm
at The Sacred Heart Cathedral,
841 Hunter St Hamilton



A Seminar hosted by the
Newcastle City Region Catholic Social Justice Group
in association with The Jesuit Refugee Service
and with financial assistance from The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

110 people attended the first “**Hunter Catholics – a response to Climate Change & Global Warming**” seminar in the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Newcastle arranged by the Newcastle City Region Catholic Social Justice Group in association with The 2008 Jesuit Seminar series on Thursday evening 15th May 2008.

The audience included a Bishop; a Monsignor; many Nuns; Teachers; Uni Students; Working & Retired Professional people; Business people; Pensioners; and others.

Sr Di Santleben, as Chair, expressed an acknowledgement of Aboriginal Ownership and lead all in a Franciscan Prayer.

John L Hayes jlhayes@bigpond.com reported that the Social Justice Group had issued invitations to Catholics across the whole Diocese, Heads of Hunter Churches, School students and Staff, Uni students & Staff, Environment, Green & Eco groups, and the wider community; and to Newcastle City Councillors, Hunter State & Federal Government & Opposition Politicians. No Councillors or Politicians could attend because of Council and Government sittings. Many other apologies were also received

Bishop Michael Malone www.mn.catholic.org.au welcomed the attendees and encouraged them to get behind this area of environmental concern.

In acknowledging a view that Christian churches are good at preaching but not so good at acting, he described the response of the church and community generally as “a bit hit and miss”. “Whilst we show our concern in one way, that sometimes does not roll out in effective action in another. There’s a certain amount of ambivalence I think in all of us”, he observed.

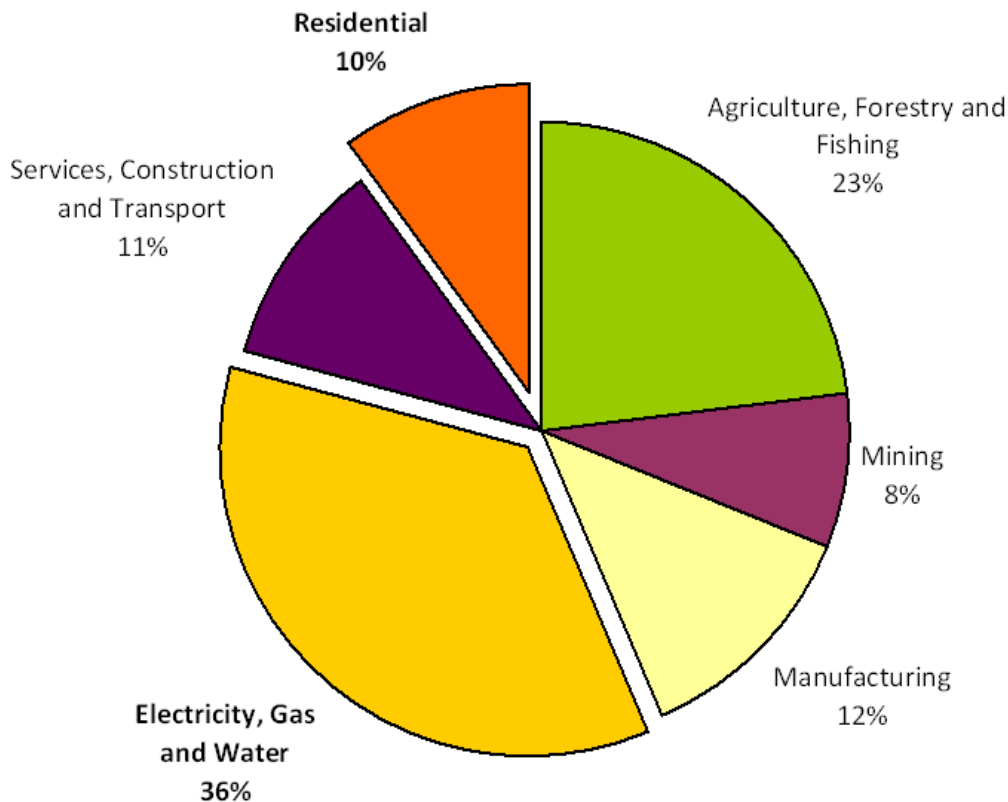
*Sr Di Santleben and
Tania Ritchie talking
after the seminar*



CSIRO experimental Scientist, **Tania Ritchie** www.det.csiro.au/energycentre gave a comprehensive description of Global Warming and Climate Change facts. She provided an historical scientific perspective, pointing out that global warming had been detected in the late 19th Centaury.

She said that the CO₂ in the atmosphere was now at an 800,000 year high. She identified electricity (Coal) and transport (Oil) as the 2 biggest contributors to production of Greenhouse gases.

Sources of Greenhouse Gases in Australia



Data from Australian Greenhouse Office, 2005

<http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/inventory/2005/pubs/inventory2005-economic.pdf>

She said we needed to reduce energy demand, and engage in other strategies. She also spoke of the research being undertaken at the Mayfield CSIRO Facility into energy efficient building methods; carbon capture and storage relevant to Coal fired Power stations; and many alternative energy sources, which are much more friendly to the environment.

CSIRO Energy Centre has an open day on Sat 16th August – all welcome.

Assoc. Director of the **Jesuit Refugee Services**, **Sr Maryanne Loughery** rsm www.jrs.org.au explained that millions of people displaced by Environmental and Climate Disasters have no protection as refugees under International Laws and Conventions and that this needs to change.

She gave examples from her personal experience in **Burma / Thailand; Darfur; Syria; Garza; and Kiribati** - formerly The Gilbert Islands.

She referred to the recent inundation of the **Irrawaddy delta**, which is the principal rice-growing area for **Burma**, and said there was conflicting opinion as to whether Cyclone Nagis could be seen as “man-made”.

She said that the legal concept of refugee currently excluded “environmental” refugees. She distinguished between refugees (who cross internationally-recognised borders) and internally-displaced people, especially in terms of the aid and support available to them.

She said that although there were “only” 9 million refugees world-wide, there were a much greater number of internally-displaced people.

She argued that the **Darfur** conflict was a product of climate change, with the Sahara Desert marching south, and that farmers’ land was becoming arid and unproductive. She said there was a prediction of the being 50 million “environmental migrants” in the foreseeable future.

She put **Kiribati** forward as an example of a place where climate change has already degraded peoples’ lives. Although the land itself was not submerged (yet) the impact of rising sea levels on the water table and the peoples’ health had been significant. For instance, the land could not now be properly sewered or the like, and the drinking water was polluted both by bacteria and salt. The surrounding sea which traditionally provided the major part of their food was also polluted or overfished due to the sell-off of the fishing rights to richer countries. The population was about 92,000.

The irony was that the people (Kiribati) were amongst the lowest CO2 emitters in the world yet were one of the worst affected. There was an extremely unsophisticated society, unable by itself to cope with this climate change development.

Overall Sr Maryanne said there was a need for anticipation, long-term planning, an internationally-recognised response, and leadership from Australia.



*Fr Mick Kelly sj
and John Hayes*

Executive Director of **Church Resources**, **Fr Michael Kelly sj** www.churchresources.com.au provided ethical and biblical explanations why we are all responsible to care for nature and creation so we can pass them on in good condition to future generations. He argued that just as Doctors are required to take the Hippocratic Oath to preserve Human Life, so also Scientists should be required to take an oath to preserve our world as a healthy organism.

Fr Michael said that St Paul had taught of the obligation to care for the earth and creation, and he mentioned the concepts of stewardship, solidarity and the common good. He gave a specific example of the waste of rainwater at a particular Catholic school in Sydney and what harvesting could mean.

He referred to the way the Creation stories in Genesis have been interpreted and how our modern idea of nature means we can no longer be comfortable advancing achievement of the satisfaction of human needs irrespective of the cost.

He suggested that the better translation of Cain's rhetorical question to God: "Am I my brother's keeper" is more along the lines of "Should I take responsibility for what God has entrusted to me"? To which the answer is an obvious "yes".

Fr Michael, in his concluding remarks, gave us some matters to consider, suggested to him by Sandie Cornish and derived from Fr John Coleman's Ten Commandments for environmentally responsible living.

Can we call them the Coleman / Cornish / Kelly **9 Environmental Questions?**

1. *Do we treat the environment as a public good in which we all share?*
2. *How much responsibility do we take for the environmental impact of our lifestyles?*
3. *Does our pattern of resource use allow others to achieve adequate health and wellbeing?*
4. *In what ways do we harm the environment now and how can we mitigate that?*
5. *Does our resource use pressure others, particularly the poor, to adopt environmentally damaging economic practices?*
6. *Do we take other people's need as seriously as our own in the allocation of resources?*
7. *What kind of weight do we attach to the risk of environmental damage as a consequence of our actions or of policies we support?*
8. *Who pays for the environmental impact of the goods and services which we consume?*
9. *Whose voices are we listening to on these issues?*

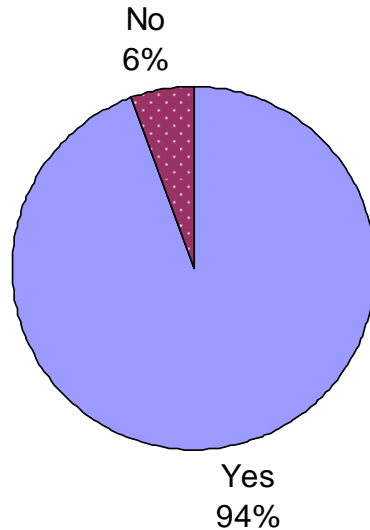
A long question and answer session followed our 3 speakers, and provided much information and examples of positive action (this is listed in the resource section of this report).

At the end of the Seminar participants expressed widespread support for another seminar on these topics in 12 months time.

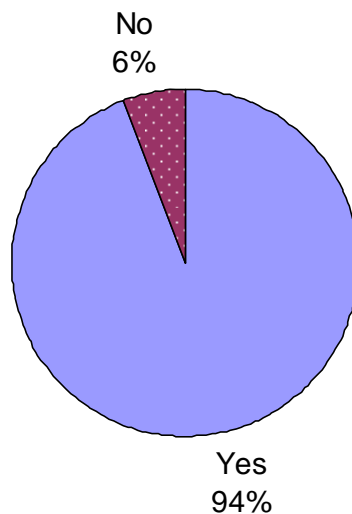
Consolidated Answers to the Feedback Sheet:

More than 20% of participants provided answers on feedback sheets & emails. Not everyone filled in every section.

This seminar gave me information that I didn't have before



I will take action on climate change because of this seminar



I am a member of a group active in these areas named:

- Climate Action;
- Landcare;
- Globe Church
- Greens, Wilderness Society
- Climate Action Newcastle (CAN)
- Sisters of St Joseph
- Waste Educator who has made presentations on climate change to churches in local area
- Climate Change Australia – Manning Branch; Other branches – Hastings & Clarence
- Sisters of St Joseph, Social Justice
- University Enviro.
- Amnesty
- Works in Council on ClimateCam projects
- Greening the Church, Hunter Presbytery Uniting Church
- Warners Bay / Boolaroo Social Justice Action Group
- St Peters (Anglican) Hamilton
- Throsby Community Forum

Participant comments:

*Great thanks,
more of it*

I think another of these seminars in a year's time is far too far away! I propose 3 months or less.

It certainly was interesting, especially the CSIRO information. I didn't realise the Gilbert Island were that low either. Would like to have had time to stay & talk with the Jesuit

Thank you very much for a very informative and satisfying gathering. Given the great work you are doing, I wonder whether our work interests you, particularly in getting the action happening from the ground up.

Very well worth while – opened my eyes to larger, more effective big picture using Diocese infrastructure to become energy suppliers, very exciting! Very fired up about taking steps to “audit” and introduce energy saving, carbon offsetting measures on a parish by parish & eventually school by school basis. The energy generation potential of Church owned buildings could create “profitable” enterprise for dormant low energy use buildings. Will personally investigate rebates available on PV's (photovoltaic Solar Panels) & wind generators.

A very interesting and useful array of speakers – thank you

Thanks, more of it

Well worth the effort - Thank you

This an important area for action towards bringing about God's Kingdom – we have to work for the preservation of his Creation

"Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need, not everyone's greed"

Mahatma Gandhi

Sr Di Santleben opm dsantleben@opeast.org.au .

She lives in the Newcastle suburb of Maryland - Her Convent, which is a simple residential house, has been converted to be very water efficient with good catchments and use of run offs, and recycling of grey water, and achieving a high degree of self sufficiency from her veggie gardens and chooks; and energy independence because of Solar Panels.

Her convent is now an official **Newcastle City Council Environmental Demonstration House, open to the Public monthly on the 3rd Saturday.**

Sister Carmel Moore rsj told us of the initiatives of the **Sisters of St Joseph**

<http://www.ssjl.org.au/> in building new units for 5 elderly sisters in Dennison St Mayfield.

These have been built to have a low carbon footprint. More information is on P 5 of the June edition of **Aurora** www.mn.catholic.org.au

Ken Rubeli from **Wangat Lodge** www.wangat.com.au told us about some of his 35 years educating young people on Environmental issues and offered a simple questionnaire (available on his website) that teachers can use as an aide.

A speaker told us of a campaign by the **Wilderness Society** for funds to help with a campaign to prepare for the “next Kyoto” and offered forms and letters to assist with this fundraising.

William Vorobioff from **Climate Action Newcastle** has advised work they are doing in catalysing a local Transition Town Initiative. He has provided a link to the 51 page Primer “**Becoming a Transition Town, City, District, Village, Community or even Island**” <http://transitionnetwork.org/Primer/TransitionInitiativesPrimer.pdf> which starts off with Climate Change & Peak Oil:

Back to Peak Oil Peak Oil recognises that we are not close to running out of oil. However, we are close to running out of easy-to-get, cheap oil. Very close. That means we’re about to go into energy decline – that extended period when, year on year, we have decreasing amounts of oil to fuel our industrialised way of life.

He has also provided a power point presentation that he recently gave to Council on the Initiative and asks: “*I wonder whether our work interests you, particularly in getting the action happening from the ground up*”.

William Vorobioff’s email is wvorobioff@optusnet.com.au

Gordon and Marie Rowland are directors of **Indigenous Landscape Design Australia** and members of the Great Lakes Environment Association and the Australian Plants Society. Gordon is also a founding member of the Sydney branch of Pax Christi and the Invasive Species Council.

In 2002, Gordon and Marie left Sydney and built an eco-friendly house at Pacific Palms on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. Their aim is to restore ecological integrity, reduce the need for garden chemicals and create a beautiful, sustainable garden in harmony with the natural environment. Their web site, www.ilda.com.au, includes an abundance of information on sustainable gardening. They are holding an **Open Garden Day on Sunday 5th October**

2008, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. If you wish to attend, please confirm by email, info@ilda.com.au or phone 4997 6444. (The 4th happens to be the Feast of Francesco Bernardone, better known as Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Ecology.)

Immaculate Hart of Mary Church at Tighes Hill is investigating installing Solar Panels on the Church roof to generate electricity– **Jodie Dixon** jodie.dixon@bigpond.com is assisting.

Mercy Community Services (MCS) www.mercyservices.org.au **Lawrie Hallinan**, Manager Organisational Development, has advised that MCS conducted an audit of its greenhouse gas emissions to establish a baseline from which they could measure their efficiency efforts. In 2006-2007 they produced 602 tonnes of greenhouse gases. Emissions came from: petrol use 42%; diesel use 24%; electricity 15%; and waste 19%. Armed with this knowledge they are exploring ways to reduce their emissions.

MCS joined the Australian Government’s Greenhouse Challenge Plus and their online calculator helped them calculate their emissions (<http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/challenge/>), and progress thus far is outlined in the following table:

<i>Mercy Community Services emission reduction strategies</i>	<i>Progress 2007-2008</i>
1. Establish a fundraising pool to purchase emission reduction equipment and services	\$200 donation enabled offsets for 5 vehicles (21.8 tonnes of greenhouse gas) (http://www.greenfleet.com.au/)
2. Phase out the number of desktop printers in offices replacing with a ratio of one multifunction photocopier/printer for every 12 staff	This is being done gradually by not replacing printers as they wear out. In the past 9 months two printers were replaced.
3. Maximise efficiency of vehicle usage: e.g. investigate opportunities for structuring rosters geographically rather than according to programs	No action yet
4. Investigate the use of alternative fuels such as LPG	Fuel efficiency is a criteria being applied when vehicles are replaced.
5. Ensure all computers have a default setting of printing double sided.	Completed
6. Ensure that all recyclable material is recycled and not thrown in waste bins.	Recycle bins have been placed in all offices
7. In 2008 some services are relocating to a former bowling club. This building is being fitted with energy and water saving features partly funded by the NSW Climate Change Fund (http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/ccfund.htm).	Energy & water saving features installed at new office building include: rainwater tanks for toilet and washing machine, high efficiency light globes, sensor and timer lights/taps, high rating insulation, and solar hot water.

Newcastle City Council <http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au> **Peter Dormand & Jessyca Bosscha** are in **CERM**, the **City Energy and Resource Management** unit which is a self-funded business unit of Council to assist local governments throughout Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions profitably. They run lots of programs including ClimateCam for Schools and they have advised:

“The Catholic Schools who will be receiving stars at Friday 16th May **ClimateCam for Schools** Recognition Ceremony include:

- **Holy Family Primary**- 4 stars for 1. School Environmental Management Plan, 2. Water Efficient Taps and Bubblers, 3. Waste Recycling and 4. Rain Water Tanks

- *St James, Muswellbrook*- 2 stars for 1. School Environmental Management Plan and 2. Waste Recycling
- *St James Kotara*- 2 stars for 1. School Environmental Management Plan and 2. Waste Recycling

We have another 70 schools that have registered their interest to participate in the program and are awaiting a sponsor to support their involvement.

Sponsorship is \$3,000 per school per year and sponsor benefits include but are not limited to:

Promotion through various media outlets; Reports on electricity, water, waste and greenhouse reductions achieved by each of their sponsored schools; Interaction with schools; Participation at ClimateCam for Schools events. A detailed sponsorship package is available to organisations who express interest in sponsoring one or more schools”.

The power of two - You do have choices - What one recently retired couple has done in the last four years, while continuing to lead active and engaged lives;

- ✓ Sold the second car;
- ✓ Installed energy efficient light bulbs – although not yet available for some light fittings
- ✓ Turn off unneeded lights and appliances;
- ✓ Turn off the 2nd Fridge – only now use it about 2 or 3 weeks a year in total;
- ✓ Signed up for 100% Green Power – about an extra \$1.50 pw - Electricity Greenhouse gas emissions now NIL & consumption halved;
- ✓ Replaced very old and small Electric Off Peak Hot Water system with instant Gas system (no storage tank). – can dial up or dial down temperature, so no need to add cold at shower or basin.
- ✓ Installed water efficient shower heads and sink and basin spouts.
- ✓ When adding to 90 year old weatherboard & iron house, installed insulation on new walls, under new floors, and under the whole roof ;
- ✓ Designed addition to pick up North sun, and shading from West Sun, and can protect living areas from the cold South. Maintained high ceilings and ceiling fans in most rooms
- ✓ All new windows can be locked semi open, and most existing windows modified to be locked semi open to allow in breezes, so no air conditioner is needed or installed.
- ✓ Breeze Curtin and doorway can divide the house, so only one main room needs heating in winter
- ✓ Reduced solid concrete driveway to car tracks to enable much green planting to moderate weather & temperature
- ✓ Removed most grass / lawn – including nature strip, and replanted with trees, shrubs & plants
- ✓ Undersoil drip watering hoses, and plenty of mulching, Now growing some veggies
- ✓ Save laundry water for toilet flushing and some on the garden
- ✓ Save water at the sink & basin and shower, while waiting for hot to come through – use on garden
- ✓ Food and other suitable organic scraps in 3 worm farms & compost bin – eventually use on garden
- ✓ Water consumption halved
- ✓ Careful and through recyclers
- ✓ Joined some conservation groups, and signed up for some email lists to be kept well informed on Environmental & Climate issues
- ✓ Regular trips to Sydney – 20 to 30 times a year – now mostly on the train; don’t drive everywhere locally – lots of walking to local shops etc – Kms in the car much reduced.

Another perspective on Kiribati from Dr Leonie Crennan l.s.crennan@bigpond.com :

"The President of Kiribati is drawing attention to a common threat. All the low lying islands of the Pacific, Caribbean and the Atlantic will be threatened if sea level rise occurs and many areas of the developed world (including my home town of Stockton on the coast of NSW) could also be inundated.

Many of these island countries have delicate ecologies which have been seriously weakened by inappropriate local development practices. This has made them more vulnerable to the impact of global climate variability and change. There are many interacting geophysical and social forces at play here.

This situation includes the atolls of Tonga, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, PNG, Tuvalu, the Maldives, and as discussed, Kiribati. Some of these countries have 'high' islands where people could potentially be relocated...some don't. Some of these countries are already suffering from a trend of more extreme and frequent weather events especially those within the cyclone zone. Fortunately Kiribati is not affected by cyclones but is affected by longer and more severe droughts, which is an equally serious feature of climate variability throughout the region.

Kiribati, like most atoll countries has very porous soils and high ground water (and no surface water) and this combined with vulnerability to drought is the reason why conventional waterborne sewerage systems are not sustainable in these countries. Unfortunately this was not understood by well meaning development organizations, and over the last forty year the groundwater has been seriously polluted by sewage from septic tanks and leaking reticulated systems, garbage, and from industrial and domestic chemicals such as oil, fuel and detergents. The principal physical protection for these islands is the fringing reef but the increasing practice of mining the beaches and the reef for construction has seriously undermined this protection, and increased the likelihood of flooding, and seawater intrusion into the freshwater lens.

There is considerable effort throughout the region to assist countries to help themselves by adopting more sustainable development, (which could include reviving traditional conservation practices) reducing risk and engaging in local disaster preparedness. This requires leadership from governments as well as understanding and co-operation from communities. Given the uncertainty of the impacts of climate change and other environmental forces, in some cases it may be a lost cause, but in many situations there is much that can be done now to preserve the integrity of these unique cultures and their islands.

In addition, (as discussed in the seminar), the developed world has an immediate responsibility to change the way we live in order to halt and reverse current environmental trends".

Dr Crennan lives in Stockton, a coastal suburb of Newcastle; and has worked for the Kiribati Government on several projects from 1994 to 2008, which have been funded by the UN, AusAid, & other Funding Agencies. She has a LLB, and a PhD in Environmental Science.

Some Additional Contacts

Catholic Earthcare Australia - **Bishop Toohey** from Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is in charge <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au>;

Jacqui Remond is the new director <http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net>

Aurora - monthly publication of the Diocese of Maitland Newcastle www.mn.catholic.org.au

Climate Action Newcastle - Vicki Brooke co-convenor vjbrooke@tpg.com.au

Rising Tide - Steve Phillips steve@risingtide.org.au

Hunter Valley Research Foundation Lecture Series www.hvrf.com.au

The Greens lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au

The Newcastle City Region Catholic Social Justice Group, meets at
7.30 pm on the 4th Monday of each month,
usually at the rear of the City Region Pastoral Centre
(the old St Josephs Convent building) in
Farquhar Street, The Junction

This Seminar was organised by a sub committee of that group:
John L Hayes, Moira Gordon, Gary Fox, Lawrie Hallinan, Laurie Dowling
& Sr Di Santleben opm

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