

Ministry update for Synod 2021

Justice and International Mission Cluster

The JIM cluster works with others to create social change and improve people's lives in Australia and overseas through faith based social justice campaigns and programs. Our faith calls us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. This means ensuring the laws which govern our society are also just and compassionate.

Context

The cluster focuses on issues and outcomes that have the greatest benefit for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people facing the greatest situations of harm. In addition outcomes are pursued to have impact on addressing unsustainable destruction of our natural environment.

Outcomes

The JIM Cluster has resourced its networks of supporters to take actions in support of achieving reforms that make our society and the world a more just place. Some of the outcomes linked to these campaigning activities have been:

- Australian Governments at the Federal and state level agreed to implement a National Consumer Protection framework for online gambling corporations. The reforms included:
 - Banning online gambling corporations from referring people to payday lenders to get credit to gambling with;
 - Requiring that people gambling online must be offered the opportunity to set a limit on how much they can lose; and
 - Restricting the ability of online gambling corporations being able to offer inducements for people to be able to gamble.

Some of the reforms align with the calls made in Synod resolution 11.6.18.2.1.

- At the start of 2020, the Victorian Government implemented the Victorian Default Offer to set a cap on the price electricity companies could charge people, to address price gouging of vulnerable people. The measure aligns with a call made in Synod resolution 07.4.37.4.
- In late February 2020, the ANZ Bank agreed to pay compensation to more than one thousand Cambodian families who had been forcibly removed from their land. The ANZ paid out the profit they made on the loan to the Phnom Penh Sugar company responsible for the displacement of the families.
- The Australian Communication and Media Authority has been requiring Internet Service Providers to disrupt access by Australians to online gambling sites that illegally allow Australians to place bets with them. The outcome aligns with the calls made in Synod resolution 11.6.18.2.1.
- In July 2020 the Commonwealth and State Governments agreed to introduce an effective warning label on alcoholic products to warn of the dangers of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. The outcome aligns with the calls made in Synod Resolution 13.6.20.2.2.
- In mid-2020 the Commonwealth Government introduced a Director Identification Number to prevent people from using fake names and straw directors to hide behind for companies engaged in illegal activities such as wage theft and fraud. The outcome aligns with the calls in Synod resolution 14.7.19.3.3.

- In mid-2020 the Commonwealth Parliament passed the *National Disability Insurance Scheme (Strengthening Banning Orders) Act* that strengthened the powers of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to ban a worker or service provider from delivering services under the NDIS. The outcome aligns with the calls made in Synod resolution 19.3.12.1.
- In September 2020, the Commonwealth Government committed an extra \$92.9 million over four years to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to prevent abuse and neglect of people with disabilities on the NDIS. The outcome aligns with the calls made in Synod resolution 19.3.12.1.
- The October 2020 budget provided funding for an extra 19 government employees to visit workers on the Seasonal Worker Program and check on their conditions and the quality of their accommodation. The outcome aligns with the calls in Synod resolution 19.5.5.1.
- In the October 2020 budget, the Commonwealth Government allocated \$10.6 million over five years to implement the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery. The outcome aligns with Synod resolutions 11.6.18.2.3 and 16.4.19.2.

Networks

The number of supporters on the main supporter list for the Cluster decreased slightly from 1,397 at the end of 2018 to 1,372 as of 1 November 2020. The End Christian Persecution Network, that carries out actions on cases of severe human rights abuses against Christian social justice activists, decreased from 58 and the end of 2018 to 56 as of November 2020.

The supporter network for refugees and people seeking asylum remained static at 656 people.

The Cluster also actively participates in the Seasonal Worker Support Group of the Vanuatu Fellowship. The Group is made up of congregational members in Victoria and South Australia that provide support to workers on the Seasonal Worker Program. The workers come from Pacific Islands to work on Australian farms. The work connects to the Synod priority of culturally diverse mission and ministry. The Cluster feeds back information from the Group to the Commonwealth Government, which has led to some reforms on the Program to improve the situation of workers. The Cluster assisted Randall Prior in being part of a World Bank research project into the Program. Randall interviewed hundreds of workers and their families back in the Pacific. Overwhelmingly, the outcomes from the Program have been positive for the workers, their families and their communities.

The Cluster established a co-design group of ministers and members of congregations to guide the work of the Cluster on family violence. The group helped to set the priorities of the Cluster on addressing family violence. However, the group was placed on hold when the COVID-19 first lockdown was put in place.

The Cluster established a Climate Action Taskforce of interested ministers, congregations members, Synod staff and Uniting Vic.Tas staff to work on facilitating and encouraging a reduction in the Synod's greenhouse gas emissions.

Resourcing the Synod

The JIM Cluster produces a pack of resources to take social justice actions for its main supporter base five times a year. It also produces an e-mail update at least fortnightly. It generates a letter-writing action for the End Christian Persecution Network once per month.



In September 2019, the Cluster hosted a convention for congregation members on the theme of climate justice.

The Cluster produced two consultation booklets in the middle of 2019 to consult with congregation members on [climate change](#) and [regulating the online world](#). The consultation process included eight online forums.

In October 2020, the Cluster released a report [on murders and harassment of church people in the Philippines](#). The report was produced with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

The Cluster has participated in the NextGen Committee and is working towards resourcing the social justice issues important to youth and young adults within the church.

The Cluster has participated in the formation of the Synod's Covenanting Action Plan (CAP).

JIM launched a new website in 2019: www.justact.org.au

The Vic/Tas Synod resolution 19.4.13.1 on the Statement from the Heart was used as template and replicated at the Synods meetings of both NSW and SA. Subsequently, a resourcing document on the Statement from the Heart has been developed through the JIM Cluster.

The Cluster held two online meetings in the middle of 2019 to gather and resource congregation members interested in campaigning on the issues faced by people seeking asylum and refugees. These conversations also led to a collaboration between members in Vic/Tas and SA Synods with a digital campaign.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 reduced the ability of the Cluster to have active involvement in congregational services. That in turn reduced opportunities to recruit new supporters from within congregations.

The lockdowns also reduced the ability of the Cluster to engage with government Ministers, public servants and decision makers in businesses.

Work on two initiatives:

1. Exploring the formation of geographical Social Justice Networks/Groups, and
2. A social justice youth and young adult event,

were put on hold due to COVID-19.

The cluster routinely participates in three inter-school Social Justice Forum a year with Uniting Church affiliated schools. Only one forum was held in March 2019 with the other two being cancelled due to school closures.

Looking ahead to 2021 – 2022

The Cluster will continue to work with other organisations to address the declining trust in the system of democratic government. The declining trust is making it harder for governments to pursue reforms to make people's lives better and prevent human rights abuses. It also makes it harder for governments to raise tax revenue to provide the services the community wants and to assist the vulnerable in our community and across the globe.





The Cluster will continue to resource congregations to take action on climate justice, both at the local level and at the level of government. The declining trust in the system of democratic government impacts on the ability of governments to act on climate change.

The Cluster will continue to support the reform agenda of the Commonwealth Government to make the online world safer for all people.

The Cluster will also continue to expand the network of congregations actively supporting workers from the Pacific Islands working on Australia farms and other rural workplaces. The objective will be to build greater social support for the workers and improve their experience of Australia.

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