



Climate Health WA Inquiry

Inquiry into the impacts of climate change on health in Western Australia

Inquiry Lead:
Dr Tarun Weeramanthri

Witnesses:

Mr Geoffrey Bice
Social Justice Consultant, Uniting Church WA

Ms Gayle Mitchell
Practice Lead, Homelessness, Uniting Care West

Thursday, 31 October 2019, 2.00 pm

HEARING COMMENCED

5 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Mr Bice, Ms Mitchell, I'd like to thank
you for your interest in the Inquiry and for your appearance at today's hearing.
The purpose of this hearing is to assist me in gathering evidence for the
Climate Health WA Inquiry into the impacts of climate change on health in
Western Australia. My name is Tarun Weeramanthri and I've been appointed
10 by the Chief Health Officer to undertake the Inquiry. Beside me is Dr Sarah
Joyce, the Inquiry's Project Director. If everyone could please be aware that
the use of mobile phones and other recording devices is not permitted in this
room, so please make sure that your phone is on silent or switched off.

15 This hearing is a formal procedure convened under section 231 of the *Public
Health Act 2016*. While you are not being asked to give your evidence under
oath or affirmation, it is important you understand that there are penalties under
the Act for knowingly providing a response or information that is false or
misleading. This is a public hearing and a transcript of your evidence will be
20 made for the public record. If you wish to make a confidential statement
during today's proceedings, you should request that that part of your evidence
be taken in private. You've previously been provided with the Inquiry's terms
of reference and information on giving evidence to the Inquiry. Before we
begin, do you have any questions about today's hearing?

25 MS MITCHELL: No.

MR BICE: No.

30 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: For the transcript, could I ask each of you
to state your name and the capacity in which you are here today?

MS BRENNAN: My name's Geoffrey Bice, I'm the Social
Justice Consultant for the Uniting Church in Western Australia.

35 MS MITCHELL: My name is Gail Mitchell, I'm the
Practice Leader for Homelessness for Uniting Care West.

40 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. Would you like to make a
brief opening statement?

MR BICE: Yes. Thank you. Firstly, just thank you
for the opportunity to be able to present to the Inquiry. We really appreciate
having our voice heard, and we commend the Inquiry for occurring. This really
important topic, and we're really pleased to see the Health Department
45 conducting this Climate Health Inquiry. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the
Whadjuk Noongar people of this land, and pay our respects to their elders past,
present and emerging, and recognise that they have been the custodians of this
land for countless generations, and have cared for the land and waters of this
place and state much more sustainably than have been since colonisation. As a
50 church, we have a covenant relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and
Islander Christian Congress, which is the basis of our work together, and we're

committed to working with Congress for truth, justice and healing for First Peoples.

5 As a church, we also acknowledge our involvement, and that of the broader
Christian tradition, in the injustice and racism of colonisation in Australia, and
the numerous policies and practices of the Australian government that have led
to the gap in health and well-being outcomes that still exist for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander people. And we acknowledge that Aboriginal people,
10 like many indigenous people around the world, have done the least to
contribute to climate change, and yet are most likely to suffer some of the
worst of its consequences. But at the same time, perhaps it could be said that
they have some of the best traditional wisdom to assist us in addressing it.

15 And as a starting point, I'd like to just read out a couple of statements from
Aboriginal leaders in the Uniting Church about the impacts that they see on
their life and well-being in relation to climate, and how they view the land in
which they live and for which they care. So Reverend Sealin Garlett is a
Noongar Elder, he's part of the Uniting Church in WA. And he says that:

20 *The creation, the land is something we should all honour and respect,
because creation, which includes all the birds and the animals,
embraces all our lives, physically, socially, and most of all spiritually,
because creation shows us the existence, not only of the raw beauty, but
it also shows the nurture of the divine and greater spirit, the creator,
25 who will nurture our lives similar to how the creation is nurtured. That
makes, for every human being, not only a purpose, but teaches the
reality that we belong together and need to respect each other.*

30 And from another leader, Pastor Ray Minniecon, who's from the New South
Wales branch, he says:

35 *The indigenous peoples have been eyewitnesses to the greatest crimes
committed against humanity. We have been living at the forefront of
climate change and environmental destruction. The pace of this
massive destruction on our environment is unforgivable and
irreversible, in some cases. We feel that our cry for environmental
justice goes unnoticed and unheard, and we ask for politicians and
40 multi-national companies to listen to our voices. We would like to see
an end to greed and arrogance from governments and multi-nationals,
especially mining and forestry companies. We would ask politicians
and multi-national companies, executives and Boards to listen to the
cry of their mother, as we hear her. Finally, we would ask governments
and multi-national company executives and their Boards to respond
45 honestly and transparently to this question that Jesus posed to his
people in his day, but what will it profit them to gain the whole world
and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their
life?*

So I think that's a really important context in which to set our discussions, and I hope that helps to frame the Inquiry that you're undertaking, and the perspective that we, as a church, want to see that's particularly holistic in its approach and view. And we also need to acknowledge that, as a church, we're
5 part of a longer history of Christianity that has, at times, promoted theologies and world views that have influenced powerful societies to view the natural world as simply a resource for humans to exploit. And this is likely to have influenced or granted permission to those that have overused and polluted God's good creation. And so now, the Uniting Church, along with other faith
10 traditions, is actively working to grow a different appreciation of humanity's place in the inter-connected systems of the planet. We believe this is our common home, which God has called good, through which God reveals Godself, and in which God chose to dwell in the person of Jesus.

15 We are part of this place and we have been called to care for it, as we have been called to love our neighbour. Indeed, we cannot love God or our neighbour, including future generations, if we do not love the Earth. And absolutely, we need to have a holistic response to the climate crisis for the sake of the planet and all its people. And we hope that this Inquiry can form part of
20 that to inform the policies and practices of the State Government going forward.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you, Mr Bice, for that opening statement, and also for your written submission. And I think you've probably
25 answered why, in that statement, why this is an issue for the Uniting Church. Could you, perhaps, speculate a bit about why this might be an issue for religious faiths more generally, in terms of your conversations with other faiths?

MR BICE: Yes. So it's particularly an issue for the
30 Uniting Church in its history, so from its founding documents, and the Uniting Church has declared its interest in caring for the environment and speaking out on that. And we're not alone in that. In the ecumenical space, there are documents from the World Council of Churches that have – for a long time,
35 they've been outspoken and proactive on advocating for action globally on climate, and have presented to the UN on that. Similarly, the Pope, Pope Francis, in one of his first major encyclicals, was the Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home, and that was quite a ground-breaking theological work, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church, to bring them on board and
40 raise their awareness and global awareness of climate as a pressing issue.

And similarly, other faiths outside Christianity; then we work with other faiths. And so we recently held a public statement at the cathedral just across
45 the road, with representatives from the Buddhist community, the Islamic community, Bahá'í and all the major Christian traditions, and apologies from the Rabbi from the Jewish synagogue as well. And so we work with them a lot, and there's a lot of shared understanding and concern about the climate. And most of those traditions worldwide have given statements about their care

and concern for the climate crisis. And we are currently connected to ARRCC, which is the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, and advocate with them.

5 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: I also want to just acknowledge what
you've said about the stewardship of the country and contribution that
Aboriginal people can make, both through churches or through other
organisations. And we have attempted in this Inquiry to not just include them
10 in the main consultation process, which they have been, but also to create a
specific consultation process. We've had a forum in Broome a couple of weeks
ago, and we're holding another one in a few weeks in the Metro area, and we'd
be pleased to send you details of that forum, and if there were people you'd like
to suggest could be invited - - -

15 MR BICE: Sure.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: - - - we'll do that.

20 MR BICE: Thank you.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: The Uniting Church of Western Australia
has a particular mission to serve the most vulnerable members of the
community in this state. Based on your experience of front-line service, which
groups are most vulnerable to health impacts of climate change, and how
25 exactly does it impact them?

MR BICE: So we have a few areas where we have
front-line services and connections to front-line services as part of our network,
and there are a range of people that we identify as being most vulnerable to
30 health impacts of climate change, starting with people experiencing
homelessness. And so I might pass to Gayle who might be able to give a bit
more detail of the direct impacts.

MS MITCHELL: So Uniting Care West is an arm of the
35 Uniting Church, and one of our main priorities is around transitioning people
from homelessness and chronic rough sleeping in the Perth CBD and
surrounds. So it's an interesting question for us around climate change
because, I suppose, in homeless services, we are very responsive to the now
and the priorities that are happening as we see it every day, and quite reactive
40 to those. And this is what I thought was quite interesting, is to come and look
at that, because I suppose we don't take enough time to reflect on future
generations, because as we have seen, homelessness is on the increase by
17 per cent from last year alone. And we run a drop-in centre, the only crisis
45 drop-in centre in Perth that does breakfast and essential services, essential
needs for people. And we just increased our hours from 7 am to 7 pm, seven
days a week, and we're seeing close to 290 people every day.

And the impact of those most vulnerable in our community is around the constant of extreme weather concerns. Many of our people obviously sleep outside. Through winter, we're seeing massive impact on health resources, on all of our essential services and the number's growing, not just for people, but even when we house people, it's such a fine line between keeping them housed and becoming homeless in the homeless cycle again. So with rising utility rates and things like that, it's just going to be a constant cycle of – most of our clients are very on the edge of being able to be sustainable in a house. And if not, we've got people accessing our service that have been chronic rough sleeping for over 10 years, due to the complexities that they present with—Health, mental health, AOD, childhood trauma, veteran trauma from PTSD, et cetera. So with the further impacts of just environmental causes alone, it's just going to have, again, quite a detrimental impact on this community.

MR BICE: And on top of homelessness, there are other concerns for other sub-groups. So we have concerns for people that are low-income households, particularly that are in rental accommodation. And so, just last week, I think it was, October 21st, there was a report about how 60 Western Australian homes and businesses having their electricity cut off on average each day for failing to pay their bills. Electricity retailers Synergy and Horizon have cut off more than 22,000 customers in the 12 months to the end of June, meaning disconnections for unpaid bills have more than doubled in just three years. And given that people who do not own their own homes cannot, in most cases, install PV—solar photovoltaic—or batteries, and there's minimal incentive for the homeowners to do so, then many renters are locked out and locked in to paying higher prices for electricity.

Given, also, that there's a lack of insulation, over 60 per cent lack of insulation in rental accommodation, and energy-efficient appliances in rental combination, they are also paying higher prices for greater energy use. If renters are choosing between paying their electricity bills and other essentials like food, medicines, medical visits, this can easily lead to adverse health and mental health outcomes. And we know that the 2018 Food Bank Hunger Report found 49 per cent of people experiencing food insecurity said that they were unable to buy food due to an unexpected expense or large bill, and 35 per cent as a result of paying the rent or mortgage. Only 19.3 per cent of people in the 100 Families WA Study were food secure. And climate change is only likely to exacerbate those issues. And you may have seen similar reporting from other submissions, I'm not sure.

One of the other options people in financial difficulty may be faced with is either paying their electricity or paying the rent. And given that the most common reason for eviction is rent arrears, it shows a tenuous financial situation of many renters. If people are evicted, this can easily lead to homelessness and a cascading spiral of poor outcomes. And in some situations, particularly with Aboriginal families, those evicted will go to other families in similarly stressful, tenuous housing conditions that are overcrowded, that have increased electricity bills as a result, and face eviction

themselves. Shelter WA highlighted there needs to be a range of measures to improve energy efficiency in existing homes, including regulating minimum energy standards, and we would support that as a church.

5 Incentives for energy-efficient appliances and retrofits, tax and financial
incentives, information sharing, and education can all be part of the solution.
They point to schemes that are running in other states, including South
Australia, where there's a virtual power plant model to put solar panels and
batteries on public housing, and an additional \$100 million home battery
10 scheme. Tasmania has an energy efficiency loan scheme, Victoria an energy
upgrades program, and a few others. New South Wales has the Climate
Change Fund, which supports similar initiatives. And we've been in
conversation with some of those groups—WACOSS, Shelter WA, Financial
Counselling Association and the State Government—to advocate for a
15 feasibility study for how a virtual power plant model might work in WA. We
know that there's one – so that's similar to the South Australian model. And
there's one being trialled in the Goldfields at the moment, which is prioritising
renewable energy and battery systems for social housing in that area.

20 So talking to the Public Utilities Office, their response was that they're keen to
see the results of that trial before they look at any other expansion or
adaptation. But we would be keen to see that – knowing that there are multiple
benefits across different sectors, energy, environment, social, health, that can
all benefit from that model. So we would encourage, from a health
25 perspective, those initiatives, both to allow access to renewable energy at
affordable pricing, as well as energy retrofits and efficiency upgrades. Some
other... I don't know if you had anything else that you wanted to contribute in
that?

30 MS MITCHELL: I suppose, as well, that what we're seeing
around summer time in homeless services... so in those different – and winter
as well, but in summer, with extreme heat coming through, we see a higher
increase of alcohol misuse, a higher case of suicide ideation and suicides.
We've exasperated health – and services being so stretched across – a lot of
35 people think homeless services in winter become really busy. But actually,
summer is our probably busiest time. It's a more complex time, people are
trying to escape out of heat to air conditioning, because there's not a lot of
places that they are allowed to enter, if you like. Shopping centres, other
places that we escape to on a hot day, they're usually asked to leave, which
40 then becomes, you know, other complex issues. So they're not always
welcome in those spaces. So homeless services become very, very busy.

We also have a waitlist of, sort of, you know, 15 to 20 people to see the GP
clinic. We've already got a full list for the GPs that come to our services. And
45 we see a lot more heightened behaviour around summer time. So if those,
obviously, environmental factors were to worsen, I think it would put more
pressure on a very high-pressure service as it is. And then on the flip side, with
extreme weather conditions, I mean, even last night, I suppose, listening to the

rain that was belting down on my roof, just the impact that that had on the service this morning, with probably an extra 80 people trying to get in this morning, with high ratios of staff to clients with limited funding. We're starting to see... the pressures are starting to form some cracks. And it's not...
5 and I'll be very honest, it's an issue that we probably don't think about enough, or don't look to look at future designs or future initiatives to try and decrease those numbers. As I said, we're quite reactive to homelessness.

10 So I think with future generations coming through, youth services, youth homelessness, there's no decrease in any of those numbers. And I think we are seeing the pressures, especially in that health, around processed foods, cheap foods, the likes of the increase of type two diabetes is quite high among homeless people, and especially Aboriginal populations that we see. So I think it's... yes, the concern is the pressure on very limited resources as we have
15 now.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: So can I just ask a follow-up question, just - - -

20 MS MITCHELL: Sure.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: That's very interesting to point us to, the fact that it might be a different pattern of presentation - - -

25 MS MITCHELL: Sure.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: - - - in Western Australia, or in Australia, I'm not sure, in summer rather than winter. We haven't heard that before. Do you provide services outside the Metropolitan area, is anything other, kind of, stories or experiences you can relate from across the state in terms of the particular impact in different parts of the state on - - -
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MS MITCHELL: Not from a Uniting Care West point. I have worked in... I spent four and a half years working in Roebourne for multiple government agencies up there. I've worked in Aboriginal communities. And over that time, we would always see a spike in mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues across summer months. We would see a higher suicide rate and a higher rate of domestic violence and violence. So due to, I suppose, in the Pilbara area where I was, the summers are long and very, very hot, and winter comes as almost, like, a relief for people up there. Communities have overcrowded housing, they have a lack of appropriate housing. So the pressure in the summer months becomes quite unbearable, with many people opting to sleep outside. That leads to higher social gatherings that can lead to higher conflict, to incidents and accidents happening, higher drinking rates. So we've seen that culture as quite apparent in the Pilbara region where I worked anyway, and it was almost you saw a massive decline in service presentations when the weather became cooler.
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MR BICE:

And similarly, we have a congregation with volunteers, part of the Floreat congregation particularly, that has an allied network that runs supports services and programs up in Mowanjum, in the Aboriginal community there, it's just outside of Derby. And one of the
5 volunteers for that organisation is an academic. He has done some of his own research, which is not something that has been peer reviewed or published, but it's an analysis of crime statistics for that area and other similar – so I think the other one was Fitzroy Crossing as well – which seems to suggest, and I think it would warrant further investigation, that there's a correlation between increases
10 in crime over the summer hot months. Also in the number of suicides in those periods as well. And so that's a point of particular concern that we have for remote communities.

I think Aboriginal people in general can be said to be more vulnerable, but
15 particularly we think people in remote communities where exposure to illness is a lot higher, housing conditions are poorer, health conditions are more common. And so what some of the recommendations are made from the analysis that the academic – so his name is Dr Richard Smith – there's some just simple things that he suggests, from creating water parks so the residents
20 can cool off during heatwaves, more shade-covered areas for playgrounds and basketball courts, air-conditioned community resource centres with Internet access and education potential, low-cost electricity via rooftop solar and battery, to run air-conditioning and refrigeration within houses, some mechanism to ensure poverty does not prevent running of air-conditioning.
25 And so there's recently been a switch where pre-paid electricity has gone to – rather than a card, it's something that you can get via debit or credit card, but that's not necessarily without issues as well.

But then if people can't afford to put money on a card, then it can create
30 problems for other people in the community that might have resources. And it means that people might have their fridge turned off overnight and everything goes bad. And to plant trees to cool the environment, provide shade, sequester carbon and create employment. Also, for people in other regional areas, particularly in environment-dependent industries like agriculture and tourism,
35 then it's a point of concern, we have congregations across the state and throughout the Wheatbelt, down in southern areas. And so none of the so-called emotional well-being pressures that regional communities face with challenging environmental conditions, and at the moment, we're seeing – the biggest example of that is in the eastern states, with the drought conditions that
40 they're experiencing. We can only expect similar things to happen as climate change worsens in Western Australia. And we already know the declining rainfall that's impacted in the southwest.

And so we would like to see greater investment, not only in social and
45 emotional supports, but in the diversification of regional economies with renewable energy infrastructure, and carbon sequestration initiatives, that can include carbon farming, as well as regenerative agricultural practices. We also have a concern for older people and - -

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Can I just come to that in a second?

MR BICE: Certainly, sure.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: So I'll just finish off – not finish off, just ask a follow-up question around homelessness. So the Inquiry held a special forum in conjunction with WACOSS at St Pat's in Fremantle on September the 19th, where the focus was on the lived experience of people who are currently homeless. Now, you've outlined some of the effects that you've seen, but just kind of reflect a bit on the fact that – we asked a bit of those questions at that forum, but we also asked the same set of questions we asked at all the public forums, around what the ideas of people were around what could be done, what they were seeing, why they were concerned about it as an issue, what they'd like health services to do. And that experience for us was, you know, that group of people was as well, if not better informed, and came about these issues as any other group.

20 So is there a sense, as well, in which – and they're very aware of Government services and being on the pointy end of Government services, and quite, you know, having nuanced understanding of how the systems work? So is there a sense in which they could also be a resource in terms of solutions, as opposed to just problematised as a vulnerable group?

25 MS MITCHELL: Absolutely. I think there's nothing that we would do in our area, Uniting Care West, without the involvement of the clients that we're there to support. And even the small initiatives that we've begun in our own backyard, if you like, has been from the clients themselves. So absolutely, I think there's nothing more knowledgeable than someone who's living it, and someone who can be really open and honest about what is happening for them. And I strongly believe that probably is the most resourceful group of people, with probably the highest resilience. I don't think I could do what they do. So their problem-solving and solution focus is actually quite remarkable when we approach this community with these issues.

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And, you know, even with, sort of, ideas that I've got around reducing chronic homelessness in the Perth CBD and surrounds, it's been with the input of people that are... we seem to go to grand ideas and grand gestures of things that we need, and looking at the whole puzzle to fix quickly, where actually, what I've learnt in the time of being at Uniting Care West for the last couple of years is around these small bite sizes. And I think, you know, people who are experiencing chronic rough sleeping need a safe space to be. And there's multiple opportunities for that in Perth of buildings that are already built and unoccupied, which is probably the most frustrating for that community of people to walk past or to sleep in front of a building that's empty. So I think that's one of the biggest things that we're actively trying to fundraise and gain funds for, is just safe night spaces for people to come out of the elements, to be safe and secure, and to hopefully regulate enough to make good choices and

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get supports around them to move past this chronic rough sleeping that they're experiencing.

5 And that's come from trials that we've done in the past. We had our trial and
homelessness week, where I was a little bit over talking about fixing
homelessness, because we do a lot of talking about it. And so we opened our
Tranby Day Centre for 24-7. So we opened from Sunday to Sunday, and
welcomed that community in for a safe space. It was a trial for a week. It was
10 probably the hardest thing to shut down, but we saw up to 60 people every
night coming in. But not just coming in and sleeping, but coming in and
supporting each other to make that system work, doing jobs, maintaining
grounds, picking up rubbish, cooking, helping and supporting each other. But
the stories that came out of that week for just safety, and I think that's one of
the primary things I think we forget, is where people felt safe.

15 We had stories of – for example, methylamphetamine is probably one of our
biggest concerns in homeless services. The decrease in methylamphetamine
use was quite remarkable. People that had been using methylamphetamine to
stay awake at night to walk and feel safe in the community decreased, we had
20 alcohol decrease. And simple stories of women coming in to feel safe, and not
sleeping in jeans for the first time in three years, and being able to just get a
safe night's sleep. And the decisions that were then made for people was quite
remarkable. So we got multiple people into housing and multiple people into
rehab and things like that. And that came from a simple conversation with
25 people experiencing it, that it's just not as hard as we think it is to offer a
solution, a quick solution. So that's something that we're working quite
passionately about right now.

30 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: We've got just 10 or so minutes, and I've
just got a couple of questions. I would like you to address the aged care issue,
if you'd like to speak about that, Mr Bice?

35 MR BICE: Certainly. So we have an aged care
agency in Juniper. And so I invited their input for this, and they mentioned
that they have already set up some forum with yourself, and that they were
going to contribute to directly themselves – to comment directly. But certainly,
a key point of concern for us, the extra vulnerability that lies with old people
and people with multiple health conditions. And one last cohort of people that
40 we have concerns about is people that are working outdoors in their regular
jobs. And so that could be construction workers, to farm labourers, to station
hands or mine workers. And with extreme weather events, and they're
particularly exposed. And I just note that there's the site inclement weather
procedure agreement that exists, which came out of the January 2013 death of a
45 worker, Glenn Newport, who was killed at work after being exposed to
extreme temperatures. And this is quite a detailed agreement, but I note that
the coroner, in his findings, made the observation that a code of practice should
be devised for any industries where workers are exposed to extreme heat,
including agriculture, mining and the building or landscapes industry. And that

this agreement is only acting in place of that. So we would like to see that progressed. And we also note that this only refers – the hot weather guidelines – to the Perth Metropolitan area. It's a question as to how this could be extended more broadly for the safety of workers more generally.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: That coronial case came up in one of the other written submissions, so we'll follow up on that around this, specifically around this recommended code of practice, so thank you.

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MR BICE: No worries.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: In your written submission, you stressed the importance of a fair and planned transition. Can you explain what you mean by that? Who needs to make a transition, and from what to what?

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MR BICE: Thank you for that question. The Uniting Church has long advocated for a fair and planned transition away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy systems. And that that transition needs to be fair for workers and accessible to all sections of society. And it's a, perhaps, unique voice of church and faith traditions to try and view the transition required as not particular to any one component of society or industry, but that it necessarily impacts on all parts of our lifestyle, and that it needs to be a holistic inter-departmental, inter-government, cross-community, across all sections of society approach that makes it very complex and difficult. But the more complexity, the better the system's response.

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So with that in mind, it is troubling that WA is the principal source of Australia's rising greenhouse gas emissions, primarily due to the expansion of the LNG industry. We think that, instead, we have the renewable energy resources here in WA and the skilled labour and the expertise to become a world leader in renewable energy generation, storage and export, and think that there's a significant economic benefit, as well as environmental benefits, to transitioning to that kind of economy. And we're watching closely as the Collie community grapples with its transition planning, and are nervous that through a lack of forward planning so far, that the transition of that economy may not be as smooth as it could have been. We see some good progress, but there are some bumps that we are seeing in the news just in the last week.

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So for the Collie community, they need to know that they have reliable local jobs and equivalent pay in alternative industries, and need to know that they're involved in the process. It's encouraging to see those conversations are now occurring. But the same process needs to be occurring also in other fossil fuel-dependent industries, particularly the gas industry, where instead of declining emissions, which are required under our commitments to the Paris Agreement targets, emissions are currently rising at a worrying rate. And they're cancelling out – and this is just primarily from the LNG industry – cancelling out the gains that have been occurring in the energy sector nationally. And this is worrying. Part of the transition process, we believe,

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needs to require the polluters pay for their emissions, and that the benefit of those payments contribute to the broader transition process and the inclusion of the most vulnerable. This would best be done through some form of carbon pricing mechanism of which there are various options.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. My final question, you mentioned your concern for partner churches around the region, and I'm presuming outside Australia. So what connections do you currently have with them, how might you show solidarity, and what are the longer-term effects of not taking sufficient action?

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MR BICE: Thank you for that question. And that, actually, gives an opportunity for us to voice how broad the scope of our concern is, and in large part, our action as a church has been driven by the voice of our partner churches, particularly in the Pacific, who have continually called for us to speak on their behalf for action on climate change. And I'll just read a section out of the Uniting Church policy document For the Sake of the Plant and all its People:

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Where the impact of climate change will affect some of the world's poorest people first. The Uniting Church are particularly concerned with the fate of some of our most vulnerable Pacific neighbours. Our partner churches in the Pacific have called on their sisters and brothers in the church throughout the world to act in solidarity to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. Lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and ecosystems of the Pacific Islands have already been affected by rising sea levels, diminishing agricultural space, diminishing reserves of fresh water and changing weather patterns, including more frequent and unpredictable storms. The Uniting Church in Australia has called on the Australian Government to provide assistance for the peoples of the Pacific as they are forced to leave their homes and their land. Solutions must be found which ensure that the unique cultural and linguistic heritages of the various Pacific island nations are not lost. The situation in the Pacific is a clear signal to us that, in order to secure our future, we must change how we live as nations, communities and individuals. Now is the time for governments, business, community and faith-based organisations to commit to working together to address the impacts of climate change for the sake of the planet and all its peoples.

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So in light of that, the Uniting Church has been working closely with our partner churches, primarily in the Pacific, where the effects and impacts are already being seen, but not solely there. And recently, in the last El Nino, we saw droughts in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and extending across to the Papuan regions of Indonesia. And so we've been working with our partner churches on helping them understand their theology of what does it mean to be following a God at a time when their lands are disappearing and their livelihoods are being affected, as well as working with them on having a better

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understanding of gender justice because we recognise that, actually, it's women in a lot of these situations that are most impacted by climate change. So I would also just like to read one excerpt from the Reverend Dr Seferosa Carroll, who's a Pacific Island woman herself. She says that:

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The concept of the inter-connectedness and inter-relatedness of human beings in creation is not a foreign concept for Pacific Islanders. Sadly, this concept has been lost due to the legacy of Christian missions and colonisation, followed by waves and influence of Western dualistic thinking and globalisation which has, and continues to, privilege consumerism. That separation or dualistic thinking has led to slow erosion of creation and culture, and a kind of forgetfulness regarding our responsibility to be good stewards of the Earth. And the challenge is to recognise what research has shown, which is that women are both particularly vulnerable to climate change, and that they, more than men, bear the full brunt of the impacts of climate change. Women are the caregivers and nurturers of these communities. They're predominantly responsible for food production, household water supply and energy for heating and cooking. And as climate change increases, these tasks become more difficult.

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So it is our shared concern with our partners that we are driven to act, but it's also how we then support them. And I think we, as Australians, as a wealthy nation, have a responsibility to contribute our fair share to support them in both their adaptation and – there's other impacts in terms of migration that is likely to occur with climate change, not just from sea level rise, but with extreme weather events that are likely to occur, particularly in low-lying areas like Bangladesh, that where do the people go and what's our responsibility to provide homes for those people? And what are the other things that that would bring it in terms of the spreading of diseases and sicknesses that might be associated with that.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Mr Bice, Ms Mitchell, thank you very much for your attendance at today's hearing. A transcript of this hearing will be sent to you so that you can correct minor factual errors before it is placed on the public record. If you could please return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering letter or email, otherwise it will be deemed to be correct. While you cannot amend your evidence, if you would like to explain particular points in more detail or present further information, you can provide this as an addition to your submission to the Inquiry when you return the transcript. Once again, thank you very much for your time in attending today.

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MR BICE: Thank you.

HEARING CONCLUDED