

SPC News

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Climate change: “the most important issue we face” Peter Whiting Editorial

At the UN’s COP24 climate talks currently under way in Poland, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described climate change as “the most important issue we face”.

The address by Sir David Attenborough was unequivocal in its alarm, fearing the collapse of our civilisations, and recognising climate change as a “man-made disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years”.

In Australia, our political leaders do not seem to share the same sense of urgent pending calamity reflected by the UN speakers, but there are obvious signs that at least parts of the electorate have received the message.

Recently, thousands of students marched on the nation’s capital cities, as well as in many regional centres, protesting the inaction on climate change.

Peter Sainsbury, writing on the findings of the *Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* in October 2018, is strident in a call for action, and believes an appropriate response “will require a reorganisation of societies, economies, and industries on a scale similar to that which occurred in the UK and USA when each entered World War II”.

Church voices are being raised along with those of academia. The Catholic bishops of Oceania have joined a call by six presidents of continental bishops’ conferences to take urgent action to tackle the climate change crisis. Reaffirming insistent calls by Pope Francis to overcome global warming, the presidents made their appeal in Rome on 26 October.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, addressing the COP24 conference, told participants that the COP24’s guidelines should have “a clear ethical foundation”, including “advancing the dignity of the human person, alleviating poverty, and promoting integral human development”, with “transparent, efficient, and dynamic” measures.

One of SPC’s committee members **Tony French** reflects on preparation in his own Catholic parish for the 2020 Plenary Council. While much of the commentary is Catholic-centric, the particular element we at SPC would like to see becoming significant in the final response of the Council is “a shift ... to matters of social justice”.

A peaceful world?

A failure of action on global climate change risks seeing world powers adopt nationalistic policies to secure the wellbeing of their citizens. This is just another of many reasons action is needed now. **Allan Patience**, in a thoughtful and challenging paper delivered at a conference supported by Social Policy Connections, asks “What can Australia do to help build a world at peace with itself?”. His response will require massive change in Australian attitudes and approach if we are to play a positive role in bringing about a peaceful world.

In an equally challenging article on Australia’s involvement in the Iraq war, **James O’Neill** reports on revelations indicating that the decision to go to war was taken much earlier than publicly disclosed, and on grounds today proven largely false.

Pacific countries

The threat of adverse global warming outcomes is very much apparent in Pacific countries. Aid agencies have long lamented that much of Australian aid to these countries is misdirected, especially in neglecting the impact of climate change. A former Australian High

Commissioner to Samoa, and now CEO of Caritas Australia, **Paul O’Callaghan** lamented in November that Australian plans for a \$2 billion infrastructure bank risk creating new debt traps for Pacific Island countries, while doing little to help them prepare for climate change.

At the recent APEC meeting, Pacific countries were courted by the major powers seeking to exert or extend their reach in the Pacific area. **Mark Moran** reflects on the type of aid which would really benefit PNG.

Year end

In this last of our Newsletters for 2018, it’s worth reflecting again on what we at SPC are about. One of our aims as an ecumenical organisation is to help bring the social involvement of the churches into contemporary policy debates to shape a just society.

At SPC, we wish you a peace-filled Christmas season.



No Planet B - funeral for our future - Melbourne.
Takver. flickr cc.



Demonstration at Paris Climate Change Conference 2015. until_fullmoon. flickr cc.

IPCC's 1.5°C report makes Paris Agreement redundant

Peter Sainsbury

The report *Global Warming of 1.5°C* was published in October 2018 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Although the report does not say so, the evidence it presents renders the 2015 Paris Agreement

on climate change redundant. It asks the wrong question, and its goals and strategies are now revealed to be completely inadequate for avoiding catastrophic climate change.

Although the 2015 Paris Agreement includes keeping global warming "well below" 2°C, the 'well below' is unspecified and most analyses focus on 2°C of warming. However, 2°C is not (as it is frequently portrayed) 'safe' for the environment or for humanity, and is not based on science (it has always been a diplomatic compromise).



The current social housing construction rate - barely 3,000 dwellings a year - does not even keep pace with rising need, let alone make inroads into today's backlog. Joel Carrett/AAP.

Australia needs to triple its social housing by 2036. This is the best way to do it ...

Ryan van den Nouweland and colleagues

Australia needs to triple its small stock of social housing over the next 20 years to cover the existing backlog and newly emerging need.

That is the central finding of our new research report on the housing infrastructure needs of low-income earners, published by the Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute (AHURI). By our reckoning, 25 years of inadequate investment has left Australia facing a shortfall of 433,000 social housing dwellings. The current construction rate – little more than 3,000 dwellings a year – does not even keep pace with rising need, let alone make inroads into today's backlog.



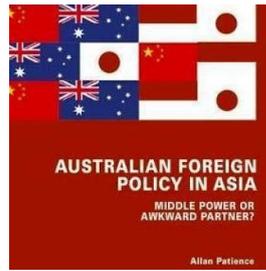
US & Iraqi soldiers in Diyala Iraq 2008. US Army. flickr cc.

Revelations about Australia & the Iraq war
James O'Neill

We now know a number of things we were not told in February-March 2003. These include the fact that the invasion of Iraq was an agenda item on the first Bush Cabinet meeting in 2001.

We also know that Vice President Cheney's Taskforce had, in early 2002, drawn up a map dividing Iraq's lucrative oilfields among its corporate supporters.

The so-called Downing Street memorandum compiled by Sir Richard Dearlove, Head of the UK's MI6, dated 23 July 2002, was disclosed in the course of the Chilcott enquiry. That memorandum stated, "military action was inevitable", terrorism and weapons of mass destruction would be the public justification, and that "intelligence was being fixed around that policy".



What can Australia do to help build a world at peace with itself?

Allan Patience

For all our cultural cringing and geopolitical fearfulness, we are a truculent nation, arrogating to ourselves the title of middle power, expecting the international

community gratefully to bestow us a seat in global forums like the UN Security Council and the UN's Human Rights Council.

What we don't interrogate is precisely what kind of middle power we are. Instead, it is simply taken for granted by the majority of our policy makers and commentators that, in the words of Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, "Australia is a middle power. We are manifestly not a great power, nor, however, are we small or insignificant".

This belief is worrying, because it is indicative of a lack of a national self-awareness about the kind of country we are, and about how we might be regarded in our region and internationally. This is actually dangerous for the country's security. Interrogating the middle power assumption underlying Australian foreign policy is a matter of urgency.



A student does his homework near a solar power kit in remote PNG, apparently charging his phone, or looking up something on the Internet. Geoff Miller University of Queensland.

In the post-APEC scramble to lavish funds on PNG, here's what the country really needs ...

Mark Moran

If foreign powers really want to make a difference to PNG, one of the poorest countries in the region, then funding equipment like telecommunications gear and solar power kits would be widely welcomed. One key benefit would be using mobile phones to transfer money - instead of traipsing long

distances to a bank in town.

No fewer than 85% of PNG citizens live in rural and remote areas, it is estimated, so items like these are capable of making an enormous difference in their lives.

Books for sale through SPC



NEW *An Enabling Life. Father Kevin Mogg. A collection of reminiscences.* Anne Tuohy. \$20, plus \$5 postage.



Bridging Troubled Waters: Australia & Asylum Seekers. Tony Ward. A project of the Yarra Institute for Religion & Social Policy. Special SPC offer \$25.



Of Labour & Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966 (Monash Publishing). Race Mathews. \$30 plus postage.



Bonded through tragedy, united in hope. The Catholic Church & East Timor's struggle for independence. A Memoir (Garratt Publishing). Therese and Jim D'Orsa, with Hilton Deakin. \$25 plus postage, or at the SPC office.