



UPJ POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Introduction

The UPJ Executive has concluded that climate change is a Jewish issue and is an urgent issue of our time. Furthermore, it is clear that taking action on this issue offers an opportunity to engage young leaders from our communities as the driving force. This document will explain why we believe this to be a Jewish issue, document how several peak organisations both within and beyond Australia have prioritised action on climate change and will then lay out a path forward

Why is this a Jewish issue?

Though 2020 will be remembered as the year of COVID, it should also be the year that awakens us all to our vulnerability to various natural forces, and the importance of taking the best scientific advice of how to deal with our environment in general. Scientists have warned that human encroachment on animal habitat and a warming climate will lead to pandemics and to the largest extinction of animal life in millennia; human impact on the environment contributes significantly to air and water pollution as well as global warming and all its consequences. We also recall that the year started with devastating bushfires in Australia and then in other large parts of the world. The viability of human life as we know it on this planet is at stake; no wonder these issues are the most important for our younger generations who are most at peril, and whose engagement risk, unless we take appropriate action.

Our Torah requires us to be stewards of the earth and its animals, to avoid wasting any natural resources, to passionately protect human life, and to pass on Judaism's teachings and way of life to the next generation. A powerful Rabbinic teaching states: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are — how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it." It is time for the UPJ to respond more clearly to the call of our tradition, the pleas of our younger generations without whom there is no future, and the leading organisations of which we are constituents.

Action to redress climate change is both important and urgent and should take place both at the leadership level within the UPJ and in individual congregations.

Jewish Leadership – National and International – is already moving forward

We note that the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the roof body and voice of the Australian Jewish community, has adopted a policy which names climate change as a major challenge facing Australia and the world and declares its support for action to tackle Australia's rising greenhouse gas emissions as the basis of an effective response to climate change.

The platform of the ECAJ has declared its support for policies aimed at achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Together, we can lead Australian Jewry and use this mandate to activate our community and change the way we operate.

Further, the **Word Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ)** has adopted the following platform:

Whereas the concept of Tikkun Olam, of working as partners with God to heal the world, is rooted in the Torah, rabbinic, medieval and modern interpretations of our holy texts, and

Whereas our mission statement talks about Inspiring the Next Generation: Engaging youth and young adults, and anticipates a safe and positive future, and

Whereas the large majority of climate specialists worldwide say our world is heating alarmingly and the future of large numbers of people (particularly the poorer nations who are less able to mitigate changes and manage disasters), animals and habitats are under growing threat

IT IS THEREFORE RESOLVED that we reassert that the modern Jewish concern for climate justice and the environment (in which many Progressive Jews across the globe are already engaged) is not only an authentic reading of our ancient sources but also urgent and essential, and that all our individual and organisational members should be urged to 'act and to learn' about the unfolding climate crisis. These commitments are ones that are essential to pass from generation to generation; as we aspire to pass on this world in good condition to those generations we will never know.

What can our Congregations, Organisations and congregants in Australia, New Zealand and Asia do?

Based on the above, we *encourage* each of our UPJ congregations and organisations to:

- stay informed on climate change issues: For example. refer to <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au> and educate their Boards and Senior Management on the latest accredited climate science and the risks posed by climate change to their organisation, members, Australia, Israel and the world;

- **Staying informed** means *educating* all those who participate in our communities about the threats and opportunities posed by climate change, *equipping* them with tools to effectively communicate the issues and solutions to others, and *supporting* them to communicate those issues and solutions through their own networks. These steps will normalise discussion of this important issue.
- educate members using clear and compelling educational resources about taking personal actions which demonstrate environmental responsibility using specific Jewish sources (<https://www.jcn.org.au/>) and to stay informed on climate change issues through social action
- take all appropriate steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with their own activities, including for example:
 1. **Invest in funds and companies that do not harm the environment without sacrificing financial returns by moving to banks and superannuation funds that do not invest in fossil fuels**
 - <https://www.marketforces.org.au/info/compare-bank-table/>
 - <https://www.marketforces.org.au/superfunds/>
 2. **Travel**
 - emphasise investing in carbon offsetting measures when travelling by air for conferences, meetings, festivals etc
 - develop effective 'virtual congregations' and 'virtual conferences' to reduce travel, and encourage employees and members physically attending services and functions to use public transport, ride bicycles or walk to the synagogue;
 - adjust transportation, using hybrid or preferably electric cars, public transport, bicycles, walking – and avoid flying wherever possible.
 3. **Energy and consumption**
 - use renewable energy and install solar panels where feasible;
 - purchase and use recycled products;
 - manage buildings to minimise waste by recycling and using more efficient forms of energy, such as LED lighting;
 - reduce meat consumption (especially beef/veal and lamb) at home, synagogue and communal functions.

4. **Religion and social action**

- establish youth/young adult-led social action task forces to lead the community in educating, advocating and discussing the issue of climate change (coordinating with Netzer and TaMAR)
- emphasise environmental connections with each festival, eg Rosh Hashanah as the 'Birthday of the World' when we celebrate creation, the importance of harvest festivals, etc.

5. **Review**

- constant reviewing and reassessing of the measures in place to reduce emissions and educate congregants (via formal annual or biannual meetings)

CREATING A SOCIAL ACTION FRAMEWORK

Taking meaningful action on climate change means inviting in leaders from the young adult population who are prepared to coordinate, encourage and recruit others to do the same. The following is a suggested action plan, although communities should certainly adapt this plan as appropriate:

Congregations should look to reach out to two synagogue members who are clearly passionate about the issue of climate change. These members can be provided a budget and a licence to begin taking steps to:

1. create initiatives for the congregation to take part in
2. recruit young people to get involved
3. draft specific recommendations for the congregation to lower its carbon footprint

It can be agreed that the team deliver regular updates and involve the wider congregation in its activities. However in the interest of youth empowerment, there should be an understanding that the group remain autonomous.

Congregations and the UPJ could provide significant assistance. Beyond budgetary support, help networking with the Reform movement's climate action groups in North America could be immensely helpful in sharing best practices. Assistance in connecting with the JCN or facilitating a joint committee for all youth led climate change initiatives under the UPJ banner should be provided.