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Watermark

Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW)

This Issue:

Introduction.....	1
Privatisation of Electricity.....	2
Pacific Calling Partnership, an Interview with Geraldine Kearney sgs.....	3
Earth Hour Update.....	4
Web Links and Ways to Help!.....	4

Introduction

The unseasonable and temperamental weather NSW experienced over the past summer has been a very real reminder of the impact of climate change on our lives. For some people, climate change is much more than an inconvenience; it is a threat to their culture, indeed their very way of life.

In this issue of *Watermark* Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs speaks passionately of the situation faced by our Pacific Ocean neighbours, whose low-lying island homes are threatened by rising sea levels. Sr Geraldine also shares her experiences from the 2007 Bali Climate Conference and describes the efforts being made in Australia and in the Pacific to protect the futures and livelihoods of these threatened peoples.

Somewhat closer to home, this issue also examines the debate in NSW over the privatisation of the state's electricity services. The focus is particularly on the impact upon the environment of the proposed action.



Electricity Privatisation

Private profit, public woe

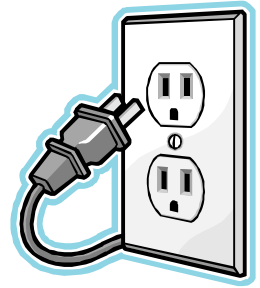
On the 26th of February 2008 Bishop Kevin Manning, of Parramatta diocese, spoke out against the NSW government's proposed privatisation of some elements of its electricity services. Bishop Manning focused on the impact that privatisation would have upon the environment and upon the state's poor and vulnerable people. He drew attention to the social teachings of the Catholic Church, which call for an attitude of stewardship towards creation and compassion for the needy.

Despite this strong show of opposition by the Bishop, many people (both religious and non-religious) remain unclear about the ways in which privatisation would change the service of their electricity, and the impact that any change to this service would have on the environment.

Currently our electricity is derived predominantly from seven coal-fired generators operating within NSW. Ownership of these generators is one of the items that would, effectively, be 'sold' through a long-term (20 to 50 year) lease as part of electricity privatisation. With public ownership as it currently stands, the people of NSW are in a position of relative power, and are able to pressure the government to move their investment away from dirty coal power, towards cleaner and greener forms of energy production. However, if these mines were to be sold, the private owners would have no incentive to abandon their purchase in favour of renewable energy production. The sell-off would effectively lock NSW into environmentally unsound electricity production for generations – for much too long, considering that climate change experts warn that we must act now to reduce emissions.

Another way in which electricity privatisation could prove to be an environmental hazard is

through its impact on the Federal Government's Emissions Trading Scheme. This scheme, which Prime Minister Rudd has committed to



implementing by the year 2010, is designed to make it more costly for companies to generate energy that produces a high level of emissions. Businesses would have to purchase 'carbon permits' relative to the amount of emissions they produce. But this important Federal initiative could be undermined if the NSW State government, in order to make the sale of the coal generators more attractive, promises to indemnify electricity buyers against the costs of future carbon liabilities. If this is done, the companies could keep producing dirty power without financial restriction (and with a competitive advantage over renewable alternatives that have no such indemnity). The cost of the indemnity would fall to NSW taxpayers. This effectively means that residents of NSW would be paying businesses to increase pollution whilst making a profit out of their electricity service.

This outcome, aside from threats of price rises, job losses, and blackouts, clearly indicates that electricity privatisation would be a bad result for the people of NSW, and indeed for everyone affected by emissions, which know no borders.

See page 4 for ways you can help stop the sell-off.

Sources:

- § Bishop Kevin Manning's address on privatisation, at: <http://www.parra.catholic.org.au/Bishop/speeches.htm>
- § Clive Hamilton's research paper on 'Carbon Liabilities of NSW Electricity Generators', at: <http://www.tai.org.au/documents/downloads/WP110.pdf>
- § News item about anti-privatisation rally, at <http://www.asen.org.au/>

Answering the Call

Pacific Calling Partnership - Interview with Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs

Sister Geraldine Kearney sgs is a woman of passion and resolve. Her energy and heartfelt enthusiasm became apparent as she shared stories of her experiences in Bali, where she attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December of last year. Working with 12 others, she led a delegation from the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP). The Pacific Calling Partnership is an initiative of the Edmund Rice Organisation (involving CLRI(NSW)), which is directed towards providing hope, educational resources and opportunities for action in support of low-lying island nations.



Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs

The PCP Bali delegation consisted of a diverse mix of people from Sydney, Kiribati, the Carteret Islands and the Torres Strait Islands. Their goal was to open the world's ears to the voices of people from these Pacific nations and territories. The lives and cultures of these people are under direct threat from the rising sea levels and erratic weather caused by global warming. Geraldine said that "it was heart-rending to hear them talking", yet the presence of these representatives at the Conference was crucial, as they "put the flesh and bones on the facts and figures".



Photo showing a Kiribati island ravaged by the rising tide

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/photos/videos/slideshows/king-tide-impacts-on-kiribati?page=4>

In addition to the key-note addresses at the Conference, side-events allowed groups to speak to guests and to the media. Members of the PCP group, Kairo Taubuki, Sr Claire Anterea sgs, and Terei Fred, performed traditional dances, while Tangaroa Arobati gave a presentation about the beautiful but vulnerable ecosystems of Kiribati. These moving presentations grabbed the attention of international media and allowed the group to show the world a glimpse of the unique cultures that will be under threat if we fail to act now to slow climate change.

Geraldine spoke with enthusiasm of the networking that arose from this event. The PCP was able to establish connections with Climate Action Network Australia (CANA), Australian Youth Climate Coalition, and even Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Environment Minister Peter Garrett. Rudd personally thanked the Good Samaritan Sisters for their work and their

representation at the conference. It is hoped that, having now seen the "flesh and blood behind the facts and figures", these politicians will act decisively to protect the livelihoods and futures of these people. One of the ongoing goals of the PCP is to continue interacting within the network of climate action organisations to affect real change in this region. This network continues to expand, as some members of the Bali delegation have since begun their own climate action groups, modelled on existing structures such as TSCAN – the Torres Strait Climate Action Network.

Addressing the situation faced by nations such as Kiribati involves strategies to both prevent and to manage the possible inundation of these islands. The Pacific Calling Partnership is campaigning for our government to provide more funds to build necessities such as stronger sea walls, levees and rainwater tanks, but long-sighted measures are also necessary. Programs designed to train I-Kiribati to work as skilled immigrants in Australia and New Zealand are crucial measures if their relocation eventually becomes necessary. CLRI(NSW) and several of its individual congregations are partners within the PCP and have contributed donations to the ongoing work of the group. As individuals we can also continually remind our politicians of the neighbours who desperately need our help, and we can reduce our own contribution to climate change through practical emissions-reducing measures.

Acting now to slow climate change and implementing measures to help our Pacific neighbours are crucial – it is our ecological debt to them. If we can all employ the passion and gusto of Geraldine Kearney we may be able, together, to successfully answer the Pacific's call.



Sr Geraldine with Sr Claire Anterea sgs at the 2007 Bali Climate Change Conference

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We are on the Web!
www.clrinsw.org

You can read past
issues of
Watermark
on our website!

Earth Hour 2008

At **8pm on the 29th of March**, millions of Sydney-siders will, once again switch, off all their lights for an hour, as they did on the 31st of March 2007. But this time, their demonstration of commitment to reducing greenhouse gases will be replicated by not only by other Australians, but by people in capital cities all across the world. The 'Earth Hour' phenomenon has gone global and more and more individuals and businesses are becoming passionate about reducing emissions.

We would like to encourage all congregations to show their support and join in the fun of Earth Hour 2008. Some suggested activities for your hour of 'darkness' include having a candlelit dinner, singing songs, sharing stories around a few candles (ghost stories if you're game!), using the time to discuss ways to cut your home's carbon emissions, or even having a quiet prayer service.

Feedback from last year showed that many people found Earth Hour to be a great opportunity to stop and share time with the people around them, without the distractions of televisions or radios. We'd love to hear what you took away from Earth Hour 2008, so if you found yourself to be a special part of this global event, please send us (clrinsw@ozemail.com.au) a short account of what you did so we can share your stories with the rest of the community!



2007: Sydney-siders spending Earth Hour enjoying a candlelit picnic beneath the unusually dark city sky!

Image:
<http://www.smh.com.au/ftimages/2007/03/31/1174761817010.html>

Don't forget!

**March 29th
8pm - 9pm**

**Turn off
the lights!**

Links and Ways to Help!

Electricity Privatisation

<http://www.nsw.gov.au>

To protest against electricity privatisation we suggest that you to write to your local member and encourage him or her to pass on your message to Premier Morris Iemma and the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Verity Firth.

You can also go online at:
<http://www.stopheselloff.org.au>

PCP and Climate Change:

Edmund Rice Centre
www.erc.org

Australian Conservation
Foundation
www.acfonline.org.au

Greenpeace
www.greenpeace.org.au

Join up to the Pacific Calling
Partnership letter-writing
network by emailing:
jillf@erc.org.au

You can also send tax
deductible donations to
Edmund Rice Centre
Services - marked for the
'Pacific Calling Partnership'.
Email erc@erc.org.au for
more information.

Earth Hour

Sign up for Earth Hour at:
<http://www.earthhour.org>