



CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NSW

Member of Catholic Church Religious Group
ABN 52 476 362 010

Senator Barnaby Joyce
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Monday 8th May 2006

Dear Senator Joyce,

I write to you on behalf of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW) a body which represents several thousand Catholic Religious women and men. The CLRI (NSW) and its members are engaged in a range of community education and formal education programs which include the promotion of ecological integrity which lies at the heart of environmental sustainability and inter-generational equity.

Recently on the ABC program 'Australian Story' entitled 'The Polarizer', you made several references to the possibility of Australia 'exploiting' the natural resources of those sections of Antarctica that are under Australian jurisdiction. One of the primary reasons you cited for such activity was your belief that other countries would be seeking to exploit Antarctica's resources and you saw no compelling reason for Australia not to follow suit.

The CLRI (NSW) urges you to reconsider such an outlook. Your visit there clearly had a profound impact on your understanding of this utterly unique environment. Any commercial exploitation of Antarctica would no doubt disrupt the fragile nature of the environment there. And given the extreme importance of both polar caps, any further erosion and deterioration of their eco-systems would result in long-term deleterious effects on the environmental systems which link our continent with Antarctica and therefore on all inter-connected global weather patterns.

You would be aware that the largest group of refugees in the world today are considered to be 'environmental refugees' as vulnerable people are forced to flee their home and cross borders because of tsunamis, cyclones, droughts, etc. Surely commercial practices which exploit the environment of Antarctica will have devastating consequences around the world thereby causing more and more people to leave their homes, especially in the low-lying islands of the Pacific. Catholic Religious men and women around this country and around the world are engaged every day in bringing relief but also long-term development to many of these highly

vulnerable people, and while we will always be willing to work side by side with refugees it is ill-logical in the extreme to condone or encourage practices which will have severe consequences on coastlines around the globe. Put simply, how can it be in Australia's best interests to participate in the long-term exploitation and subsequent destruction of Antarctica?

Our perspective on ecology is not only motivated by our concern for the environment itself but also from our concern to ensure that our current generation builds prosperity for all within a framework which respects sustainable growth and development for future generations. We know that as a parent and as someone who has experienced inter-generational prosperity yourself that you will be particularly interested in ensuring that your children and grand children inherit a global and national environment in which they can live comfortably. We are working towards this goal in Australia but we are mindful too that such a goal should be enjoyed by others around the world.

We must make the right decisions today for tomorrow's future. This is clearly a stand that you share with us. And yet we were dismayed at the reasoning which seemed to motivate the exploitative activities that you were suggesting – simply because others would be doing it first seems to be an un-principled and ill-logical perspective to take on an area of such enormous global significance as Antarctica. We feel confident that the position you articulated on Australian Story will be subject to your own processes of review and reflection. You have indicated in the past that you are willing to take the long-term view. We hope that we can be of assistance to you in this matter over the coming months.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Morgan
On behalf of the CLRI (NSW)