

Townsville Bishop Tim Harris calls out extreme left and right for confusing public on climate change



Warning signs: The Great Barrier Reef and coral reefs around the world face the threat of climate change. The effects of climate change, including increasing temperatures leading to coral bleaching, are already being seen on the reef.

TOWNSVILLE Bishop Tim Harris criticised both extreme left and extreme right political narratives for misleading the public from finding a reasoned and nuanced understanding of the costs and effects of climate change.

Bishop Harris said this reasoned and nuanced understanding was essential to enacting our "God-given" responsibility to care for creation.

He said both the hard-left and hard-right stifled the public's capacity to find the facts where a careful, moderate approach was required.

Christians had a unique responsibility, he said.

"We're here to do God's work and God's work is caring for one another

and caring for our common home," he said.

"Our common home is the earth and it is integral to who we are as Christians; we have responsibilities, God-given responsibilities, for caring for one another and that means caring for the place in which we all find ourselves."

Bishop Harris' comments came as he and North Queensland Anglican Bishop Keith Joseph released a joint statement calling out the impact of climate change and the need to take action on January 22.

The joint statement said the February 2019 Townsville floods, in which Bishop Harris' home was flooded, and the catastrophic bushfires that have been raging since August were instances where climate change was a significant factor.

"The overwhelming majority of scientific experts confirm that this particular episode of climate change is largely attributable to human activity, such as clearing of forests and the use of fossil fuels," the bishops said.

"This overwhelming evidence is accepted by all of Australia's major political leaders, including our Prime Minister Scott Morrison and our Science Minister Karen Andrews."

Navigating a post-truth world

Bishop Harris said he and Bishop Joseph were spurred to action because of the amount of misinformation floating around.

"There was so much being said, we needed to take a deep breath and look at the facts," Bishop Harris said.

Bishop Harris said people struggled to find the middle ground because of the amount of "fake news" circulating.



Creation is sacred: "Our common home is the earth and it is integral to who we are as Christians; we have responsibilities, God-given responsibilities, for caring for one another and that means caring for the place in which we all find ourselves."

In the statement, the bishops said the understanding necessary for taking action against climate change was "drowned out by controversialists of both hard left and right".

"Fake news" hit on both sides and stifled the public interest, they said.

Inaccurate maps circulated online that showed North Queensland on fire, which the bishops said "induced panic and despair rather than useful action".

In a similar vain, the sources that said arsonists predominantly caused the bushfires were proven "simply not true".

The bishops also discussed the commonly cited argument that because Australia produced only 1.3 per cent of greenhouse emissions, any action by Australia would have no impact.

But the bishops called this a "fallacy".

"Try refusing to pay your tax because it does not make any difference to

the big picture," the bishops said.

"Pragmatically, if we do nothing we will inevitably be left behind as a nation."

Bishop Harris said every country had a responsibility to one another to do the right thing.

Supporting a careful approach to transition

But Bishop Harris cautioned that we could not adopt the simplistic idea that fossil fuels could be replaced tomorrow.

He said this was not realistic.

There would be a time where reliance on coal and gas would continue, but efforts should be made to transition to sustainable energy sources, he said.

In the statement, the bishops warned there would be a cost to transition but there would also be a cost for inaction.

"There will be a cost to this: the longer we let this go on, the higher the cost will be," the bishops said.

"If we refuse to adapt to new environmentally effective and efficient technologies, then other nations will have all sorts of advantages over us.

"We need to start transitioning to a low emissions and environmental-friendly economy."

Caring for creation is "our responsibility"

"As people of faith, we take seriously our responsibility for looking after our environment," the bishops said.

"We know that we do not own creation, but we hold it in trust for future generations."

The bishops said history would ultimately be the judge.

"We will all be held responsible by our children and grandchildren," the bishops said.

"The exploitation of our environment for our own wealth with no regard for the future is morally wrong."