



**MEDIA RELEASE
FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF ADELAIDE
JEFFREY DRIVER**

The Elephant is still here!

Anglican Archbishop, Jeffrey Driver, has issued a challenge to both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott to stop skirting around issues that really matter, in particular a national response to climate change

“Climate change is the elephant in the room. What remains for many Australians as the single biggest moral and social issue of our time is being danced around by both major players in the political debate. Unfortunately for the nation, the risk averse tactics of political leaders will not make the issue go away.

“The last Federal election showed clearly that Australians are engaged by the issue and want action. A people’s assembly is just another way of deferring the issue. Waiting to see what other nations do before we respond is a morally bankrupt strategy. The science on climate change is gathering conviction. What we now need is some conviction from our political leaders.

“I welcome the Prime Minister’s recent commitment to the Murray River water buy-back but that is, essentially, remedial action.

“Australia needs to move towards workable reforms to meet the challenges of climate change. This is the global challenge that no nation can responsibly ignore. We are not a major world power but we are one of the world’s wealthy nations and also a regional leader. As such, we must act – and be seen to be acting - on climate change as a priority.

“Certainly any policies need to be economically sustainable, enlisting the goodwill and cooperation of industry rather than portraying industry as the problem. Purely aspirational and ideologically driven policy might sound good but the Australian people are now demanding practical and workable solutions. This requires the goodwill and cooperation of Industry and Agriculture”

The Archbishop linked climate change policy to another issue that he describes as receiving little more than a “knee jerk political response from our political heavyweights”.

“Climate change will become a major driver of population movement and the refugee crisis. While we in Australia debate the future possibility of over-population, countries in areas like sub-Saharan Africa are already experiencing internal conflict over scarce resources.

“This means that the current and continual arrival of refugees cannot be treated as an exceptional circumstance for Australia. Humanity is now mobile and the refugee population is a permanent fixture for the foreseeable future. There are 43.3 million refugees and forcibly displaced people worldwide^[1]. That is more people than live in individual countries such as Australia, Canada and Argentina. The refugee population is, effectively, a hidden country. It may be hidden but it won't be disappearing anytime soon.

“Australia needs to develop a more creative and humane engagement with this reality.

“I endorse the recent comments of the National Council of Churches of Australia. I call on the major political parties to work toward a humane, bipartisan approach to the treatment of asylum seekers. To look to an approach that fulfils our international obligations and enhances Australia's reputation as a just and humane global citizen. It is past time for such an approach, one which recognises the spirit of generosity and hospitality that has made Australia the country it is today.

“It is clear that the great majority of people who arrive by boat are desperate human beings – including many families – who are escaping terrible persecution. They are, on the whole, motivated and skilled people who go on to contribute to our national good. They represent almost no security risk.

“It is more likely that the new, sophisticated and trained terrorist will arrive, business class, on Qantas, rather than risk the ordeal and uncertainty of a leaky boat run by a ruthless people-smuggler.

“The time has come for all political parties to stop using refugees for political ends and to end the demonization of vulnerable people.

“The Jesus we encounter in the gospels always sides with the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable. As followers of Christ we will always be calling on the government to enact just, compassionate and generous legislation that recognises and respects the human dignity of every person.

“Each and every election is fought on the economic issues. There is no question that our financial stability is a measure of our national success but I would remind both parties that they will also be measured and remembered by the way they respond to the major global issues of their time - and whether they choose to prioritise the most marginalised members of our global and national community.”

**Archbishop Driver is available for interview.
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^[1] UNHCR report 15 June 2010