

Religious leaders back carbon tax

AAP, SMH, 2 June 2011



Representatives from Australia's Hindu, Uniting Church, Jewish, Bahai, Buddhist, Catholic, Jain and Anglican communities met members of both sides of politics in Canberra to show their support for action on climate change. *Photo: Alex Ellinghausen*

Monks and rabbis have stood alongside Catholics and Anglicans in Canberra to show support for the federal government's plan to tackle climate change.

Leaders from the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) met Prime Minister Julia Gillard in support of the carbon tax today.

Anglican representative George Browning said the group wanted to assist politicians to create good legislation and the message to Ms Gillard was that the issue was a moral one.

He said caring for the environment was at the core of all faiths and agreed with former prime minister Kevin Rudd that the issue was the greatest moral challenge of our time.

"It impacts on every aspect of life," Bishop Browning told reporters in Canberra, adding it was a threat to political and military security.

Asked why Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, a Catholic, lacked faith in the need for a carbon price, the Reverend Browning said: "If I knew the answer to that question I'd give it to you."

The Anglican church was united in its concern globally, he said.

Sister Geraldine Kearney from Catholic Religious Australia said there was a tremendous groundswell for action on climate change in Catholic congregations.

Pope Benedict has called for movement on climate change but the cardinal of the Australian Catholic church, George Pell, has expressed doubts about the science.

"I do believe that we are struggling to keep up with even what the Pope is saying," Ms Kearney said.

"We continue to fight and put forward our belief that this is what the normal grassroots level of the Catholic congregation believe in."

Faiths of all persuasions had more to unite them than divide them, she said.

"This morning, over a plate of corn flakes, the superior of our congregation said before anything I am an earthling and I agree wholeheartedly," Ms Kearney said.

Bhante Sujato, representing the Federation of Australian Buddhist councils, said climate change was a profound moral challenge and could not be reduced to merely an economic issue.

Mr Sujato called for bipartisanship on the issue.

"Australia in its global perspective is a laggard in its response to climate change and I think we can do much better," he said.

Rabbi Jeffery Kamins said combating climate change was a moral imperative no matter what religious beliefs people held.

"This isn't actually an issue to whether one believes in God or not or how one believes in God," Rabbi Kamins said.

The Jewish community was on the same page at a global level because there was an immediate threat posed by climate change, he said.

Uniting Church representative Niall Read and representatives from the Hindu, Baha'i and Jain faiths are also part of ARRCC.

A forum tonight will examine responses from Parliamentary Secretary Mark Dreyfus and opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt.

Mr Abbott was contacted for comment.