

BRUCE DUNCAN. No issue matters as much as climate change

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What will it take before the Morrison government recognises the great peril from climate change? Is the overwhelming consensus of scientists not enough, as they track the record-breaking heat waves globally? And why are religious leaders not echoing Pope Francis more vigorously about a looming 'catastrophe' from global warming?

While the Morrison government dithers, climate specialists are alarmed that the chances to limit global warming are slipping away, with the likely result that we will be left facing truly catastrophic changes to the weather.

The former Liberal leader, [John Hewson](#), in the Fairfax media on 1 August, castigated the Morrison government for ignoring the overwhelming advice from, among many others, experts, fossil fuel miners, the Reserve Bank of Australia, and finance and insurance sectors. 'I despair at just how long our Australian government can continue to deny the undeniable.' Yet Australia is the largest exporter of fossil fuels, so damaging to the environment. Britain and Germany are planning to abandon coal in the 'climate emergency', while our government simply ignores the 'urgency of the climate challenge'.

According to [official figures](#), Australia's greenhouse gas emissions have been rising for the last three years, and we are not on track to meet commitments at the Paris climate conference by 2030 to reduce emissions from 2005 levels to between 26% and 28%. Yet Australia is again experiencing severe drought, and extreme weather is [damaging our coastline](#), facilities, and fisheries. For the month of July, the years 2017, 2018, and 2019 were the hottest on record.

Warnings from defence forces & the mining industry

[Internal briefing notes](#) for the Australian Defence Force warn that climate change will result in extreme weather and droughts destabilising Indo-Pacific regions, with rising sea levels displacing millions of people and flooding military bases. The former Defence Force chief Chris Barrie once warned the government that Australia could face a 'seaborne migration' of 100 million people from places like Bangladesh. The report by global infrastructure consultancy Aecom said global temperatures could

rise between 0.6°C and 5.1°C, depending on whether or not the world can reduce emissions quickly.

The [Climate Change Authority](#), set up by the Gillard government in 2012, is advising the Coalition government that it needs to increase its positive engagement with State governments and business to put in place effective policies to reduce greenhouse emissions, including putting a price on carbon.

Putting a price on carbon is not enough on its own, according to the CEO of mining giant BHP, [Andrew Mackenzie](#). Speaking in London recently, he said the science about global warming was 'indisputable', and BHP was investing \$US400 million to reduce emissions, direct and indirect, from processing iron ore and burning coal and crude oil. Together, these amounted to nearly 600 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, equivalent to emissions from 126 million cars or 153 coal-fired power plants. He said BHP planned to have net-zero emissions by 2050, but, 'like most scientists', he feared global warming would tend to the higher end of forecasts.

Another [record-breaking heatwave](#) swept across Europe in late July, the second time in a month. Temperatures reached 43.6°C near Paris, and broke records in Germany at 42.6°C. A spokesperson for the World Meteorological Organisation said it was 'absolutely incredible' to see temperature records 'being broken by two, three, four degrees'. The prolonged heat is also continuing to melt the ice sheet over Iceland, in July an estimated 160 billion tonnes of ice. Global temperatures for June were the hottest recorded, and July was expected to be hotter still.

Are the churches mobilising opinion on the 'climate emergency'?

Despite Pope Francis warning of the dire consequences of climate change, many Church leaders are failing to alert their people to the unprecedented moral challenge this presents. [US Bishop Robert McElroy](#) of San Diego said recently that the climate change issue needs to have much increased priority among competing issues.

'If we don't get this issue right, in the end none of the other issues are going to matter... if our planet is destroyed.' He added that the climate emergency is 'so mammoth in its consequences that it has a rightful claim to a top priority in the social issues facing the world today'. In an address on 27 June, McElroy said climate change must become "a central priority" for the Catholic Church. The Pope's

encyclical *Laudato Si'* 'is a call to arms for those who would rescue our bruised planet from the forces that deplete and destroy it'.

Climate change is not just a concern for people of religious beliefs. Everyone is involved in this critical moment. There is no need for despair, yet. According to the prominent Columbia economist [Jeffrey Sachs](#), 'the world can realistically end greenhouse-gas emissions by mid-century at little or no incremental cost, and with decisive benefits for safety and health', despite the inertia of those politicians who 'don't know better'. Everything depends on the whole world acting decisively and quickly.

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