

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

NOTES ON QPLC WEBINAR ON FEDERAL ELECTION 2022

Held via zoom on Saturday 30 April from 4 to 5.30pm Eastern time.



The meeting was facilitated by Harold Wilkinson, convener of QPLC, and there were 30 participants. After acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, Harold explained that the webinar was an opportunity for Friends across Australia to hear from several speakers about a range of peace-related concerns relevant to the forthcoming Federal Election to be held on 21 May. Each of the 8 speakers made a short presentation, including suggested action that Friends could take when contacting political candidates. This was followed by breakout rooms for all participants to respond and add their own concerns, and a final time of sharing and summing up. The sessions were recorded and notes taken for help in distributing a Quaker Flutter from QPLC.

Jo Vallentine (WARM) spoke about **State Capture**. She drew attention to the work being done by the Australian Democracy Network about the ways in which democracy is being undermined by the network of links between corporate interests and government ministers and agencies. Scott Ludlam, former Greens Senator, has also written extensively on this. Candidates for election can be asked to support the adoption of a strong 'code of conduct' for MPs and Senators, a register for lobbyists, the publication of Ministers' diaries, and real-time disclosure of political donations. It is also vital that the right to protest and speak out against wrongdoing be protected, and especially that whistleblowers be given stronger support. The media as well as political candidates need to be pressed to raise awareness of the dangers of state capture. Reference – www.australiandemocracynetwork.org.au

Dale Hess (VRM) spoke on **Climate and Security**. The focus on national security in this election uses a military lens and involves greater spending on defence, stronger security alliances, and an expansion of the arms trade. The Commission for the Human Future (ANU) gives an alternative approach. The IPCC reports highlight climate change issues and how they impact on all parts of society adversely unless serious steps are taken to reduce emissions. It is essential that Federal Budget allocations are changed from support of fossil-fuel industries to support for alternative energy. References – *Shared Security* (AFSC/FCNL) www.afsc.org and report of Commission for Human Future www.humanfuture.net (also see *QPLC Watching Brief 20-5*).

David Shorthouse (CRQ) highlighted **Climate Change and Biodiversity**. Climate change, net zero by 2050 or even 43% by 2030 does not reflect the whole environmental issues we face, and is simplistic in that it uses a linear model of reaching a carbon output by a certain date. Scientists working from a whole of planet perspective recognise other key dimensions of human impact on the earth's systems. They have published this in the form of a 'planet's view' of boundaries that we are exceeding or soon to exceed.

Key amongst these are chemical pollutants – in their broadest sense – synthetic chemicals, plastics, pesticides, industrial chemicals, chemicals in consumer products, antibiotics, and other pharmaceuticals. All are wholly novel entities, created by human activities with largely unknown effects on the Earth system. The researchers conclude that current increasing trends of chemical production and release put the health of the Earth system at risk. The authors call for actions to reduce the production and release of pollutants. "We need to be working towards implementing a fixed cap on chemical production and release," says Carney Almroth.

“And shifting to a circular economy is really important. That means changing materials and products so they can be reused not wasted, designing chemicals and products for recycling, and much better screening of chemicals for their safety and sustainability along their whole impact pathway in the Earth system”, says Villarubia Gómez.

<https://www.earthlaws.org.au/event/planetary-boundaries-with-prof-will-steffen/>

Chris Hughes (VRM) spoke on ***First Nations Peoples Concerns***, especially the Uluru statement and heritage protection. The ALP has endorsed the Uluru statement, with its emphasis on Voice, Treaty and Truth. The Liberals have said they will work towards a vote on a Voice to Parliament. The Greens support Uluru although have a focus on Truth first. Individual candidates can be asked about their views and commitments. The destruction of environmental and cultural heritage has been significant, and neither state nor federal governments have done enough to stop it. National heritage protection legislation is needed.

Adrian Glamorgan (WARM and AWPS) spoke about the ***AUKUS security agreement*** involving US, UK, and Australia. It is of little general benefit, except for the arms trade manufacturers. The war on terror has already been disastrous for many people, leading to multiple deaths and destruction globally. The AUKUS agreement is more of the same, with priority on military approaches to crises, and drawing Australia further under the nuclear umbrella (including breaching the Nuclear-Free Zone principles in the South Pacific). The QUAD involving Australia, Japan, India and US is a further attempt to encircle China. These moves add to the development of hypersonic weapons, nuclear submarines, and cyber security developments that can endanger peace. They add difficulty for our relations with ASEAN and Pacific countries, and undermine our relations with France. Instead of being a deputy sheriff to US in the region, Australia should focus on using its middle power status to build positive relations, return to multilateralism and multi-track diplomacy.

Kay de Vogel (CRQ) spoke on ***Refugees***. She drew attention to the demands of refugee agencies for a series of measures including – a permanent end to offshore processing of asylum seekers, boat turn-backs, and detention centres. What refugees need is a faster processing system on-shore, more options for living in the community, more support for working and being engaged in local areas. Australia should be expanding its allocation for accepting refugee and humanitarian applicants, assisting Asian countries with their handling of asylum seekers, and increasing payments to UNHCR. At present the Greens support all these proposals, the ALP most, and the Coalition none. Reference – Refugee Council of Australia www.refugeecouncil.org.au

David Purnell focused on ***Diplomacy and DFAT***. He reflected on the current tendency to see diplomacy as less important than military strategy, and to give little acknowledgement of the skills involved in diplomacy, despite its success in our region over many years. He quoted figures for the significant decline of funding for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade relative to the great increases for defence and intelligence agencies. There is a strong case for bringing DFAT into the centre of government coordination of international relations, with additional resources given for recruitment, training and communication systems. Candidates for the election can be urged to pay more attention to non-military ways to contribute to building peace in our region and beyond.

The participants were then put into breakout rooms to share their own insights into priority issues and possible action in response. The webinar concluded with a brief plenary session to allow some final comments and plans for follow-up. QPLC will review the notes and consider possible options.

David Purnell