



June 8, 2022

The Hon Anthony Albanese M.P.
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Mr Albanese,

Congratulations on being elected as Prime Minister of Australia. We wish you and your team well as you form the new Government. You and your government carry the hopes of many Australians for a better nation.

We write on behalf of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA). CRA is the peak body that represents more than 150 Catholic Leaders of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life who are resident in Australia. Our religious congregations comprise more than 5,000 Catholic religious women and men. Our members and their lay colleagues work in education, health care and social services and work with many vulnerable groups and individuals in Australian society. Many of our members were delighted to hear your acceptance speech on 21 May. Much of what you said resonated with their beliefs about the need for greater fairness, justice and compassion within our country, and CRA is looking forward to working with the new Government.

We fully support your commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, for improved wages for low paid Australians and for urgent action on climate change, and as you set the agenda for this term of office, we ask that your Government gives priority attention to several other areas that we believe are in urgent need of a changed approach.

We applaud the government's quick action to finally allow the Murugappan family to return to Biloela. Yet, they remain on Bridging Visas, in the precarious and uncertain position of not having permanent protection, that some other 19,000 refugees living in Australia also experience under Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas.¹ We would therefore like to see the government expediate its promise to end temporary protection, to allow these people to stop having to live in a cruel limbo. We also ask you to release the unfortunate women and men who are still in mandatory detention. It is unjust and violates international law for Australia to incarcerate asylum seekers arbitrarily and indefinitely. While resettlement arrangements with New Zealand and the United States will ease this situation, more than 500 people will miss out, and current policies mean that future asylum seekers may be turned around or themselves detained. We call for an Australia that embraces all of our global brothers and sisters when they seek out our shores, in need of assistance.

As a matter of urgency we ask that you ramp up even further current policies regarding the climate crisis. We commend your re-instatement of a Minister for Climate Change for the first time since 2013, and look forward to decisive action from Minister Bowen. We ask that your government pay heed to the

¹ Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, "Voters stand with refugees this election, ending an era of fear and division," <https://asrc.org.au/2022/05/22/election/>

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, which has declared that the impacts of Climate Change are speeding up around the globe, with only a narrow window of opportunity left for urgent and drastic action to reduce global emissions, before irreversible and catastrophic damage occurs. Australians, who have suffered over the last few years through climate-driven droughts, floods and fires, have voted in this election for stronger climate action. According to the ABC's Vote Compass, more partakers listed climate change as their most important issue this election than any other topic.² The Government's proposed policy of a 43% reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions (below 2005 levels) is not strong enough to avert catastrophe. A 50% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 is the absolute minimum needed to ensure that Australia remains on track to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, but ideally, a just transition to a 65-75% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 would give us more certainty.³ Decisive and timely action is also needed to provide greater support and existential reassurance to our Pacific Island neighbours.

Additionally, we are greatly supportive of the Government's commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in its entirety, and we ask that this is done as a matter of priority, in full consultation with First Nations Peoples, following the sequence set out in the Uluru Statement. Many other issues of injustice remain for First Nations Peoples, and we would like to see the government work collaboratively with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations Coalition of Peaks, to substantively improve gaps in health, education and socio-economic status that continue to persist for First Nations communities. Likewise, we would like to see a continuation of the government collaboration with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance to co-jointly reform federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage protections. Furthermore, this year's National Sorry Day marked 25 years since the *Bringing them Home* Report was published, yet today Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 10 – 17 are 17 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous youth,⁴ and are overrepresented in out-of-home-care, at 9 – 11 times the rate of non-Indigenous children.⁵ It is well beyond time that substantive action occurred.

While we are grateful that the government has pledged to make significant improvements to aged care, including 24/7 registered nurses for all residential care facilities, better pay for aged care workers, more care, better food for residents, and greater accountability for providers, this is only a start on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care, Quality and Safety. We believe that older Australians, like all Australians, have inherent dignity, and a complete and holistic overhaul of the level of care currently marking our system is urgently needed, in line with these recommendations. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, and continues to expose, an attitude of indifference to the suffering and unnecessary death of the elderly, with 1643 COVID-19 deaths in Aged Care this year to date, and the vast majority of total

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-26/climate-change-election-what-are-labors-plans/101094986>

³ Professor Bill Hare, "Yes, Australia can beat its 2030 emissions target. But the Morrison government barely lifted a finger," <https://theconversation.com/yes-australia-can-beat-its-2030-emissions-target-but-the-morrison-government-barely-lifted-a-finger-169835>; The Climate Council, "Carbon Emissions Creep Down In Australia As Global Warming Accelerates," <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/carbon-emissions-creep-down-australia-global-warming-accelerates/>

⁴ Australian institute of Health and Wellbeing, "Youth detention population in Australia 2020," <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2020/contents/summary>

⁵ Australian institute of Health and Wellbeing, "Rate of children in out-of-home care remains stable," <https://www.aihw.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/2021-1/may/rate-of-children-in-out-of-home-care-remains-stabl>

deaths in the country clustered in the elderly.⁶ This death toll continues at a steady rate each week, and we urge the government to consider a suite of measures that might better protect the vulnerable.

CRA believes in the inherent dignity of each human person and has been, and will continue to be, an advocate in society for those who are unjustly marginalised. We have outlined above a few of the most pressing issues in Australian society today, recognising that there are many more suffering peoples in our midst and globally, for whom Australia has the capacity and compassion to care for. As our members continue their advocacy and work in providing services for those in need, we hope to work collaboratively with you and your Government in addressing these.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Carroll FMS
President



Anne Walker
National Executive Director

⁶ Australian Government Department of Health, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a glance – 3 June 2022," <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-at-a-glance-3-june-2022>