

LAUDATO SI' WEEK

MAY 2024

*Reflecting on Laudato Si's
message of solidarity, and the
wisdom of Indigenous People*



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OFFICE FOR
JUSTICE, ECOLOGY AND PEACE

FOREWORD

On 24 May, 2015, Pope Francis issued his encyclical letter on caring for our common home, *Laudato Si'*. Each year, *Laudato Si'* Week gives us an opportunity to renew our commitment to respond to the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor. During *Laudato Si'* Week 2024 (May 19 – 26), you are encouraged to tap into the ecological wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia (as mentioned in Decree 8 of the Australian Plenary Council of 2022) and Indigenous Peoples everywhere.

Below is one of the prayers with which Pope Francis concluded *Laudato Si'*. We encourage you to pray this prayer each day of *Laudato Si'* Week, reflecting on what God is calling us to do to care for the earth and for all who live on it.

In the following pages, you will find information on some of the ecological problems faced by Indigenous Peoples and the work Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are doing to heal country. We hope that this can inspire you in your own *Laudato Si'* journey.

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

Laudato Si' No. 246

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!

AMEN



GET INVOLVED

For as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26

A common refrain within Laudato Si' is the need for immediate action. Some readers may already be familiar with the Laudato Si' Action Platform, encouraging dioceses, schools, parishes, and individuals to make and share their own commitments to responding to Laudato Si'.

Laudato Si' week is an opportunity not only to reflect on the messages contained within the text, but what actions and changes we can make in our own lives.



St Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Ecology, and the Poor

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Encourage your employer, school, or parish to create a Laudato Si' Action Plan, and join the Laudato Si' Action Plan with the help of your local Caritas Australia Director. <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>
- Ask members of parliament to support the expansion of Caring for Country programs, that encourage sharing knowledge and collaborative responses to ecological challenges.
- Listen to the Dead River podcast on the Mariana Dam disaster and share it with others - <https://pogustgoodhead.com/dead-river-podcast/list>
- Make sure your gardens have native species and trees, to support our unique ecosystem
- Reduce your personal contributions to CO2 emissions, for example by cycling or taking public transport, or reducing your meat consumption.
- Advocate for your organisation to make a plan to reduce energy usage and transition to install solar panels.
- Join the *Our Islands, Our Home* campaign, and ensure Torres Strait Islander peoples are fairly supported in mitigating the threats of climate change: <https://ourislandsourhome.com.au/>
- Reach out to local First Nations groups and take the opportunity to learn about Indigenous culture in Australia, and reflect on what we can learn from 60,000 years of historic practices in caring for country.



INDIGENOUS RANGERS PROGRAM

OUR CHILDREN LOVE IT, BEING PAID TO SPEND TIME ON COUNTRY IS THE GREATEST JOB THEY CAN IMAGINE

Anonymous Ranger, Cherbourg

- **70% OF RANGER GROUPS CARRY OUT DEDICATED THREATENED SPECIES ACTIVITIES**
- **OVER 20% OF AUSTRALIA IS HELD IN INDIGENOUS OWNERSHIP**
- **AUSTRALIA HAS THE HIGHEST RECORD OF MAMMAL EXTINCTIONS OF ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD**
- **THERE ARE CURRENTLY 1900 INDIGENOUS RANGERS, WITH FUNDING TO DOUBLE THAT NUMBER BY 2030**

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis warns of the ecological risks of relying on a modern technocratic paradigm as the solution to the climate crisis; instead, he writes, a dialogue between science and local culture is key to meeting the challenges of our times (LS no. 143).

Combining the rich heritage of Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices, with modern land management techniques, Indigenous rangers are the embodiment of this concept, and are at the frontline of conservation in Australia.

The resumption of Indigenous fire management practices, drawing on over 60,000 years of caring for country, is one of the most successful initiatives, reducing the intensity of bushfires, and restoring the diversity of habitats that small species rely on.

In other places such as Cape York, indigenous led efforts have saved species previously thought extinct.

Other seeds fell on good soils and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty

MATTHEW 13:8





CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

The loss of culture is just as serious as the loss of species, yet often this important concept is missing from conversations on ecology. (LS no. 144)

IN MINUTES, EIGHT MILLION TONNES OF ORE WERE RIPPED FROM THE EARTH, AND 46,000 YEARS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE DESTROYED.

Professor Peter Veth

- **MORE THAN 400 SITES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED IN THE LAST 10 YEARS IN EASTERN GURUMA ALONE**
- **THE FULL SCALE OF THE DESTRUCTION IS UNKNOWN, WITH NO NATIONAL FIGURES AVAILABLE**
- **EVEN FOLLOWING CHANGES TO LEGISLATION, THE DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL SITES CONTINUES TO THIS DAY**

Australia is the home of the oldest continuous living culture in the world, yet mining companies such as Rio Tinto have long been engaged in the destruction of cultural heritage sites in the pursuit of profits.

The destruction of this 60,000+ years of history is akin to the burning of our libraries.

in 2020, following the destruction of Juukan Gorge, new scrutiny was placed on the failures of state and federal laws to protect our unique cultural heritage from these acts of destruction. A subsequent Senate Inquiry into the matter delivered 8 recommendations to better protect cultural sites with amendments to state and federal legislation, though experts note that power is still disproportionately with mining companies.

In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

EXODUS 15:13



MARIANA DAM DISASTER

WE BELIEVED THAT [THE RIVER] WAS A FATHER AND A MOTHER FOR OUR PEOPLE. AFTER 2015, A PART OF OUR HISTORY DIED BECAUSE WE CAN NO LONGER PRACTISE OUR CULTURE

Wakrewa Krenak, Krenak Leader

20,000 OLYMPIC SWIMMING POOLS WORTH OF TOXIC MUD WERE RELEASED INTO WATERWAYS FOLLOWING THE COLLAPSE

11 TONNES OF FISH WERE KILLED IMMEDIATELY IN THE WAKE OF THE COLLAPSE, WITH 100,000'S MORE IN FOLLOWING WEEKS

THOSE IMPACTED BY THE DISASTER HAVE YET TO BE COMPENSATED, AND HAVE BEEN LEFT TO PURSUE A CLASS ACTION AGAINST DAM OPERATORS IN AUSTRALIAN COURTS

At the heart of Laudato Si' is the call to heed the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. These are not two separate issues, but rather one cry for dignity, for the gravest effects of attacks on the environment are felt most acutely by the poorest. (LS no. 48)

In November 2015, the Mariana Dam, operated by Australian Mining Company BHP and other partners, in Brazil collapsed, killing 19 people and spreading pollutants through the River Doce. It remains the worst ecological disaster caused by the mining industry ever recorded, and a potent reminder of the international context in which Australian companies can have an impact.

The aftermath of the flooding left hundreds displaced, and tens of thousands without access to clean water. Particularly affected were the Indigenous Krenak people, for whom the River Doce was sacred and who have now suffered a profound spiritual loss.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly

LUKE 1:52





TORRES STRAIT CLIMATE ACTION

WE MUST LOOK AFTER OUR ISLAND, THE WAY IT HAS LOOKED AFTER US. THE BOSOM OF THIS LAND IS OUR MOTHER, AND THE WATER SURROUNDING IT IS OUR FATHER

Yessie Mosby, Claimant

- **SEA LEVELS IN THE TORRES STRAIT ARE RISING TWICE AS FAST AS GLOBAL AVERAGES AT 6-8MM PER YEAR**
- **SEVERAL ISLANDS IN THE TORRES STRAIT ARE LESS THAN 1M ABOVE SEA LEVEL, LEAVING THEM CRITICALLY VULNERABLE**
- **SALT WATER CONTAMINATION OF WELLS IS IMPACTING THE AVAILABILITY OF DRINKING WATER IN THE REGION**
- **EROSION IS DESTROYING CULTURAL HERITAGE SUCH AS GRAVEYARDS**

The climate crisis is global in scale, yet the world order, creaking with the inertia of capitalism and profit, seems powerless to change course and adequately respond. In their absence, a response lays with individuals and local communities who love the land on which they live, and care for what world their children and grandchildren will inherit. (LS no. 179)

In the UN, 8 Torres Strait Islanders won a historic legal fight against the Australian Government, with the UN ruling that it's inaction on climate change violated the human rights of the Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Now, the people of the Torres Strait are at the forefront of the climate justice movement. *Our Islands, Our Home* is a campaign to hold the Government to its obligation under international law, and to take the necessary steps to protect the Torres Strait from climate damage.

For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

ISAIAH 25:4





INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

THIS LAND IS IN OUR HEARTS, IT TEACHES US, IT IS OUR KNOWLEDGE, IT IS OUR WISDOM AND WE WANT IT TO STAY AS IT IS.

Rose Laynabalaynba, Cultural Caretaker

■ **THE 84 CURRENT INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS COVER 87 MILLION HECTARES OF AUSTRALIA, REPRESENTING 50% OF OUR NATIONAL RESERVE SYSTEM**

■ **IN 2021, THE IPA PROGRAM WAS EXPANDED TO ALSO COVER SEA COUNTRY, PROTECTING OUR MARINE BIODIVERSITY**

■ **IN 2017, THE IPA PROGRAM WAS RECOGNISED INTERNATIONALLY FOR ITS LEADING EFFORTS TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION**

Within the simple truth that we and society exist within nature, we find a deeper understanding of our relationship with the environment; it cannot be regarded as some separate space outside of our cities, but rather a complex web that we are in constant interaction with. (LS. no 139)

Indigenous Australians have long understood that they are a part of country, not separate from it, and that the wellbeing of the land is synonymous with the wellbeing of the people who inhabit it.

Indigenous Protected areas, first established in 1993, recognise the wisdom and stewardship of First Nations people in caring for country, protect the biodiversity of the land, and the cultural values of Indigenous peoples, ensuring that these gifts can be passed on for future generations to enjoy.

Wisdom is better than might, yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.

ECCLESIASTES 9:16