



women's
CLIMATE CONGRESS

Annual Report 2020–21

Women leading united action on climate change



Table of contents

Who we are	3
Foundations of the Congress.....	4
Out of the Storm – how a women’s initiative for uniting action on climate change was born.....	4
A profound shift – why we advocate for mediation to achieve united action on climate change	6
Rebalancing decision making — why we focus on women’s leadership.....	7
Organising ourselves	8
Our structure	8
Our people.....	8
Legalities and finances.....	10
The most valued resource.....	10
Building a strong congress community	12
What we offer our members.....	12
Who are our members?	12
Members’ circles	13
Book club.....	13
Keeping communication open.....	14
Reaching out to Indigenous wisdom.....	15
Reintegrating the arts.....	17
Advocating for a collaborative nonpartisan approach	19
The importance of old-fashioned letter writing.....	19
‘Neighbourly conversations’ with elected representatives	20
Mediation plan submitted to government.....	20
Engaging with government officials	21
Promotion of a parliamentary women’s group (a ‘Women’s Caucus’).....	21
Amplifying women’s leadership	22
Women’s Agenda Leadership Awards 2021.....	22
Women’s networking breakfast - <i>Women in Climate and Health</i>	23
Women’s Climate Conversation Series	24
Collaborating with head heart and hands	24
Bringing qualities of the heart into policy making and governance	25
Collectively imagining equitable and sustainable ways forward	25
Connecting with like-minded organisations	26
Hosting a National Congress of Women	27
A call to the women of Australia.....	27
<i>Women rising. Why women? Why now?</i>	27
<i>Weaving the threads together</i> project.....	28
Independent review of financial statements	29

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Cover artwork: Sally Blake, *Magie Phoenix* (detail), 2021. Ink, pen and pinpricks on paper. 56 x 76 cm. [Sally Blake](#) is a Canberra artist and a member of the 'Reintegrating the arts' circle of the Women's Climate Congress.

A note about the cover artwork

I loved this artwork for the symbolism of the Women's Climate Congress being formed from the grief of the Black Summer bushfires — like a phoenix rising from the burnt red colours of Sally's picture. And 'women rising' are like soaring song birds!

Janet Salisbury, October 2021

Who we are

Founded in 2020, the Women's Climate Congress aims to provide a safe space for women to explore together their own priorities and agendas in relation to the big issues of our times, particularly climate change. We welcome all those who identify as women (cis-women and trans-women) and we want to include women from all walks of life and political views. With over 300 signed up members covering around 90 electorates in Australia we are linked to thousands more women through our alliances with other organisations both national and international.

As women, we cannot stay silent while the unfolding climate emergency threatens the future of our children and all life on Earth. We work with open minds to inspire mediation and collaboration across political parties so that together we can co-create a pathway to a just and sustainable future.

We accept the scientific consensus expressed in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports and incorporated into the Paris Accord. As beneficiaries of the industrial age, we suspend judgment on the leadership decisions that have brought us here. Our mission is future-focused and will be a catalyst for united and creative change to restore climate balance and a renewed commitment to care for life on Earth.

We believe that it is time for women to lead the cultural change needed to help rebalance our currently stuck system towards compassion, inclusion and collaboration. To bring women's voices to the fore, we aim to design processes that suit women's schedules and ways of working together – through local groups, workshops and national congress. Through these gatherings, we will develop and model principles for the cultural shifts are needed to ensure that nurture of life and custodianship of the Earth are prioritised in all policy decisions. We will progressively promote these principles across all genders and parties to build trust that collaborative processes can serve the common good, and that mediation can resolve currently blocked policy pathways.

We welcome you to our first Annual Report. It is introduced by Dr Janet Salisbury, Congress founder, businesswoman and community leader, who writes about the foundations of the Congress – how and why we exist, the collaborative principles that guide us and why we advocate for women's leadership.

Foundations of the Congress

We share a vision to restore climate balance by 2030. In this future women's leadership has helped turn the tide from polarised discord to collaboration and cooperation. Nurture of life and care for the earth are at the centre of every government decision.

[Womens Climate Congress Vision](#)

by Janet Salisbury, Founder

Out of the Storm – how a women's initiative for uniting action on climate change was born

Out of the Storm

Women arrived, slowly then more quickly.
Many arrived close to the start time. Hiatus.
Unable to move from the table.
Preoccupied with the trashed and shredded trees. Overwhelmed.
Car parks full of cars, all scarred by hail.
A late start. Polite listening. Sensing gradual grounding. Deeper listening.
Then A Chorus of Women sang '[Dear Earth](#)'.
Participants were transcended to that place, far from where they were minutes before.
Now connected to the ground, to the Chorus women and to each other, they were ready.

Poem by Jenny Robinson, January 2020

In January 2020, with the Black Summer bushfires still raging, and after weeks of choking smoke, the need to act on climate change never seemed stronger. Over coffee, my women friends were asking 'what can we do?'

Climate scientists had warned that we have only one more decade to get our house in order before we suffer the consequences of Earth's fury. Children had been calling for action to secure their future and then the country had caught fire. But, after more than a decade of bitter party political debate, our government was still in deadlock, seemingly unable to move the policy dial to create a nationally agreed plan to address climate risks.

It was time for action. I distributed a discussion paper I had written in late 2019, [Independent mediation for uniting action on climate change](#), about how women could lead an initiative to overcome policy roadblocks and transition our economy and lifestyles to a sustainable, regenerative future before we are overwhelmed by climate change.

My paper grew out of my long involvement with [A Chorus of Women](#) who have been creatively giving voice to citizen concerns and leading a culture of conversation in Canberra for the past 17 years. It was also inspired by Julia Grace Wales, a 33-year-old Canadian-born English literature scholar who wrote a far-sighted plan to end WW1 through independent mediation by the neutral nations ('Continuous mediation with Armistice'). The plan was adopted at the International Congress of Women (The Hague, April 1915) by 500 women from warring and neutral countries who came together in response to the unprecedented suffering and loss of young lives in WW1. This story is told here by A Chorus of Women, [Lifting the 'curious spell of war'](#), [Recalling](#)

women's peace making 1914–19. Largely excluded from the mainstream history of WW1, this is a marvellous case study of women working together across difference with no other objective but to restore balance and nurture of life to a war-torn world.

On 20 January 2020, in the aftermath of the massive hailstorm described in Jenny's reflection above, 32 women arrived at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra hoping that women's voices, collaborating beyond partisanship, could show the way to address climate change and focus on nurturing life on Earth for future generations.

A second meeting followed with a further 35 women, and the Women's Climate Congress was born. We had answered nature's call but had little idea at the start what the journey would look like! A core group calling ourselves the 'Hub', took up the tasks of developing a vision statement, structure and all the other workings of a not-for-profit organisation, determined from the outset to explore the natural ways that women come together. Rather than adopting typical corporate structures, we set up a number of women's circles to fulfil different functions. They spiralled out from a Steering Circle of 4 'directors' through the Hub which became the coordinating and decision-making circle of the Congress. These circles have supported the growth of the Congress into a national network which aims to engage members from all walks of life and political views. We now have members in every state and territory working to build common ground for action to restore climate balance.



My heartfelt thanks to all the women who answered the call, particularly my co-members of the Steering Circle, Lyn Stephens, Barbara Baikie and Kirsten Anker, and all of the members of the Hub, without whom we would not have made it to this milestone of our first AGM and annual report with so much achieved!

A profound shift – why we advocate for mediation to achieve united action on climate change

Following the century-old footsteps of our foremothers in a time of catastrophic world war, we seize the moment, charged with the realisation of our responsibility to respond to Earth's call and our shared aspirations.

Women's Climate Congress Values Statement

Many people have asked about the use of the term 'mediation' in my discussion paper *Independent mediation for uniting action on climate change*, which sparked the formation of the Congress. What did I mean exactly? 'Isn't mediation rather a formal process out of step with more contemporary thinking on participatory democracy?' 'Would a citizen's assembly be a better option?'

I admit that I used the term 'mediation' loosely (without explicit reference to contemporary mediation practice). I thought that something profound needed to shift in our mode of public discourse. And I was inspired by Julia Grace Wales' farsighted plan to end WW1. In *Continuous mediation without armistice* published in 1915, she observed that nations were thinking separately and a 'world thinking organ' was needed to consider the issues from all sides without attributing blame. She proposed that there must be some right on both sides and that if the belligerent nations woke one morning able to understand the motives that drove the other to war, they would be able to find a resolution. She proposed an independent conference of neutral nations to review proposals and mediate a resolution. This was, according to Julia Grace, 'the natural thing to do'.

Julia Grace's plan won support from the peace movement, business, academic institutions and government leaders in Europe and the US. But it was never fully implemented. The war continued and killed 40 million people.

As our young people and children face a new potentially catastrophic global threat, it seemed time to ask again 'What is the natural thing to do?' In the developed countries, we have all enjoyed the benefits of the industrial revolution and so bear some responsibility for the current predicament. It seems the right thing to work together to transition our economy and lifestyles to a sustainable and just future for all.

But our politicians and some aligned groups of citizens are full of distrust and are thinking in polarised ways. To break the deadlock, I proposed an independent council of citizens chosen from a range of relevant backgrounds and disciplines to develop and mediate proposals for the social, economic and environmental changes needed. Such a national 'thinking organ' could offer the currently opposing forces an opportunity to collaborate without renouncing their overall convictions; a dignified way forward for all sides (without 'Armistice' or 'winner takes all').

In mid-2020, we met Rhian Williams, a mediation practitioner with public policy experience. Rhian worked with us to develop a proposal to government for a mediated roundtable process with diverse participants. We submitted our proposal, *Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response*, to the office of then Energy Minister Angus Taylor. We have not received a formal response.

This is not a great surprise. Such a process would ideally require government to commit (hand over control) to the process and to the action plan developed from it. This requires a significant shift in the usual way that governments operate.

Hence, the Congress has been developing initiatives that bring a new narrative to political discourse, such as promotion of women's leadership, a proposal for a cross-party parliamentary women's group (like the Women's Caucus in the US), our 'neighbourly conversations' initiative, and our raising up of nurture of life and custodianship of the environment as the basis for government policy. We hope that these initiatives will promote new thinking that will make adoption of collaborative processes 'the natural thing to do'.

Rebalancing decision making — why we focus on women's leadership

As beneficiaries of the industrial age, we acknowledge our responsibility for the present situation with grateful hearts and with lament.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

Another founding principle for the Congress is that it is time for women to lead. People ask — why women? Isn't that unfair to all the good men that we know who are also working for change? Shouldn't we all work together? This is a difficult question to answer fairly.

In western democracies, and other cultures apart from Indigenous cultures, women have been excluded from governance for centuries. Our organisational systems and policy agendas created by men inevitably reflect the so-called patriarchy. These systems and agendas do not reflect the lifestyle needs of women, the ways that women naturally engage, or the issues that are most important to women. We know that women's leadership style tends more towards compassion, inclusion and collaboration. And these attributes are essential in times of emergency when life is threatened.

Men's ways of organising and their priorities are not bad things per se, but our current organisational systems lack balance. We are seeing the cumulative impact of this in the unsustainable and inequitable trajectory of human existence on the planet. We know from the science, social indicators, and also in our hearts, that this can't go on for much longer without a major breakdown in environmental systems, in social structures, or both.

Since finally being allowed to vote, women have been preoccupied with getting admitted into the existing organisational structures — fitting in as best they can. Much effort in the women's movement has gone into increasing representation, which is important but not the whole story. We have bought the idea that the systems are fine and women can 'compete on merit'. The 'con' inherent in this is only coming fully to light as the numbers of women increase but the struggle to be heard fully in the system at all levels continues. Men still hold the ace cards.

And yet history has shown that when women act together without the influence of existing political cultures, they have developed visionary plans like those of the 1915 International Congress of Women and subsequent women's conferences. In the US, the Women's Caucus, formed in 1977, facilitates bipartisan relationships and policy priorities among the women members of Congress, particularly in relation to improving the lives of women and families. And we have recently witnessed on the world stage that when women lead on their own terms, free from the worst misogynist overtones, their policy agenda is far-reaching and transformative.

The Women's Climate Congress is providing opportunities for diverse women to reflect on these issues together so that we can promote the changes needed to rebalance our relationships with each other and with the Earth before it is too late.

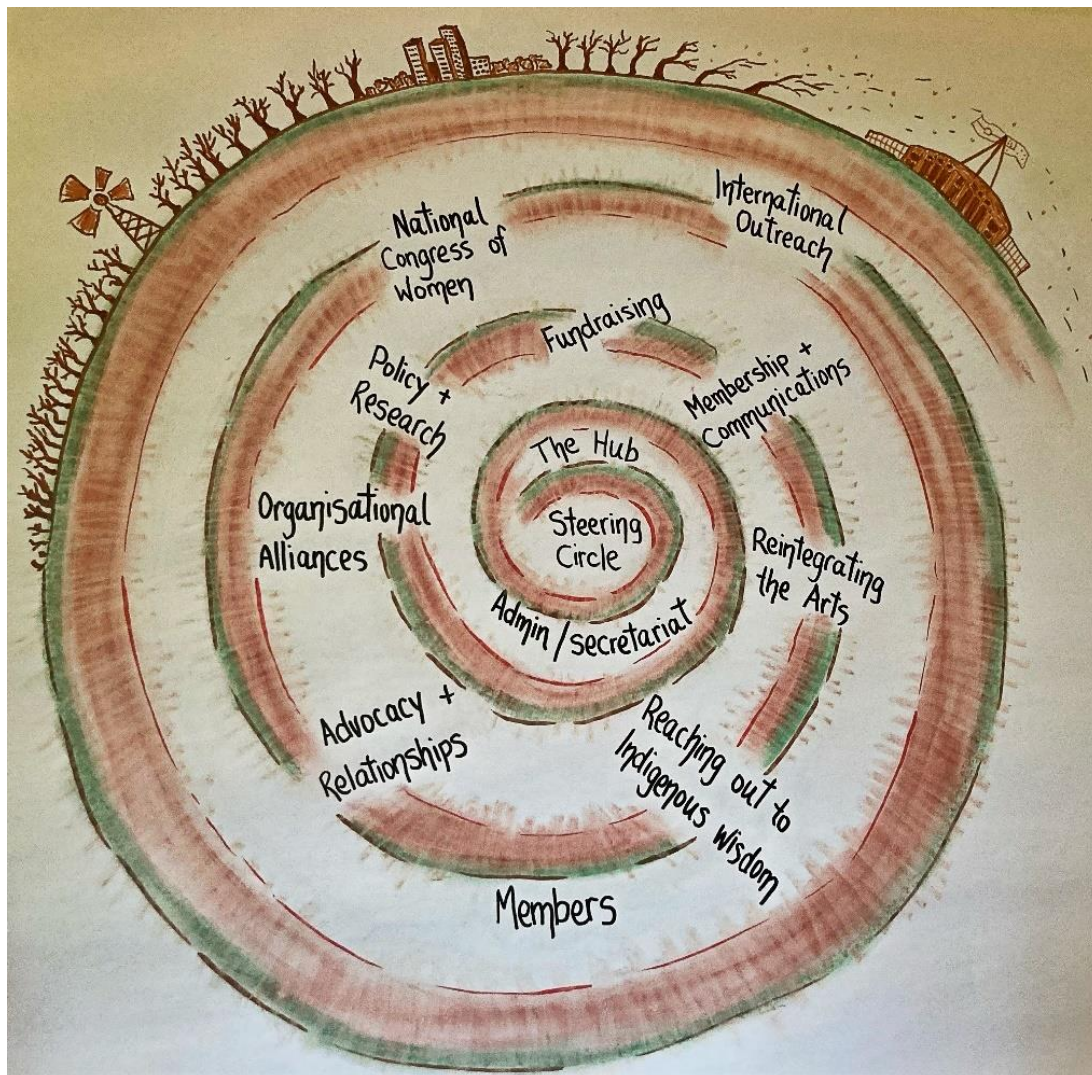
Organising ourselves

by Lyn Stephens and Kirsten Anker

Our structure

Right from the start we wanted to work as an organisation that fitted with our understanding of how women like to work together; so we devised a spiral organisation with small circles of women taking on particular tasks and activities and feeding in to and out of a central decision making and coordinating Hub. We have deliberately kept our structure in sketch form because we want to evolve flexibly in response to the environment in which we find ourselves, our capacity and feedback from our members.

The spiral structure of the Women's Climate Congress



Graphic by Purpose Partners

Our people

At this stage we are a totally volunteer organisation, and we are grateful to everyone who has supported us. We are particularly appreciative of the people named on the page following who have worked so hard to develop the organisation over the past year, to deliver our program of events, and develop our advocacy skills and capacities.

Steering Circle Dr Janet Salisbury, Kirsten Anker, Barbara Baikie, Lyn Stephens

The Hub – the coordinating and decision making circle of the Congress Janet Salisbury, Kirsten Anker, Barbara Baikie, Lyn Stephens, Joanne Ede (Secretariat), Sarah Stitt, Dr Honey Nelson, Michele Smith and Lynne Audsley. Jane Breden, Irene Pellegrino, Calista Castles, Sandra Coopman and Lynne Curran have also all contributed.

Advocacy and relationships circle Janet Salisbury and Kirsten Anker (Convenors), Barb O'Dwyer, Dr Philippa Rowland, Leonie Ebert, Robyn Seth Purdie, Toni Hassan and Savannah McGuirk. Irene Pellegrino, Calista Castles, Alison Leigh and Debbie Argue have also contributed.

Membership and communications circle Lyn Stephens (Convenor) Janet Salisbury, Dr Jenny Robinson, Lynne Audsley, Iolanthe Mae Phillips, Joanne Ede, Honey Nelson. Christine Favre and Savannah McGuirk have also contributed with special thanks to Julia Boyd of Shout Out Arts. **Member registration and welcome** Dr Jenny Robinson. **Website design and management** Janet Salisbury. **e-Updates** Lyn Stephens (editor), Janet Salisbury, Lynne Audsley with special thanks to Dr Richard Stanford. **Annual Report** Lyn Stephens, Janet Salisbury with Jane Geltch and Fiona Malcolm and Richard Stanford. **Women's Climate Conversation series** Janet Salisbury (Convenor and host) assisted at different times by co-hosts Barbara Baikie, Kirsten Anker, Lyn Stephens and Jenny Robinson and supported by publicity and administration from Joanne Ede and Laurann Yen.

Fundraising circle Kirsten Anker, Sarah Stitt (Co-convenors). Calista Castles also made a significant contribution in the early part of the year.

Reintegrating the arts Dr Sally Blake (Convenor), Dr Glenda Cloughley, Johanna McBride, Meg Rigby from a Chorus of Women along with contemporary dancer Courtney Allen and poet and rock musician Danny Pratt.

Reaching out to Indigenous wisdom Honey Nelson (Convenor), Kirsten Anker, Janet Salisbury with special thanks to Dyan Coe of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Policy and research circle Janet Salisbury (Convenor), Barbara O'Dwyer, Kirsten Anker, Irene Pellegrino, Michele Smith and Calista Castles. Delwyn Langdon, Kate Ringvall, Anne Jenkins, Karli Mylius, Dr Bronwyn Kelly and Dr Angela Maharaj and Professor Will Steffen have also contributed.

Organisational alliances and networking This circle has not been established yet but outreach has been led by Janet Salisbury with Barbara Baikie and Kirsten Anker.

National Congress of Women hosting team Janet Salisbury (Convenor) Barbara Baikie, Kirsten Anker, Barbara O'Dwyer, Lyn Stephens, Sarah Stitt, Sally Blake and Jane Geltch also contributed.

Weaving the threads together reference group Janet Salisbury, Dr Kath Kovac, Lynne Audsley, Merrilee Baker, Deb Collins and Caresse Cranwell.

Legalities and finances

Status of the Congress

The Congress is a charitable organisation, registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for profits Commission, and is a registered company limited by guarantee. Membership to date has been free. Our members sign on via the 'Join us' form on our website and their details are entered in a register of members.

Financial position

Details of our financial situation are contained in the audited statements in this report. As a 'small organisation' registered with the ACNC we don't have to audit our accounts, but it's a requirement of the Queensland Department of Fair Trading that we do so in order to be able to raise funds in that state.

We raised \$7,768 through the generosity of our 2020 inaugural members in response to a direct fundraising drive. These inaugural donors are listed on our website. We have subsequently received further donations from members and from participants registering for free online events. The addition of a generous seeding loan from a supporter has enabled us to cover our modest operating costs. We are very grateful for these contributions. Because of this generosity we close the year soundly positioned to develop further in 2021–22.

Future directions

We will continue direct fundraising and grant applications to enable us to meet our operational costs, support our advocacy and mediation projects, and provide services for our members more efficiently so that our volunteer workforce can all focus more on strategic tasks.

We're taking the next step of applying for Donor Gift Recipient status so that donors can claim a tax deduction. This involves amending our Constitution and we have circulated a motion to this effect for the Annual General Meeting. We will also consider the issue of membership fees at the AGM. On one hand, an annual fee of \$30 will go a long way to meeting our operating costs. On the other we want to be open to women of all financial means and a membership fee may be a barrier. Some organisations similar to the Congress charge for membership, others do not. In keeping with our collaborative ethos, we have invited members to share their views on this at the AGM.

The most valued resource

The women who join us and support us in whatever way is right for them are a most valuable resource and we are grateful for the thousands of hours that Congress supporters have contributed to our movement since we began.

At the same time we want to offer a place where all women are listened to and where all contributions are welcome. Knowing that not all women are in a position to offer either financial support or unpaid work, we operate on the principle espoused by our colleagues in the [Art of Hosting](#) community – 'Ask for what you need and offer what you can.' Contributions don't have to involve money or hours of time, just having women put their name to our cause is a valuable contribution, and just offering a comment or an idea may spark something entirely new.

As we honour our supporters, it's also important to acknowledge that for too long women's volunteer contributions have been taken as a given. Our commitment to women rising also

means we aim to pay for professional services offered whenever possible, and we will continue to build our financial position to increase our capacity to do this.

It is also interesting in this context to ponder on the value to our society of women's unpaid work. According to current accounting methods the Congress hasn't made much contribution to GDP. Yet many women, including the inspiring speakers at our events, have together contributed the equivalent of thousands of dollars of unpaid work to the call for stronger climate action – action which is critical not only to the health and wellbeing of our people but also to the mainstream economy.

Thank you from our hearts!

We are very grateful for the contributions of our members and other supporters, realising that for many the dollar amount given or the time offered is a stretch. All contributions whether of money, time, energy or ideas are appreciated. They inspire us, representing as they do the concern for women-led climate action that lies behind them. We look forward to meeting and collaborating with many more of our members and supporters in the coming year.

Congress planning day October 2020



Building a strong congress community

We, a web of women, seek and support wisdom for the common good.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

By Lyn Stephens and Jenny Robinson

Who are our members?

When the first 32 women from the ACT region gathered in that hail-swept venue in January 2020 few could have imagined that just 18 months later we would be a national organisation of more than 300+ members, with 1000+ followers on Facebook and several thousand more allies via our organisational networks. Our signed-up members live in 90 of 151 federal electorates and our ambition is to have members active in every electorate of Australia. We will work hard to expand our coverage in 2022, particularly in rural and remote electorates.

In February 2021, when Congress membership sat at 180, Jenny Robinson initiated a simple qualitative analysis of the information held in our membership database. Names and email addresses were removed to ensure privacy. The information we drew on now represents only a sample of our membership community. Nevertheless, this small study revealed that most of our members lived in the ACT and New South Wales and that we needed to reach out more broadly to other geographic areas, to women from more socially and culturally diverse backgrounds and to young women.

Since then, we can advise that our membership base has almost doubled and we are particularly pleased to welcome more women from Western Australia and Queensland. Our member information is showing more young women are connecting with us and more women who appear to be from culturally diverse backgrounds. We have also welcomed a number of international members. As reported by our Reaching out to Indigenous wisdom circle (page15) we have also given priority to strengthening our outreach to Indigenous women. We have worked hard to ensure diversity in the guests invited to engage with us via our Women's Climate Conversation series and in developing the program for all stages of our National Congress of Women.

What we offer our members

To support our members, we have:

- hosted quarterly Members' Circles to introduce new members to the Congress and to stay connected with others
- produced 15 monthly newsletters to share ideas and information on relevant events
- established a growing social media presence
- initiated a Zoom Book Club
- welcomed a number of members to our Congress community as volunteers to the Hub and to various working circles.

In 2021-22 we will introduce a new membership platform which will enhance the membership experience for those who join the Congress.

Members' circles

Hosted each quarter online, these circles are for new members and those who have been with us for a while who want to stay connected. They explore themes related to the ways that women think and feel about climate change, the impact of societal structures on women and the paradoxical demands on all of us as we handle everyday life in a time of existential threat. They also help to inform Congress thinking on these issues of deep concern to many women.

A story from our members' circle focused on the arts

How can the arts inspire and support us in these times of existential challenge?

Sally Blake, our 'Reintegrating the Arts' convenor, spoke about her visual art practice, relating it to climate change and how the arts express what is deeply held and felt. Members shared reactions and other artists in the circle also spoke of their own work in this field. One participant reflected an emerging theme when she said:

The failure to act on climate change is a failure of imagination. The arts can bring us to the imagining of a renewed future.

Another added:

Amid a culture bedded in scientific facts and dry journalism, the arts move us emotionally – that other immense realm of feeling which drives much of our behaviour and expression. As women, this is our familiar realm, and the arts can join us wordlessly together.

Together we concluded that as a movement of women, we need to revise the language and direction of societal politics and economics. We talked of the necessity to bring the arts forward in public awareness: the necessity for such expression from the heart, if we are to restore compassion, empathy, contemplation, grieving, and renewal to public narratives - which in turn drive policy and action.

Book club

As a forum for members to share reactions to contemporary books related to the Congress's core values, Book Club also offers opportunities for distributed leadership and relationship building. The club is an initiative of Congress member, Jenny Robinson, who says

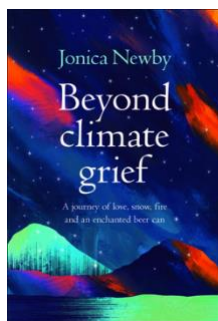
I'm thrilled to host the Zoom Book Club. Each gathering draws a different mix of participants and they all offer a unique perspective on the book. I appreciate the openness and sense of collegiality from all.

The feedback from these small gatherings has been supportive and we will continue this initiative into 21-22. Here are the books we have read so far, all of which are recommended:

- *Beyond Climate Grief: A journey of love, snow, fire and an enchanted beer* can by Jonica Newby

- *Women and Leadership: Real Lives, Real Lessons* by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Julia Gillard
- *Summertime: Reflections on a vanishing future* by Danielle Collarmaker
- *Full Circle: A search for the world that comes next* by Scott Ludlam
- *What Happens Next? Reconstructing Australia after COVID-19* edited by Emma Dawson and Janet McCalman

A taste of the Women' Climate Congress Book Club



There was a strong coherence in our appreciation of this engaging, courageous, thought provoking, empowering and often quite funny book - despite the underlying seriousness of the theme. As a scientist, Jonica understands science, but it was the emotional reaction to losing her beloved snow country and other places she loves because of climate change that really affected her. Jonica's personal story and the stories of others that she shares reveal the psychological impacts of climate change that affect us all. Her emotional honesty engaged us from the beginning, and the evidence base she draws on adds validity to her narrative.



This book was particularly significant for us as women because it acknowledged our presence as holders of pain as well as the nurture of life. That dual role can sensitise us to the shifting institutional practices that have normalised violence against nature and climate denial. Danielle's holistic view links care for the environment, human rights and animal rights into one movement for multi-species justice. Her powerful descriptions of fear and devastation along with her sensitivity to the beauty of the natural world, including its animal members, aim to wake us up to our responsibility to care for all living beings and our environment if we are to sustain ourselves in coming years.

Keeping communication open

While we began locally, we became national very quickly, partly because various lockdowns encouraged us to go online. This has meant we have also been able to connect, learn from and support our growing number of international connections. We set up our website immediately as essential for holding and disseminating information. The first of 15 monthly e-update newsletters followed soon after.

Our Facebook groups (members only and public), Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter profiles have helped us grow membership and provide an invaluable space for connection and sharing ideas. Over the coming year we want to build on this and to strengthen our presence, particularly on Instagram, to reach young audiences.

Reaching out to Indigenous wisdom

We acknowledge the ancestral wisdom of First Peoples and accept our responsibility as custodians of a precious world that must be nurtured as it nurtures us.

[Women's Climate Congress vision and values statement](#)

by **Honey Nelson**

Our core value of recognising the experience and wisdom of First Peoples in the care of the land, the waters and the atmosphere entails recognition of their First Law, which arises from the Earth Mother herself: our human duty of reciprocal love and care for the land that gives us our life, and for all the life-forms with whom we share her bounty.

In the early days of the Congress, Janet Salisbury and Honey Nelson were involved in a project to invite climate scientists and Aboriginal Elders to come together to discuss the dire state of the country and climate, and how to manage, rectify and protect them for future. While this gathering was cancelled due to the pandemic, we aspire to continue this conversation in the future.



Walan Migay - Strong Black Women and Alliances by Dyan Coe

Early in 2021 we were invited to learn some *Wiradjuri Women's Business* with Ms. Diyan Coe, the present caretaker of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. Diyan led us in three well-attended and wonderful teaching meetings, before COVID again intervened. These gatherings were intense, emotional, and led us into the First People's allegorical knowledge of creation, evolution, feelings: and as overarching principles, the One-ness of all things, the equal value and rights of all life-forms, the equal balance between women and men.

Once it is safe to move around again, a visit to Mirramu beside Lake Weereewa (George) is planned: a home of the Rainbow Serpent. We are being exposed to lucid insight into the human psyche, behaviour and spirit, and also a mystical history.

One session in our popular Womens Climate Conversation series featured the wisdom of Dr. Mary Graham, from Kombu-merri/Waka Waka country, SE Qld who spoke of the First Law which underpins all human-made laws and sustains the life and love of Country. She described this deep connection as 'Relationalism': of balance (of male and female), autonomy (of self, others and species), place (reciprocal care for country), ethos (the law and lore), in contrast to the settlers' attitude of 'Survivalism': competing in an environment seen as resistant and hostile.

Dr Graham will also be an invited guest at *Women rising. Why women? Why now?*, our online event on 30 November 2021, along with [Dr Anne Poelina](#), a Nyikina Warrwa Traditional Custodian from the Mardoowarra, lower Fitzroy River, in Western Australia. We are also honoured to have a local elder, [Matilda House](#), a Ngambri-Ngunnawal elder, welcoming us to country.

We have recognised the distance that lies between the settler peoples of Australia, and the First Peoples who still endure such severe loss and displacement. We reach out to meet First Women and hope to work together on behalf of future generations, which in Aboriginal women's law is our primary love and duty.

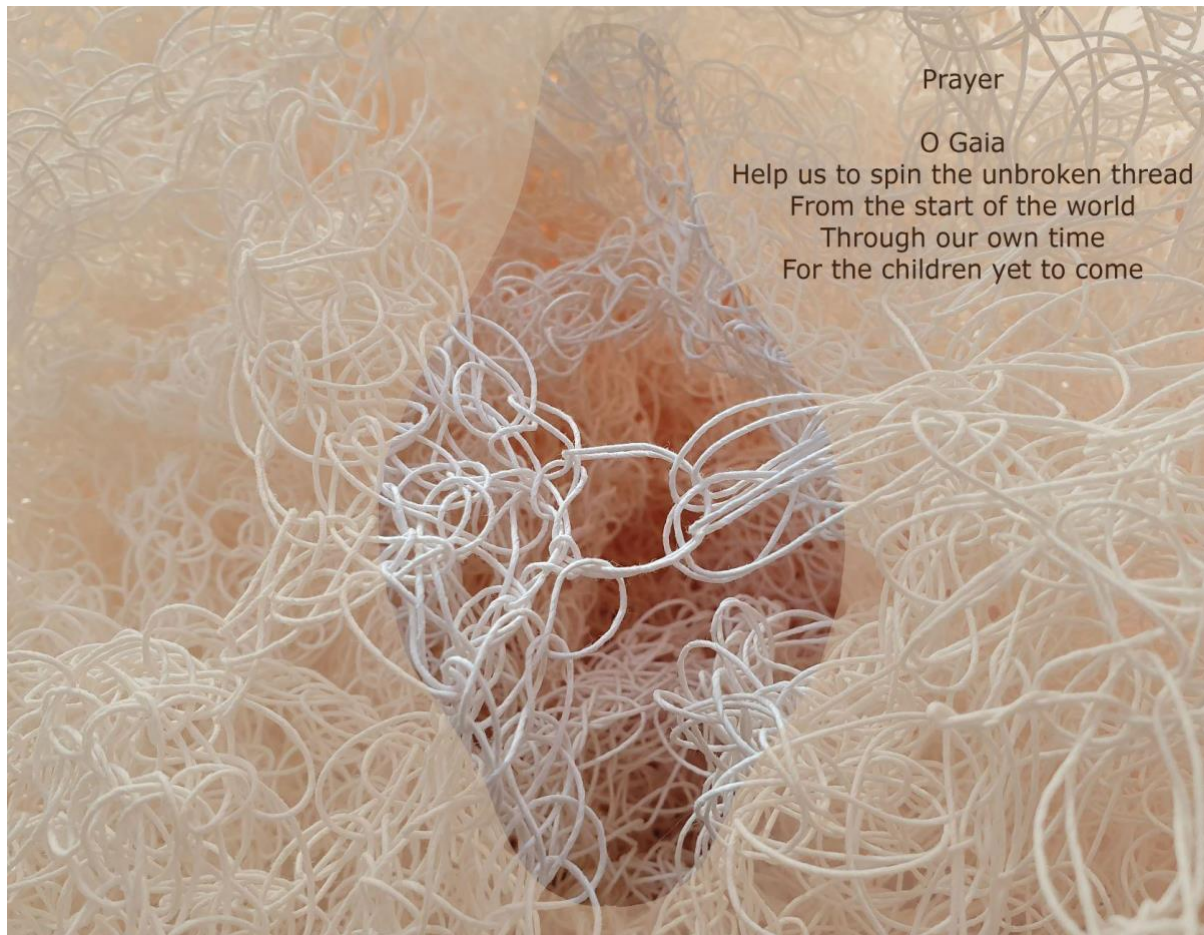
Reintegrating the arts

We understand that the heart, imagination and intellect must all be engaged if people are to remember themselves as part of nature, live within its laws and stop the worst effects of climate change.

Credo of the Reintegrating the Arts Circle

by **Sally Blake**

Arts and creativity are integral to the work and thinking of the Women's Climate Congress. Artists, alongside others in the Congress, make themselves accountable to future generations and all life on earth by acknowledging climate science and contributing to the world-wide movement for climate justice.



Prayer

O Gaia

Help us to spin the unbroken thread
From the start of the world
Through our own time
For the children yet to come

The Ecological Thought Goddess by Sally Blake , Prayer words and music by Glenda Cloughley – both from Earthbound's sellout performance in Belco Arts Theatre, Canberra, June 2021

Five Canberra women – Glenda Cloughley, Johanna McBride and Meg Rigby from A Chorus of Women, contemporary dancer Courtney Allen and visual artist Sally Blake – along with poet and rock musician Danny Pratt, formed the Re-integrating the Arts circle.

Our close bonds grew during the multi-arts, intergenerational performance collaborations of our Canberra-based 'Earthbound' project. We think together about the ways artists can contribute to social and environmental discourse and change. We wonder about the wisdom in indigenous cultures where profound environmental knowledge and law are passed on through story, music, dance, painting and ceremony. We imagine into the new stories that are needed in our time of climate crisis, pandemic and inequity. The world seems more connected than ever, yet the responsibility we all have towards an interconnected, intermeshed whole earth system is disrupted by greed and misused power. What stories could help us remember our great capacity for living in harmony with nature and each other?

Music and visual artworks generated by the Re-integrating the Arts members are woven through many Congress activities. Several of Sally Blake's artworks have appeared on our event flyers and website pages, including the banner for the National Congress of Women. Sally and climate change advocate Dr Robert Glasser gave a talk for the WCC where Sally's artworks were the catalyst for their conversation. Sally also co-hosted a members' circle with a focus on the arts as described on page 13. Songs from Chorus's original repertoire composed by Glenda, Johanna and Meg have been sung at WCC events.

Glenda and Sally presented at a film night hosted by the WCC and Chorus about archaeologist [Marija Gimbutas](#)'s research in more than 25,000 years of European symbolic imagery that indicates deep layers of peaceful, matristic European history. The group has assisted with planning the National Congress of Women. Johanna will help produce the day and her song 'Dear Earth' will be sung. Glenda will present at the National Congress of Women launch event on 30 November.

Advocating for a collaborative nonpartisan approach

Weary of conflict and polarisation, we resist judgement and blame, embrace uncertainty and encourage mediation and collaboration for a safe passage from climate chaos to climate survival.

[Women's Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

by **Kirsten Anker**

We aim to create a chorus of women's voices which will influence decision-makers to adopt more collaborative and inclusive ways of developing policy, especially around action on climate change.

The importance of old-fashioned letter writing

Thank you to Congress members who are writing individually to their representatives and requesting meetings. This is an essential part of the chorus of voices calling for collaborative and strong action on climate change. Whether they be attached to an email or popped in the mailbox with a stamp, letters are a powerful way to connect with your local member. They can be the start of a conversation about your thoughts on the changing climate and the response you would like to see in your community and elsewhere.

In 2020, the Congress wrote to every federal MP and senator in Australia and we have been pleased that this has resulted in meetings with more than 20 MPs and senators (or their advisers). Many of the meetings have been with independents or members of the ALP and Greens, who have been interested to learn about the Congress and have been receptive to our calls for climate action. We also met with Minister for Energy Angus Taylor's advisers (see below). This year (2021) we are making particular efforts to connect with LNP women and have met with Celia Hammond (Lib, Curtin, WA) and Dr Katie Allen (Lib, Higgins, Vic). We are very keen to strengthen this engagement with all sides of politics and will make a concerted effort to reach out across the political spectrum in the coming year. More recently we have sent letters to all parliamentarians urging an increase in Australia's emission reduction targets for presentation at COP26 in Glasgow.



Clockwise from top left Kirsten Anker and Janet Salisbury with Dr Katie Allen MP

'Neighbourly conversations' with elected representatives

During a meeting with Josh Wilson (Labor, Fremantle) earlier in the year, he proposed a neighbourly chat with his Liberal neighbour in Curtin, Celia Hammond. The subsequent meeting we arranged was a professionally facilitated circle conversation online held under the [Chatham House Rule](#) and not recorded. Along with the two politicians. Fourteen women, including Congress members from the electorates of Fremantle and Curtin attended.

'Neighbourly conversations' – some feedback

This gathering was a great success, as revealed in these comments from participants:

I enjoyed Monday's conversation so much. I felt very energised and motivated afterwards... I'm really grateful to Josh and Celia for their time, their openness, and their willingness to listen to our perspectives.

The 'neighbouring electorate' approach is a good one. I was challenged (in a good way) by listening to what others had to say... and, [because of] the beauty of the environment you helped create today, that 'challenge' did not cause a 'defensive shut down' - but, rather, more thought and reflection.'

I really enjoyed the conversation, and, even better, learned some things and was pushed to think differently about some things along the way.

[A report of the event is here.](#)

We have stuck with the name 'Neighbourly Conversations' to describe the values-based type of conversation we facilitated between Josh and Celia, because it connotes informality and openness in exploring common interests.

When we met with Tanya Plibersek recently, she suggested that this approach would be particularly effective and helpful for newly arrived MPs to enable them to begin to make some cross-party connections. We will definitely follow this up after the federal election. Our vision is that such an introduction will help foster awareness of common interests.

We thank our collaborators, Wicked Elephants Co-op, for their help in planning and facilitating the conversation. We also thank our members who joined us for this experiment and especially Josh Wilson and Celia Hammond for their willingness to be involved in what proved to be a moving and worthwhile event. To find out more go to our ['Neighbourly Conversations' invitation document](#).

Mediation plan submitted to government

In October 2021, we met with Energy Minister Angus Taylor's advisers. In the course of the discussion we put forward the Congress idea of a mediated process to resolve the deadlock on climate action and we were requested to submit a plan in writing. We worked with mediation professional Rhian Williams to develop our proposal, [Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response](#), which we submitted to the office of then Energy Minister Angus Taylor in November 2020.

Engaging with government officials

We met with Nev Power, Chair of the National Covid Coordination Commission and discussed the need for the pandemic recovery measures to be aligned with the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and reduce emissions. We also pointed out the lack of equal representation on the Commission. Subsequently, the composition of the panel was changed to include more women and greater diversity, and we like to think we played a small part in making this happen. [Janet Salisbury was interviewed about this meeting by Sophie Singh of Canberra local Radio 2XX.](#)

We have made a number of submissions to government including:

Submission to the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy Inquiry into the Climate Change Bill 2020 We stressed the advantage for the government and Australian community of allowing the bill to be debated in parliament. [Read our submission here.](#)

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications, Inquiry into the Grid Reliability Fund Bill 2020. [Read our submission here.](#)

In the lead up to COP26, members of the Advocacy and Relationships circle have attended public information sessions held by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade about the Australian delegation process and negotiating team. As one of a small group of NGOs, we have been invited to take part in a roundtable discussion with Australia's chief negotiator to COP26, Ambassador for the Environment Jamie Isbister.

Promotion of a parliamentary women's group (a 'Women's Caucus')

The Women's Climate Congress promotes women's leadership towards collaborative action on climate change. Speaking with women members of parliament, we have promoted the idea of a cross-party women's parliamentary group similar to the Women's Caucus, which has operated in the United States Congress since the late 1970s and has supported bipartisan policy development on issues of common concern to women. Our meetings with several ALP and Independent women MPs in 2020 indicated that collegiality among women in parliament (ie on the basis of being women) was not strong. However, workplace safety issues for women in Parliament House, and the March4Justice movement have generated more focus on how women of all parties are able to fulfil their role within a parliamentary system designed and still largely dominated by men.

We believe that if parliamentary women speak with a unified voice on even a few issues, such as violence against women and persistent gender inequity, they could set an example for the whole nation about collaboration that is above party politics.

Amplifying women's leadership

As holders of a great and universal desire to look after the young, we raise our voices, confident in the potential of women to lead positive change.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

At the Congress we believe women's full participation in leadership and governance is crucial if we are to survive the existential threats facing ourselves and future generations. We have undertaken a number of activities to support women's leadership, and provide an overview in this section. We believe that the challenges of our times require new notions of leadership including this approach:

The current focus on individual leadership and individual agency is not fit for purpose in the new world we are facing. I think 'Partnership' is the new transformative leadership for our times. We need collaboration rather than hierarchy to deal with the complexity we face. This seems to fit the way women like to get things done.

A participant in our *Weaving the threads together* women's circle conversation project

Women's Agenda Leadership Awards 2021

In April we were thrilled when Janet Salisbury, who exemplifies a collaborative style of leadership, was announced as a finalist in the Emerging Leaders for Climate Action category of the Women's Agenda Leadership Awards for 2021. [Women's Agenda](#) is an independent, female-owned and run media hub sharing the latest news and views affecting how women live and work. The 2021 awards were the biggest ever with 900 nominees and 34 finalists across nine categories. Janet was honoured to be in the company of all the nominees in her category and the eventual winner, Joanna Dodds, President of the Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action.

[Janet was interviewed about this award and the Congress by Capital Radio.](#)



Women's networking breakfast - *Women in Climate and Health*

Our co-hosts for this event, held in March 2021 at the Senate Rose Gardens at Old Parliament House, were the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment, Dr Sophie Lewis, and Dr Arnagretta Hunter of the ANU Medical School and ANU Climate Institute. We were joined by more than 100 women, some of whom gave us the added gift of the presence of their small children. Elected representatives who attended included Alicia Payne (ALP) Member for Canberra, Julie Owens (ALP), Member for Parramatta, Senator Janet Rice (Australian Greens) from Victoria and Canberra MLAs – Elizabeth Lee (leader of the Liberal Party in the ACT), Marisa Paterson (ALP) and Emma Davidson (ACT Greens).

Taking place in the highly charged atmosphere of the Women's March4Justice, which had been held close by the day before, we were deeply moved and inspired by the emotional honesty, deep knowledge and courageous leadership aspirations of the speakers.

We thank [Dhani Gilbert](#) (former Young ACT Citizen of the Year, Wiradjuri woman and environmental science student), [Felicity McCallum](#) (an Awabakal woman from the Hunter Valley and Reconciliation Scholar at Charles Sturt University) and [Dr Liz Hanna](#) (Honorary Senior Fellow, Fenner School of Environment & Society, and Climate Change Institute, Chair, Environmental Health Working Group, World Federation of Public Health associations).

Huge thanks to our Advocacy and relationship circle for their hard work in organising this event See our [events page](#) for more.



Clockwise from top left: Sophie Lewis, Liz Hanna, Felicity McCallum and Dhani Gilbert

Photo: Lynne Audsley

Women's Climate Conversation Series

One of the 3 online gatherings we held in 2020 was a conversation between [Louise Tarrant](#) of Australia ReMADE and Congress member [Honey Nelson](#) on *Women turning the tide*. The positive response to this led to the launch of our monthly Women's Climate conversation series in 2021. The series has two aims - to draw on and honour the expertise and experience of women who are leaders in their field, and to stimulate our own thinking on important topics. Increasingly popular, these interactive conversations have generated nearly 900 registrants so far. They have explored three main themes:

- collaborating with heart and hands
- bringing qualities of the heart into policy making and governance, and
- evoking the collective imagination for sustainable and equitable ways forward.

We are extremely grateful to all of our guest conversationalists who gave their time and expertise so generously to this program. Click on the subject titles below to watch a video of the event. For biographies and more details go to the [Women's Climate Conversation](#) page on our website.

Collaborating with head heart and hands

Connecting head, heart and hands, we will collaborate across all genders and to restore nurture of life and care for the earth to the centre of every decision made at every level, local to national and international.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

How can women's leadership inspire collaborative national action on climate change?

Dr Kim Loo and Cristina Talacko



Listening as we go: connecting over shared values despite difference

Dr Millie Rooney and Julie Lyford OAM



Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response

Rhiân Williams and Val Lang AM



Bringing qualities of the heart into policy making and governance

We assert that qualities of the heart (such as compassion, love, empathy, forgiveness are the basis of true strength. These human laws must be reactivated for us to survive.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

Finding compassion in public discourse and policy making

Dr Lynne Reeder and Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard



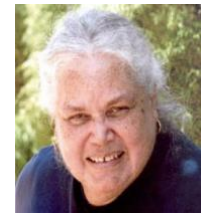
Women's voices changing the public conversation on climate change

Dr Rebecca Huntley and Dr Jonica Newby



Listening to First Nations knowledge to inform Earth-centred, collaborative governance

Dr Michelle Maloney and Dr Mary Graham



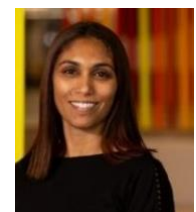
Collectively imagining equitable and sustainable ways forward

Listening deeply to the science, we recognize the interconnections of Earth's systems and human influences within those systems. With this in mind, we bring our collective imagination to uncover innovative, equitable and sustainable ways forward.

[Womens Climate Congress Values Statement](#)

Climate science, women and kindness – connecting the dots

Associate Professor Melissa Hart and Dr Angela Maharaj



After the pandemic. What happens next? And why women's leadership is vital

Dr Emma Dawson and Professor Susan Harris Rimmer



Connecting with like-minded organisations

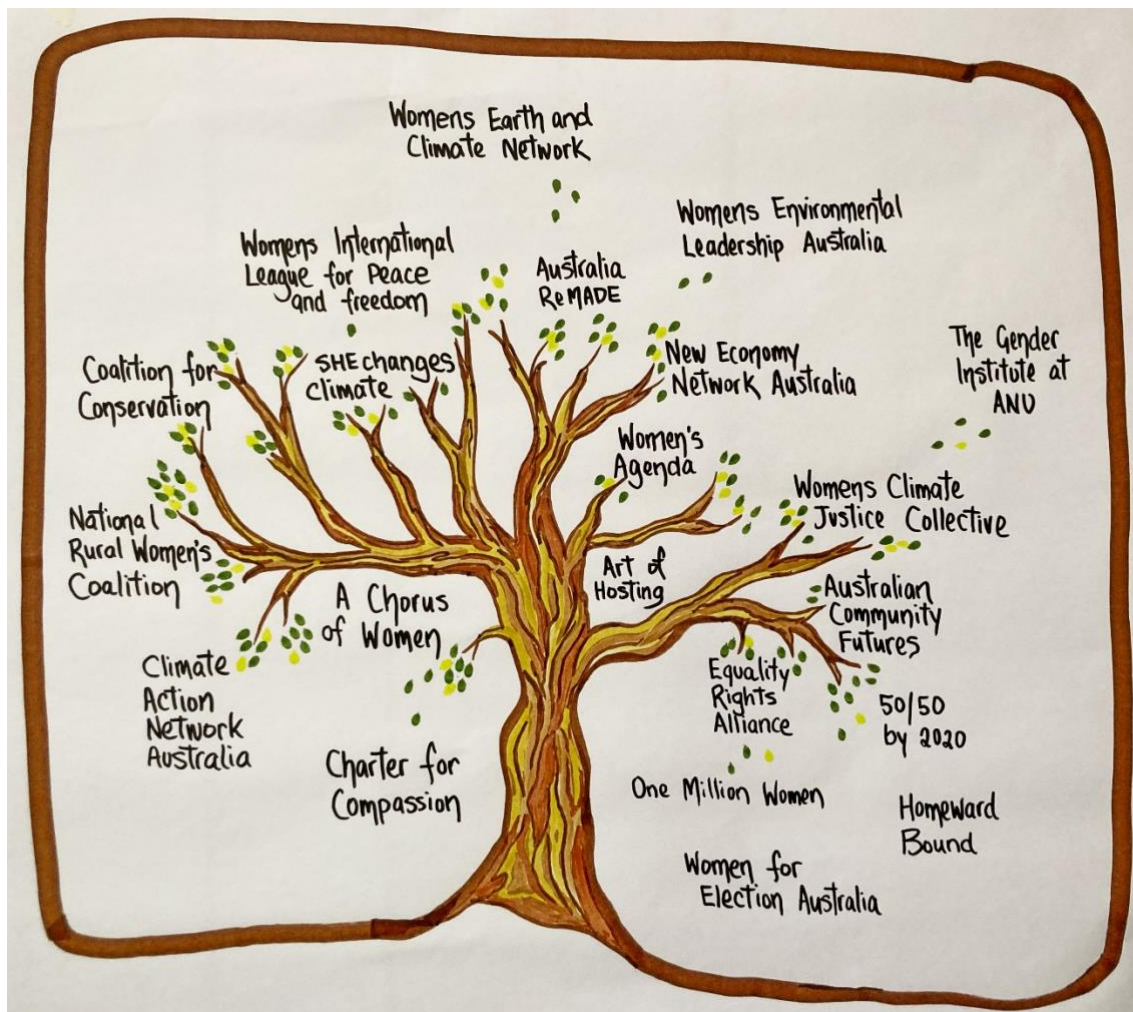
by Barbara Baikie

As a new organisation we have benefited enormously from the generous sharing of expertise and experience from other women's rights groups and from the wide variety of organisations aiming for climate action and broader systems change. We are extremely grateful for the warm welcome and support we have received.

As an organisation committed to climate action and systems change via a nonpartisan collaborative approach we do not fit neatly with many activist advocacy groups, but we can learn from everyone. The graphic illustration below shows some of the organisations we have been privileged to connect with during the year.

Our intention in the coming year is to strengthen and broaden these ties so that the voices of women crying out for nurture of life and care for the earth to be at the centre of every government decision are heard.

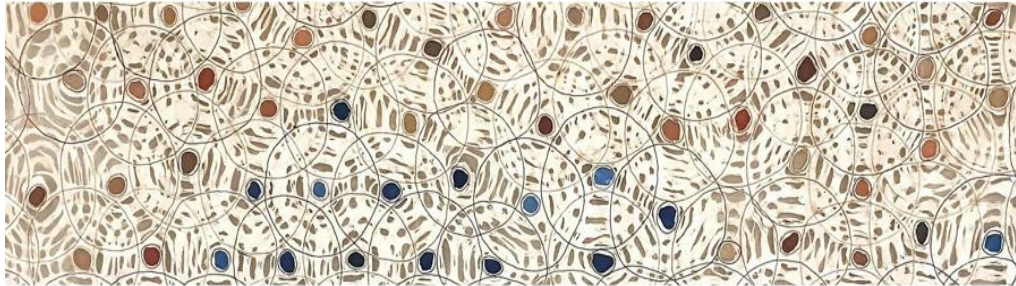
Some of our organisational connections



Graphic by Purpose Partners

Hosting a National Congress of Women

NATIONAL CONGRESS of women



Launching 30 November 2021 (online)
www.nationalcongressofwomen.com

A call to the women of Australia

Inspired by the [1915 International Congress of Women](#), we intended this National Congress of Women to be a call to the women of Australia to come together to lead a movement for a collaborative national plan on climate change — a plan to bring the nation together and to restore care for the Earth and nurture of life to the centre of all of our actions on climate. Planned as a three-day face-to-face event in Canberra in November, a small hosting team spent long hours exploring purpose and designing an engaging program. Sadly COVID forced a postponement.

The urgency and the need for women to rise remains. The National Congress has now become a series of events launching with Day One *Women rising. Why women? Why now?* on 30 November 2021. A further online event in April 2022 will focus on collaboration across difference and a two-day face-to-face Congress in September 2022. All events forming part of the National Congress of Women will include deep conversation and learning, authentic connection and community building, artistic expression, collaborative action planning, and interaction with elected representatives. This series of gatherings will build towards a public declaration from participants about achieving climate balance and protecting life on Earth for current and future generations.

Day One – Women rising. Why women? Why now?

This event, on 30 November 2021, will explore women's responses to climate change, First Nations approaches to governance and environmental management, and the experience of women in politics and other leadership positions. We will consider what systems changes would allow full participation of women on equal terms with men, particularly on fundamentally important policy issues such as climate change.

Speakers include:

- First Nations Woman. [Dr Anne Poelina](#), a Nyikina Warrwa Traditional Custodian from the Mardoowarra, lower Fitzroy River, in Western Australia, fellow of Notre Dame/Charles Sturt universities

- former Chief Scientist, [Professor Penny Sackett](#)
- [Natalie Isaacs](#), founder of One Million Women (TBC)
- [Helen Haines MP](#), Independent member for Indi
- environmental artist, [Janet Laurence](#)

A full program for the day, all guest speaker details, and information about artistic presentations during the day are on the [National Congress of Women website](#).

Weaving the threads together project

As part of the National Congress of Women we initiated the *Weaving the threads together* conversation circle project. It provides an opportunity for women from all over Australia to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the development of the themes of the Congress itself including women's leadership, collaboration on climate action and the changes in the system that we would like to see. Options include hosting a circle using a hosting guide developed by us, participating in a circle hosted by the Congress or sending in an individual contribution.

Weaving the threads goes online

The face-to-face options for this were affected by lockdowns in ACT, NSW and Victoria in the early stages. However, online gatherings have been held and enjoyed. As one participant said:

In such a small group, conversations and imaginations flow, and ideas float out between us. I can only imagine the cache of ideas which will gather by the time we reach the Congress. ... An opportunity for committing and sharing 'women-thought' - fun talk and also serious exchange...



Weaving the threads circle online by Honey Nelson

Excerpts from the harvest of these conversations will be shared at the Women rising event in November, and this project will continue into 2022 in the lead up to the National Congress of Women in September.

Further details are on the [Weaving the Threads Together webpage](#).

Independent review of financial statements

Woman's Climate Congress Ltd

ABN: 62 643 533 715

Balance sheet

For the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021 \$
Current assets	
Cash on Hand	30
Cash at Bank	9,404
<i>Total current assets</i>	9,434
Total assets	9,434
Current Liabilities	
Loans - Directors	4,000
<i>Total non-current liabilities</i>	4,000
Total liabilities	4,000
	Net assets
	5,434
Equity	
<i>Retained earnings</i>	5,434
	Total Equity
	5,434

Woman's Climate Congress Ltd

ABN: 62 643 533 715

Income statement
For the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021 \$
Sales	
Sales	130
Interest Received	2
Member Contributions	7668
Grants- and other	1000
<i>Total Income</i>	<u>8800</u>
Expenses	
Advertising	867
Filing Fees	417
Insurance	608
Subscriptions	105
Tool Replacement	183
Venue Hire	1,100
Website expenses	87
	<u>3,366</u>
<i>Net profit</i>	<u>5,434</u>
Retained earnings (accumulated losses) at the beginning of the financial year	-
Retained earnings at the end of the financial year	<u>5,434</u>

INDEPENDENT REVIEW REPORT TO WOMEN'S CLIMATE CONGRESS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

Report of the Financial report

I have reviewed the attached financial statements of Women's Climate Congress Ltd for the year ended 30 June 2021, comprising an Income Statement and Balance Sheet. The Directors are responsible for the preparation and presentation of the financial report and the information contained therein. I have conducted an independent audit of the financial report in order to express an opinion on it. No opinion is expressed as to whether the basis of accounting used is appropriate to the needs of the organisation.

Responsible Entities' Responsibility for the Financial Report

The responsible entities of the registered entity are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 (ACNC Act)* and for such internal control as the responsible entities determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error

Auditors Responsibility

My responsibility to express a conclusion of the financial report based on my review. I conducted my review in accordance with *Auditing Standard on Review Engagements ASRE 2415 Review of a Financial Report: Company Limited by guarantee or an Entity Reporting under the ACNC Act or Other Applicable Legislation or Regulation*, in order to state whether on the basis of the procedures described, anything has come to my attention that causes me to believe the financial report does not satisfy the requirements of Division 60 of the ACNC Act including: giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2021 and its performance for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 ended on that date; and complying with the Australian Accounting Standards *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013 (ACNC Regulation)*. ASRE 2415 requires that I comply with the ethical requirements relevant to the review of the financial report.

A review of a financial report consists of making enquiries, primarily of persons responsible for financial and accounting matters, and applying analytical and other review procedures. A review is substantially less in scope than an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards and consequently does not enable me to obtain assurance that I would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in an audit. Accordingly, I do not express an audit opinion.

Conclusion

Based on my review, which is not an audit, nothing has come to my attention that cause me to believe that the financial report of Women's Climate Congress Ltd does not satisfy the requirements of Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2012* including:

- a) Giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2021 and its financial performance and cash flows for the year 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 ended on that date; and
- b) Complying with Australian Accounting Standards and Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013*



Diane Bennett, NTAAF

Date: 19.10.2021

Suite 15, George Turner House
11 McKay Gardens
Turner ACT 2612