



19 May 2019

Hon. Scott Morrison M.P.  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Morrison,

Congratulations on being elected to the leadership of all Australians. We wish you and your team well as you form Government. I write to you as President of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

CRA represents over 150 religious congregations across Australia with approximately 5,500 Catholic religious women and men throughout the nation, as well as many thousands of people working in organisations run by religious institutes. Our members and their lay colleagues serve in education, health care and social services. We work with First Australians, refugees and asylum seekers, people struggling to survive on the margins of society and many others in need of assistance. The members of CRA and their colleagues, many of whom engage daily with the vulnerable and the marginalised throughout the nation, look forward to working with your Government.

As you set the agenda for the future of Australia and this term of office, we ask that your Government gives priority attention to several areas that might restore Australia's reputation and practices as a compassionate and creative nation.

Firstly, as a matter of priority we ask that, having secured the borders and stopped boats coming to Australia, you revisit the Government's position in relation to the treatment of asylum seekers. Australia needs to take its fair share of asylum seekers and to restore its reputation as a humane and compassionate country. We ask that steps be taken to: immediately restore SRSS which has left many asylum seekers living in the community in dire circumstances and reliant on NGOs and faith-based organisations to meet basic needs of shelter, food and clothing; enact a public one-off moratorium for asylum seekers in the community, giving citizenship to those awaiting the processing of their claims; bring asylum seekers in off-shore detention who have been judged to have a medical condition to Australia and re-start negotiations with third countries for those remaining; and take the initiative to restart negotiations with other countries towards an agreed regional solution that honours Australia's obligations.

Secondly, we ask the Government to take the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' seriously and, within the coming twelve months, advance consultation and decisions related to Constitutional Change and Treaty to empower Indigenous people to take their rightful place in their own country. We ask the Government to view Indigenous people and their leaders as active partners in this process and in developing legislation, policies and programs to address their disadvantage.

Thirdly, it was often repeated during the election campaign that Australia faces a climate crisis with disastrous effects on our nation, and effects that fall disproportionately on neighbouring low-income and small island states. This is an emergency on which the new Government must act. We ask that your government upholds the Paris Agreement by reducing subsidies to the fossil fuel industries and reducing tax breaks for polluters; invests in renewable energy and commits to no new coal or coal seam gas projects in Australia; and takes strong remediation action to restore the health and administration of the Murray Darling Basin waterways. We have only one earth, it is our common home as Pope Francis reminds us. The Government and we, as citizens, must do all in our power to protect it.

Lastly, with over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness, an insufficient supply of affordable housing and almost one million households now living in rental and mortgage stress, we ask your government to commit to a realistic budget allocation to create new, affordable social housing in its first term. Women who experience domestic violence are a particularly vulnerable population who experience these stresses disproportionately and so we ask for investment in emergency housing.

Prime Minister, in the wake of discourse and advertising that has been unedifying and, in some instances untrue, we ask that you take leadership in working with the Opposition in a constructive way that places the good of all Australians as a priority over gaining political advantage.

CRA believes in the inherent dignity of each human person and is an advocate for justice and compassion towards those whose life chances are limited. Our members have extensive experience in providing many services for those in need and look forward to working with you and your Government in addressing these. Thank you, Prime Minister, for taking on this service of the country. We wish you and your Government well.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. M. Cavanagh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr Monica Cavanagh rsj  
President