

Summary of GreenPower Questionnaire Results

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Introduction

“GreenPower” is electricity sourced from renewable sources (the sun, wind, water and waste), accredited by the governments of Australia, and available through the National Electricity Grid. Energy suppliers purchase this electricity from generators on behalf of their customers, and feed it into the grid¹.

The 2006 meeting of the NSW Synod passed a resolution to ask all congregations, presbyteries and church agencies to switch to 100% government accredited GreenPower. In November 2006, the Moderator, Jim Mein, wrote to all congregations encouraging them to take this step. He endorsed switching to GreenPower as a practical expression of a theological and moral imperative to steward the earth, a first step in helping to prevent global warming by reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from the running of churches.

Instructions for several options to switch to GreenPower were included with the moderator's letter. These options were:

1. Contacting Church Resources with a view to participating in a bulk discounting agreement.
2. Contacting the existing electricity provider and asking to switch to GreenPower.
3. Researching all available GreenPower providers and choosing the congregation's most desirable alternative (e.g. on the basis of quality, cost).

Little is known about how churches have responded to this encouragement to switch to GreenPower. With a view to finding this out, a questionnaire survey was conducted within the Sydney Presbytery by the Project Green Church Coordinator at Maroubra Junction Uniting Church.

Questionnaire Description/Methodology

In October 2007, a one page questionnaire (see appendix) was posted with an introductory letter and reply paid envelope to the treasurers of all Uniting Churches in Sydney which have their own buildings. These churches are highly diverse with respect to the size of their congregation(s), and in terms of the size, number, nature and patterns of use of their buildings.

The questionnaire aimed to:

- 1) Establish the number of churches within the Presbytery who have switched to GreenPower, and the greenhouse gas emissions savings that have resulted
- 2) Ascertain what barriers churches face in switching to GreenPower, with a view to assisting churches to overcome these barriers
- 3) Give voice to any concerns churches may have about GreenPower

Few questionnaire responses were received after the first request, so churches were followed up until February 2008 by mail, telephone and email. Questionnaires were completed by treasurers (primarily), church administrators, or ministers in placement.

Of the 34 churches that were approached to complete the questionnaire:

- Ultimately, three did not reply.
- One replied but did not complete the questionnaire, saying that it was replacing its building complex, and planning to install solar panels to power the complex.
- Three replied saying they were not responsible for paying their electricity bill.

¹ For more information about GreenPower and how it works, see <http://www.greenpower.gov.au>.

Results

Respondents were asked to consult the electricity bill corresponding to their church building(s)², and to indicate the amount of electricity (in kWh) that the church had used in the last 12 months. Only six respondents answered this question, with answers ranging between approximately 300 and 25,000 kWh³. This question may have been onerous for respondents and therefore an alternative question was used to gain an approximation for electricity consumption. Although not initially in the questionnaire, respondents were asked in followup emails and phone calls to indicate (or simply to estimate) their electricity usage in \$ rather than kWh. 12 respondents replied to this question, with answers ranging from approximately \$600 to \$6,000 in a year.

Of the 27 churches who completed the questionnaire and were responsible for paying for their electricity bills:

- Four (15%) had switched to GreenPower; three with Energy Australia and one with Origin Energy. One church had made the switch in 2006, and the remainder in 2007. Two of these churches reported their electricity consumption over the preceding 12 months. This amounted to 22,500 kWh for the churches combined. These two churches combined would therefore expect to save approximately 20 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year through their purchase of GreenPower⁴.

Of the 23 churches that had not (or not yet) switched to GreenPower:

- Three (13%) had already decided to switch to GreenPower. Two of these churches had been in contact with Church Resources to participate in a bulk discount arrangement, but had not yet heard back.
- Two (9%) had decided not to make the switch to GreenPower, one citing cost as the reason, and the other said that they were a small church and switching to GreenPower would make little difference.
- Seven (30%) were undecided as to whether or not they would switch. Four of these churches said they were currently looking into it, three churches specifically said that they were considering the cost, one said it was waiting to hear from Church Resources regarding a bulk discount arrangement, and one said it was in the process of having its lighting redesigned.
- 11 (48%) had not considered switching. The respondents from three of these churches were not aware of GreenPower. Most of the remainder said that their churches had simply not gotten around to discussing the issue, some expressing that it was difficult to find the time/energy to do so in the face of a range of pressing day-to-day priorities. Two respondents said that their churches were concerned about the issue of cost.
- 11 (48%, consisting of churches who were undecided or had not considered switching to GreenPower) requested further information about GreenPower. Two churches specifically requested information regarding the comparative costs. The requested information has subsequently been provided to the churches.

Of the 30 churches that completed the questionnaire:

- 17 (57%) said that they had undertaken specific measures over the last five years to save the amount of energy used in the church. 15 of these churches said that they had installed energy saving light bulbs. Other measures (uncommonly) listed included installing blinds, energy efficient fridges, energy efficient hot water systems, and light sensors.

² i.e. the building housing the church itself, not any separate bills for e.g. a manse, office or hall.

³ As a point of comparison, the national average household electricity consumption is approx 6,800kWh (http://www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au//index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=3&Itemid=41).

⁴ In NSW, for every kWh of electricity produced, on average 0.897 kg of carbon dioxide is emitted to the atmosphere (<http://www.greenhousegases.gov.au/glossary.html#coefficient>).

Discussion and Conclusions

This questionnaire was conducted approximately one year after the Synod resolution and letter from the Moderator encouraging churches to switch to GreenPower. However, at the time the data were collected, a minority of churches in the Sydney Presbytery had switched (15% of churches⁵), or decided to switch (11% of churches⁵). Why are these figures this low? Very few churches expressed direct opposition to GreenPower, with only 7% of churches having decided not to switch. While a sizeable minority (35%) of churches who hadn't switched did explicitly express concerns about cost, this does not appear to be the primary reason for a slow uptake of GreenPower, at least, not at this stage⁶. Rather, the main explanation seems to be a low sense of priority and urgency in taking this action, with 41% of churches having not considered switching, and 26% having not yet decided. Communication of the need for concerted action on climate change, across all spheres of society, along with discussions about the environmental benefits of switching to GreenPower, may help here.

Along with switching to renewable sources, reducing electricity consumption is central to reducing the environmental impact associated with the running of churches. Furthermore, this offsets the cost involved in sourcing renewable rather than non-renewable energy. Encouragingly, just over half the churches had taken some measures to reduce their electricity use, typically by installing energy saving light bulbs. It should be noted, though, that much larger savings can usually be achieved in relation to minimising the use of space heating and cooling. Although questionnaire respondents tended not to mention heating and cooling (the questionnaire did not directly probe for this), it is possible that many churches are already doing their best to minimise heating and cooling. In any case, churches should be encouraged to take these steps. Churches should also choose energy-efficient models when replacing appliances.

Finally, it is important to note that switching to GreenPower and pursuing energy efficiency is just one component of the ways that congregations can help to prevent climate change. From car sharing to community gardening, and from campaigning to seminars and workshops, congregations within and beyond the Uniting Church are starting to explore how they can live out a hopeful witness to climate justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This witness can also serve as a part of our mission to the broader community. Useful websites for congregations to consult for ideas for what they can do include:

1. The Season of Creation resources - <http://www.seasonofcreation.com/studies/>
2. The Climate Institute's "Seven Steps to Sustainability", <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/cb>
3. Catholic Earthcare Australia has developed a very extensive environmental audit – covers many aspects of the life of a church, including its worship and outreach, <http://catholicearthcareoz.net/audit.html>
4. Eco-congregation: <http://www.ecocongregation.org.uk/englandwales/index.html>, click on "free resources" from the menu on the LHS for downloadable modules. Also, the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle has also adapted one of the modules, which you can download from http://www.angdon.com/environmental_commission
5. Christian Ecology Link has lots of useful resources, www.christian-ecology.org.uk, see especially <http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/resources.htm>

In our experience at Project Green Church, encouraging each other on the journey of green discipleship is really important. This is especially so for congregations who are considering what green steps they can take but are not sure where to start. If you'd like some advice or somebody to talk to, please contact us at Project Green Church. We'd be delighted to help.

⁵ Relative to the churches that completed the questionnaire and were responsible for paying their electricity bills.

⁶ NB, the questionnaire didn't explicitly ask about cost. It would be reasonable to assume, though, that the cost of GreenPower may generally be an issue for church councils. The cost of non-renewable energy is approximately \$0.12 per kWh. A church that uses 10,000 kWh of electricity per year would expect to pay an extra \$500 for 100% GreenPower, given the approximate additional cost for GreenPower of \$0.05 per kWh (http://www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au//index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=3&Itemid=41).

APPENDIX: GreenPower Questionnaire: Sydney Presbytery

1. Church name _____
2. Please list the buildings for which the church pays electricity. _____

3. How many separate electricity bills does the church receive? (e.g. you may have separate bills for the church building, and for the manse) _____

Please answer the remaining questions in relation to the single electricity bill which covers the church building itself.

4. Please list the buildings covered by this bill. _____
5. How much electricity (in kWh) did the church use over the last 12 months (dating back 12 months from your most recent electricity bill)? (You can find this information on your bills.) _____
6. Has your church switched to GreenPower? (please circle one option): YES NO

If you circled yes, please answer questions 7a-d. If you circled no, please answer questions 8a-b.

- 7a. When did the church make the switch to GreenPower? _____
- 7b. Why did the church decide to make the switch? _____

7c. Which GreenPower package does the church purchase? (name of provider, name of package, % GreenPower) _____

7d. Why did the church choose this particular package? _____

Please proceed to question 9.

8a. Does the church intend to switch to GreenPower? (please circle one of the four options):

YES NO UNDECIDED WE HAVE NOT CONSIDERED SWITCHING

8a(i). If you circled yes, when does the church intend to switch? _____

8a(ii). If you circled another option, please explain the church's reasons for not/not yet intending to switch to GreenPower. _____

8b. Is there anything (e.g. further information and/or advice) that would assist your church to switch to GreenPower? (please circle one option): YES NO

8b(i). If you circled yes, then please list details. _____

9. Has your church undertaken specific measures over the last five years to save the amount of energy used in the church (e.g. installed energy light bulbs, appliances etc)? (please circle one option): YES NO

9a(i). If you circled yes, please describe what the church has done and approximately when it was done. _____

Thank you for your participation. Please use the reverse of the questionnaire if you need extra space or to list any further comments or questions you might have.