

Archdiocese of Wellington Ecology, Justice and Peace Commission

Oral Submission to Finance and Expenditure Committee

Budget Policy Statement 2021

Introduction - Ana

Kia ora tātou. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of our written submission on the Budget Policy Statement. The submission was prepared by the Poverty Committee of the Archdiocese of Wellington's Ecology Justice and Peace Commission.

Our main presenter will be Fr Tom Rouse, who is Convenor of the Poverty Committee. Supporting Fr Tom, we have John Kennedy-Good, Sr Ruth Coleman and I am Ana Ayora. We are members of the Poverty Committee. We also have with us Lisa Beech, who is Ecology, Justice and Peace advisor for the Archdiocese.

Fr Tom lipreads, so please look directly at the camera if you are asking any questions. I'll hand over now to Fr Tom.

Fr Tom

Our Commission supports the overarching policy goals for Budget 2021. We also support the wellbeing objectives.

We would like to make some comments in support of the government's economic decisions around Covid-19. We also want to express some concerns about inequality.

Firstly, we support the government's decisions in 2020 to work beyond the constraints of the Fiscal Responsibility Act in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We know that there were political voices who were willing to sacrifice lives for the economy. We have all seen now that wasn't necessary. The strong public health response protected jobs and saved lives.

We want to see government to act as decisively, boldly and with the same sense of urgency in responding to the crises of climate change and poverty.

However, we do have some concerns about how the Covid-19 recovery is reported in the Budget Policy Statement. For example, on pages 4 and 5 it reports overall higher life satisfaction and no overall changes in the wellbeing of families.

This doesn't really accord with our experience. We know that although the country and the economy is bouncing back sooner and better than expected, life has been really tough for many people.

That is recognised even in the Budget Policy Statement, which recognises increased hardship for working families, and higher levels of anxiety for younger people.

We wondered if the studies reported in the Budget Policy Statement hadn't asked the right questions, or hadn't reached the right people. When we saw that the Victoria University study quoted had a sample drawn from Fly-Buys customers, we thought there will be a lot of people missing from that group.

It's good that many New Zealand families are doing okay. But we know that there are people who were already struggling before Covid-19, and they will have been further disadvantaged.

We believe the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee needs better analysis about how the Covid-19 crisis has increased inequalities. The government isn't going to be able to achieve its wellbeing objectives without really understanding what is happening for the most vulnerable.

We would be happy to take your questions.