

Passionate allies connect to make a difference in the world



Kelly Marks
Research/Industrial Officer
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Federation colleagues with an interest in unity, climate, habitat and global affairs can join with members who have similar concerns via the union's Peace, Environment and International Issues Special Interest Group.

Federation Life Member Janine Kitson said the SIG represents "a vision for a better world, based on peace, protecting the environment and human rights" and participation provides solidarity for teacher activists.

Andrew Wright, a member at Bankstown Senior College, said the group encompasses the breadth of why he teaches and is a unionist: "A sustainable world connected peacefully through our common humanity and global citizenship — a better tomorrow."



Retired member Peter Weitzel said: "It is good to meet with like-minded people and to highlight the aspects of peace and the environment that have particular relevance to both the union and to education.

"Peace is union business and war is an international environmental and social disaster! It's actually hard to disentangle the three aspects in our SIG's title.

"The hope is that a society in which peace is an embedded value will be more amenable to global environmental sustainability."

Officer attached to the SIG, Kelly Marks, said all Federation members are invited to participate. The group meets twice a term, usually at Federation House with teleconference facilities available for our remote members. However all meetings since March have been held via zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings.

"After the devastation caused by the summer's bushfires, the SIG's most recent activities and discussions have focused on supporting Federation's response to the climate emergency. However, meetings over the past year give an indication of the breadth of issues that the group concerns itself with," Ms Marks said.

At one meeting Tom Reddington from Cooperative Power Australia provided members with information about a new cooperative that is helping union members to access electricity from cheaper, renewable sources and

not lining the pockets of the large corporate power companies. A member of the SIG successfully moved a motion at a Federation Council calling on Federation to investigate further participation in the cooperative.

The SIG also moved a recommendation to Federation's Executive in support of the Education International Hands Off campaign calling on the Duterte government to stop attacking trade unionists in the Philippines. Government attacks on teacher unionists have included red-tagging and death threats. Two teachers, active trade unionists, were shot at last year in their classroom in front of their students. A Federation contingent attended a rally at the Philippines consulate in support of the campaign.

Earlier this year human rights lawyer Veronica Koman updated members on the Free West Papua campaign. Veronica was the recipient of the prestigious Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award last October from the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak body for Australian non-government organisations that work overseas and in humanitarian action.

"Veronica's work to document and disseminate information about the situation in West Papua saw her charged by Indonesian police for 'provoking unrest' and 'spreading hoaxes'. Indonesia has also threatened to issue an Interpol red notice to have her extradited," Ms Marks said.

"According to Veronica, the West Papua situation is one of the worst instances of human rights violations anyone could conceive. West Papuans are treated like sub-humans and are denied access to education and healthcare. Rather than attending school, many children are being forced to follow in the footsteps of their elders in joining the liberation army, and the cycle of violence continues."

The SIG resolved to keep in touch with Veronica to arrange further opportunities to highlight the West Papua to our members and to the broader community.

The most recent meeting of the SIG members heard from Nature Conservation Council chief executive Chris Gambian about the organisation's current campaigns. The Nature Conservation Council is an affiliated organisation to the Federation and at the SIG meeting Chris reiterated their commitment to continuing to work closely with teacher activists to raise awareness of issues affecting the climate and biodiversity.

To find out more about the SIG's activities or to be added to the mailing list to receive meeting notifications and minute of meetings, send an email to Kelly Marks via mail@nswtf.org.au.

Meeting dates:

- 14 September
- 26 October
- 30 November