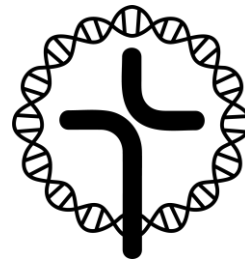


# InterChurch Bioethics Council



**INTERCHURCH BIOETHICS COUNCIL,  
2023 REPORT TO THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA;  
METHODIST CHURCH NEW ZEALAND, TE HAAHI WETERIANA O AOTEAROA;  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**

The InterChurch Bioethics Council (ICBC) is an ecumenical cross-cultural body supported by the Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand. ICBC members have expertise and knowledge in science, ethics, theology, medicine, education and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Biotechnology relates to biological, medical, environmental, and agricultural technologies derived from science. Bioethics is an interdisciplinary category of ethics that provides the framework for policy and decision-making with regard to scientific research and resulting technologies; including future consequences, legal, political, commercial, theological and social aspects.

2022 represented a milestone year for the ICBC, being the **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the formation of this unique ecumenical body, and an October public lecture in Wellington is currently being planned to celebrate this. The ICBC followed on from the “InterChurch Commission on Genetic Engineering” that was formed in 2000 to provide a Christian response to the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification. Following the governmental Royal Commission, the InterChurch Commission was renamed the “InterChurch Bioethics Council” in 2002 and was given a broader brief to raise issues relevant to the cultural, ethical, spiritual, and theological issues in the use of biotechnology in New Zealand.

**ICBC Vision:**

*Exploring the spiritual, ethical, cultural, technological and evidential dimensions of bioethics and its consequences in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

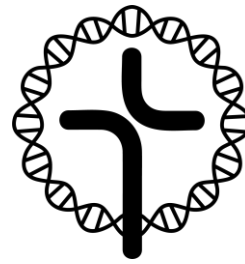
**Mission Statement:**

*To increase the knowledge and understanding of church members and the wider community around the spiritual, ethical, cultural, technological and evidential issues relating to bioethics. To enable and encourage citizens to take action on these issues.*

Our key tasks are:

- To increase our own knowledge and understanding of the interface between spirituality and biotechnology.
- To engage in consultation and dialogue with church members, community groups and specialists on the ethical, spiritual and cultural issues raised by biotechnology.
- To undertake and promote education on these issues within the community.
- To make appropriate submissions to Government and other relevant organizations on important issues of ethical and spiritual concern.
- To be an advisory body to our national church organisations by responding to requests for a positional stance on bioethical issues from our national church bodies.

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For Church members the most important part of our work will be found on our website and we encourage congregations to include [www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz](http://www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz) as a resource. The website has been significantly updated in 2023 and contains study guides, papers, reports and useful links that can give a framework or guidelines for ethical enquiry that is separate from what appears in other media.

## **Key Tasks/Activities:**

The past two years have been influenced by the Covid pandemic and the increasing urgency of climate changes. A new consultation by ACART investigated societal attitudes to research using human embryos, which is a pivotal issue affecting all assisted reproductive technologies.

### **1. Submissions to Government and other Organisations.**

- ***National Ethics Advisory Council***

- Ethical Guidance for a Pandemic

At the end of 2022 the government announced a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Pandemic Response, to gain lessons learned from our Covid response but also to future-plan for new Covid variants, and other future pandemics with different morbidities and parameters.

- ***Advisory Committee for Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ACART)***

Submissions were made to consultations on:

- Proposed Changes to the Guidelines for Extending the Storage of Gametes and Embryos (2022)
- Research Involving Human Gametes and Embryos (2023)

### **2. Engage in consultation with our churches**

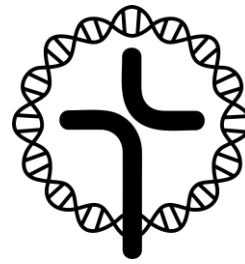
The ICBC reports regularly to our national church organisations and provides relevant website resources for our congregations and the general public. A list of bioethical questions for election candidates pertinent to the up-coming elections was made for available for congregations in July. Congregations are invited to use these questions to stimulate on-going conversation beyond the election.

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023, the ICBC held a public lecture with guest speaker Prof. Jonathan Boston on 'Confronting the Climate Crisis: Keeping Hopeful in Challenging Times', to celebrate the past 21 years of the ICBC's mahi. Professor Boston painted a grim picture of the possible, if not likely challenges of global warming, but also highlighted a Christian response. The full script and the PowerPoint are available on the website. It is available for use as we grapple with the implications of climate change. We strongly encourage the use of this resource.

### **3. Undertake and promote education in the community**

- ***Links with A Rocha and NZCIS.***

# InterChurch Bioethics Council



A member of the ICBC, Dr Nicola Hoggard-Creegan, is co-director of New Zealand Christians in Science, and Chair of A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, and the interests of ICBC, NZCIS and ARANZ all overlap. At the end of last year (2022) Nicola again taught a summer course in Science and Christian theology at Otago, and this included a unit in bioethics and eco-theology. This year NZCIS hosted a Winter Lectures on Science Fiction themes and many of those are climate and nature related. Our Conference on the Fall examined which parts of the Fall story have become dysfunctional and in particular how we can imagine hopeful ways of living together. In September Ernst Conradie visited New Zealand to give a lecture on themes to do with the anthropocene. NZCIS partners with ISCAST to put on Zoom Conversation Series and last year one of these was on Climate Ethics. See the A Rocha website for these resources.

A Rocha has now become heavily involved with leading the Eco Church initiative and is resourcing Churches for both practical action for mitigating climate change, and a deeper reflection on the theology of nature.

- ***Climate Change:***

The complete set of global IPCC reports for 2021-23 have now been released and are informing the policies of many countries around the world – scientifically it is clear that the impacts of humans have been detrimentally affecting the Earth and its atmosphere, especially through greenhouse gas emissions, for the past almost two centuries. The effects of increased global temperatures in Aotearoa New Zealand have been seen for some time in decreasing snow fall and diminishing glaciers. Fifty years ago, you could step off the Ball Hut Road onto the Tasman Glacier. Today the glacier sits behind a 2km-long lake and is a long walk from the road. Dramatic flood events have increasingly affected Westport, Nelson/Marlborough, Hawkes Bay, Coromandel, Auckland and Northland in the last two years. It is likely that less obvious effects are just as critical, such as invasive weeds and pests increasing their range and native plants not acclimatised to a cooler climate being squeezed out.

The cost of remedial and preventive measures is likely to be an increasing burden on all sectors of our society, with the highest cost falling on the most vulnerable. In our last 2020-21 report, the ICBC made a recommendation for our churches to engage with EcoChurch Aotearoa New Zealand, and we continue to urge our member churches to take all practical steps possible to reduce our ecological impacts as churches and individuals, including providing practical guidance such as found on the EcoChurch website ([www.ecochurch.org.nz](http://www.ecochurch.org.nz)) to enable church members to reduce their carbon footprint.

#### **4. Increase our own understanding.**

One feature of the ICBC's role is to be informed about advancing science and technology and the issues raised by new technologies. Members have attended/streamed a wide variety of seminars and conferences to inform the ICBC.

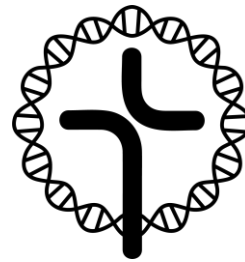
The ICBC also aims to keep its website relevant with links to a range of organisations. A priority for the work of the ICBC in 2023 has been to update our documentation on climate change. Alongside this, we are continually seeking out reputable resources and websites that we can share links to provide reliable information.

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[www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz](http://www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz)

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/InterChurchBioethicsCouncil?fref=ts>

# InterChurch Bioethics Council



## **Future Work:**

### **Genetically Modified organisms**

The Coalition Government has a policy to remove the current restrictions on Genetically modified organisms. ICBC is preparing a paper to be circulated to our member congregations to receive feedback on the implications of this proposal. We have been advised that there will be a Select Committee process to consider this proposal.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

The ability to analyse large amounts of complex data has the potential to add significant benefit to medical and biological research. But are there implications for privacy? Are there matters which require human rather than machine input? ICBC is beginning work on understanding the benefits and risks of increasing use of complex data management.

## **Membership:**

Recently, we have welcomed Samuel Allen and Prof. Steven Chambers as new members. We would like to acknowledge the substantial work of Rev Dr Graham O'Brien who has stepped down from the co-chair role, and welcome Rev David Bush into that role.

As an ecumenical body, we are conscious of needing a good representation from across our three contributing denominations, including cultural representations for Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pacifica, and currently we are finding this representation difficult to achieve. We would ask our supporting denominations to look out for available people with relevant skills, interests and backgrounds, and invite them to consider joining the ICBC.

### **Current Members**

|                        |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Samuel Allen           | (Presbyterian, Wellington)           |
| Helen Bichan           | (Presbyterian, Wellington)           |
| David Bush             | (Co-Chair; Methodist, Christchurch)  |
| Stephen Chambers       | (Methodist, Christchurch)            |
| Nicola Hoggard Creegan | (Anglican, Auckland)                 |
| Joy McIntosh           | (Co-Chair; Presbyterian, Wellington) |
| Graham O'Brien         | (Anglican, Nelson)                   |
| Barbara Peddie         | (Methodist, Christchurch)            |
| Deborah Stevens        | (Anglican, Wellington)               |
| Tania Stuart           | (Anglican, Auckland)                 |

## **Recommendations:**

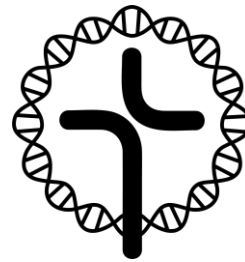
As the ICBC we see ourselves as a resource for our member Churches and wider Christian community. As such we welcome opportunities to engage in discussion and provide resources. Our recommendations are:

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[www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz](http://www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz)

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/InterChurchBioethicsCouncil?fref=ts>

# InterChurch Bioethics Council



1. This Report is received.

2. As a response to the best care for creation and an ethical use of the earth's resources, ICBC urges members' churches to take practical steps to reduce their carbon footprints and share resources to encourage members of our churches to respond positively to the climate crisis.

Our thanks to the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia; Methodist Church New Zealand, Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa; and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for their continued support of the ICBC.

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is on the left, and the second signature, which reads 'David Bush', is on the right.

Dr Joy McIntosh and Rev David Bush, ICBC Co-Chairs.  
March 2024.