

A REFLECTION ON SUMMER

Summer in Australia is a time of sun, sea and sand; of hot winds, sudden storms and ferocious bushfires. It is a time to enjoy the natural beauty of this land; to share holidays and long lazy days with family and friends. It is a time of diverse religious celebrations: the Christian season of Christmas; the Pagan minor Sabbat of Summer Solstice; Chanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights.

It is a time when we are very conscious of the health risks to humans from excessive exposure to the sun: sunburn, skin cancer.

It is also a time when reminders of the dangers of global warming abound. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 'Climate change is variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It encompasses temperature increase, sea level rise, changes in precipitation patterns and increased frequencies of extreme events. Each of these phenomena can impact on biological diversity. In fact climate change is one of the major threats to biodiversity.'

In Australia, climate change is projected to see decreases in winter rainfall across much of southern Australia, the potential for more bushfires and more intense cyclones. These changes will have an indirect negative impact on plants and animals already under stress from land degradation and changing climatic conditions. Scientific studies in Australia identify ninety animal species at risk from climate change, including mammals, insects, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians.

As we celebrate our various religious festivals, how can we integrate our gratitude for the mystery of life, our experience of the beauty of the summer season and our knowledge of this acute threat to the environment? What is an appropriate response?

*Spirit of Fire, heart of the sun,
your fierce heat is both enervating
and exhilarating.
Fill me with your energy;
Gift me with your passion.
Awaken me to the power of the Cosmos;
Show me how to live responsibly
In harmony with the web of life.*

Painting by Philip Costigan