

The Greens (WA) policy

Ecological Sustainability Core Policy

Preamble

The resources of our planet are finite. The devaluing and unsustainable exploitation of the natural environment has led to degraded and unstable ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, resource depletion, increasing pollution, and climate change. The pace of exploitation of our previous abundance of fossil fuels has greatly intensified these trends, leading to population increase and increased resource consumption that now exceeds the regenerative capacity of the Earth.

Unsustainable human consumption of the Earth's resources will deny future generations a world as rich and complex as the one we currently enjoy. The unprecedented rate of observed species extinction, ecosystem degradation, and in some cases, ecosystem collapse, is indicative of the effects human activities are already having.

Overuse and extraction of natural resources beyond their capacity for replenishment is eroding nature's capital and in so doing will compromise the essential future services that ecosystems can provide. Our health, wellbeing and economy are entirely dependent on the functioning and integrity of these ecosystem services – they are a pre-requisite for our future prosperity, and ultimately, survival.

The Greens (WA) are committed to creating an ecologically sustainable future, integrating social, economic and ecological imperatives into public policy through transparent democratic processes.

This approach means harmonising human work and enterprise with natural systems and social justice. It affirms the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world and acknowledges the interdependence between people and their environments.

Principles

- Australia must recognise and address its severe land degradation, declining water quality and supply, loss of biological diversity, resource depletion, population and waste issues.
- We must stop using resources as if they were limitless and learn to live within the capacity of the Earth.
- Action to improve ecological sustainability must always consider the needs of affected people, especially those already experiencing disadvantage.
- Australia's net Greenhouse Gas emissions must be dramatically reduced and the economy must urgently restructure around the rapid uptake of both carbon biosequestration and renewable energy technologies as part of a transition toward a low (and eventually zero or net negative) carbon economy.
- Economic activity must become significantly more resource efficient to minimise the social, economic and environmental consequences of severely depleted key resources. In particular, the decline of oil production will have enormous negative impacts on the modern economy without a detailed transition strategy and the prioritisation of major infrastructure changes.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' expertise with, and obligations to, country must be incorporated into developing and implementing ecologically sustainable land management.

- Australia must develop meaningful policies relating to total population, as well as its geographical distribution, based on principles including ecological sustainability, intergenerational equity, and social justice at both local and international levels.
- Global environmental protection and social justice must be included as part of the national interest in Australia's treaty-making processes (including trade agreements), the allocation of foreign aid, and bilateral and multilateral relationships with international partners.
- Australian businesses must be required to operate their overseas operations according to relevant Australian environmental laws, except where the relevant overseas law provides stronger environmental protection.
- Local, state and federal legislation and policy must be amended to ensure they are explicitly designed to achieve ecological sustainability.
- Governments must utilise, for their own reporting purposes, environmental accounting systems such as a Genuine Progress Indicator designed to augment the reporting of the Gross National Product.
- Human health and the environment must not be put at risk by nuclear technologies.
- The price of consumer goods and services should, where practicable, take into account their full environmental costs.
- Company annual reports must describe their environmental and social impacts and benefits, as well as their financial performance, in a standardised and integrated way.
- Governments must stop supporting ecologically unsustainable activities with subsidies and financial incentives and instead support either direct government involvement, or economic mechanisms which promote investment activity, that results in improved environmental outcomes.
- Penalties for environmental damage must as a minimum reflect the seriousness of the damage caused, recognising the value (including economic and social) of the relevant ecosystems. They should be high enough to act as an effective deterrent for businesses and individuals.
- A well-resourced, comprehensive public participation process must be established and maintained to ensure that the public has a right to be involved in decision-making related to ecological sustainability.
- The notion of ecological sustainability must become one of the core concepts of education.
- Governments must initiate and maintain procurement policies for ecologically sustainable technologies, such as renewable energy.
- Governments must provide substantial and reliable access to financial assistance, resources and advice for the research, development and uptake of ecologically sustainable technologies.
- Governments must aim for minimal net waste, with waste management policy integrated with consumption reduction policy.
- Producers of products must be required to accept responsibility for their products at end of life, this will introduce incentives to reduce waste and ensure products are recyclable/reusable.
- Human health and the environment must not be put at risk by genetic engineering.
- All life forms are part of the environment and should not be patented.
- The farming and marketing of animals must be made as ecologically sustainable as possible, and free from cruelty, through meaningful industry regulation.