

Ecosystem Respecting Human Society

Policy Position Statement

- Key messages:** PHAA will advocate for Australia's participation in international action to break the cycle of indebtedness, poverty and high population growth in the world's poorest countries.
- Domestically, PHAA will advocate for concerted action by all sectors to promote ecosystem respecting development, and responsible consumption of global and national resources as well as measures of social wellbeing that incorporate ecological sustainability.
- Key policy positions:**
1. Global environmental change comprises multiple forms of environmental degradation including global warming which ultimately threatens human well-being and survival. The current pace of change is unprecedented, making physical and social adaptation more difficult.
 2. Australia's national policies, including environmental, industry and agricultural policies, exist in a global context and must recognise and help manage the direct and indirect effects on human health from ecological destabilisation occurring through global environmental change.
 3. The protection of the health and function of Earth's ecosystems, as well as individuals and communities dependent upon those ecosystems, needs to be given highest priority in trade and economic policy.
- Audience:** Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.
- Responsibility:** PHAA Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group
- Contacts:** Dr Lea Merone, Convenor, Ecology and Environment SIG
- Date adopted:** 29 October 2020

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[Refer also to PHAA policies on: Safe Climate, Ecologically Sustainable Population for Australia, Preparing for Peak Oil, Health Effects of Fossil Fuels, Health Inequities, Ecologically Sustainable Diets, Global Warming the Food System and Food Security, and The Food System and Environmental Impacts.]

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. Development decisions should be based on the precautionary principle, with appropriate prior assessment of potential environmental and social impacts on human health and wellbeing and equity.¹
2. Australia's national environmental, industry and agricultural policies need to recognise the global context and potential adverse effects on human health from ecological destabilisation.²
3. Limitations on human population size are necessary for ecological sustainability and long-term prosperity.³
4. The health of ecosystems, people and communities needs to be given priority over economy and trade considerations.⁴

PHAA notes the following evidence:

5. A sustainable human society is one that provides food, habitation, energy, transport and leisure within the ecological boundaries of the planet for the present generation, while also allowing for the needs of future generations. Ecological sustainability features complex biodiversity; functioning chemical and ecosystem cycles responsible for providing clean air, fresh water, soil and forests; intact protective features such as the tropospheric ozone. Maintaining human population within the planet's carrying capacity is crucial to an ecologically sustainable global human society. Developing and maintaining an ecologically sustainable social and economic system is a prerequisite for maintaining a safe environment.⁵
6. Humans experience the environment in which they live as an assemblage of physical, chemical, biological, cultural and economic conditions.⁶ The environmental threats to human health can be divided into traditional hazards (poor water and sanitation, unhealthy housing, vector borne disease, natural physical disasters, pestilence and war) and more modern hazards (the toxic effects of chemicals, waste and pollution, direct and indirect effects of global environment change, the chronic diseases that are attributable to affluence and social inequity).^{7,8}
7. Global environmental change comprises global warming and its many ecological consequences, loss of stratospheric ozone leading to increased biological damage due to ultraviolet radiation, deforestation, degradation of landscapes and water resources, and loss of arable land, increasingly rapid loss of biodiversity, pressure on food security, and urban and social disintegration under the combined pressures of population, pollution and poverty.^{7,9} Ultimately, environmental degradation threatens human life support systems.

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8. Human impact on ecosystems are a function of the human population, levels of resource and energy consumption mediated by the technology in use, and are affected by feedbacks from the waste generated. These factors together affect Earth's capacity to support human existence.⁹
9. Resource shortages contribute to conflict, famine, disease, mass migrations and other human tragedies. The effects are disproportionately felt by the poor.¹⁰
10. Some of the drivers of environmental degradation, international and national wealth disparities and the modern epidemic of chronic disease are to be found in the current economic and political systems.^{11,12} Globalisation of economic activities can undermine efforts towards investments in public health and jeopardise efforts for environmental protection.^{13, 14}
11. The current pace of environmental change is unprecedented, rendering forecasts less certain and physical and social adaptation more difficult. The existence of multiple and concurrent environmental stresses (including interactions and synergies) may compound the effects and lead to irreversible effects.^{15, 16}
12. Implementing this policy would contribute towards the achievement of [UN Sustainable Development Goals 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing](#) , [11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities](#), [12 - Responsible Consumption and Production](#), and [13 - Climate Action](#).

PHAA seeks the following actions:

13. Incorporate protection of human health and ecosystems into trade, aid and production policies to break the cycle of indebtedness, poverty and high population growth in the poorest countries.
14. Concerted domestic action by all sectors to reduce ecologically unsustainable development, inequity and overconsumption of global and national resources.
15. Re-examination of urban and service planning to promote ecologically sustainable development.
16. Existing technologies and developments be re-evaluated according to current ecological sustainability criteria.

PHAA resolves to:

17. Promote ecologically sustainable socio-economic policies by:
 - a. Promoting the ecological determinants of health, recognising planetary boundaries, resource limits and human population pressures;
 - b. Taking action to reduce and prevent poor ambient air quality, and chemical and toxic exposures to human populations;
 - c. Developing policy proposals in relation to international agreements to support ecologically sustainable economic and social development.
18. Identify and promote indicators of ecological sustainability, social sustainability, public health and community well-being, as alternate measures of national and state prosperity to unidimensional economic measures.
19. Support action for the adoption of health impact statements as part of environmental impact statements and in budget and development proposals at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

References

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