FECCA Environment Policy Discussion Paper

Why an Environment Policy?

Environmental sustainability is fundamental to the health and welfare of all Australians. Environmental issues need to be addressed across all levels of government and society, and also in a manner that includes the richness and diversity of people that make up the Australian nation. Sustainability requires that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their needs¹.

A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that global warming is attributable to rising greenhouse gas concentrations. According to IPCC, global warming “is unlikely to be entirely natural origin” and the balance of evidence suggests a human influence.” Over the next 50 years this may adversely affect many aspects of living including our water, eco- and coastal systems, food production, health, and wider society with our most vulnerable communities being at greatest risk.²

Australia is currently one of the highest greenhouse gas emitting nations in the world on a per capita basis.

Considering the impact of climate change both nationally and globally, as a nation we have an opportunity to take a leading role in the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable practices and lifestyles. All Australians need to play their part to meet this challenge, including Australians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Social Implications

Climate change is not only an ecological and economic issue; it is also a social one. The effects of climate change can result in directly threatening basic human rights to life,
food, and a place to live and work. The UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights asserts that governments have an obligation to prevent and address the devastating consequences climate change can reap upon basic human rights.  

**FECCA’s View**

Environmental issues need to be addressed across all levels of government and society, in a manner that includes the richness and diversity that exists within the Australian community.

As the peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and a responsible contributor to social debate, FECCA wishes to develop a robust environmental policy that addresses and represents the wide-ranging environmental issues faced by all Australians.

Such a policy would seek to match FECCA’s broader philosophical position which promotes community harmony, social justice and human rights so that the Australian nation can move cohesively into a socially equitable but also environmentally sustainable future.

FECCA also wishes to see the development of comprehensive strategies for the people adversely affected by climate-change within Australia and in our surrounding regions, and also those nations potentially devastated by climate change in the Pacific islands.

**Water Policy**

Despite living on the driest inhabited continent on earth, Australians use more water per head than any other country on the planet. The Rudd Labor Government water policy incorporates an overarching national strategy that covers urban and rural water use and infrastructure 'in preparation for reduced water availability in the wake of

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4 Labor’s National Plan to tackle the Water Crisis. ALP Official policy 2007
climate change’. The policy statement acknowledges the role of farmers in land and water management and to this end pledges a consultative process with farmers, farming organisations and local communities to address the water crisis, with reference to drawing on local farmers’ knowledge to assist the transition to more sustainable water use in the Murray Darling Basin and throughout Australia.

Many Australian migrants originate from rural communities and consequently have a strong interest in issues related to sustainable farming. For example, many post-war Greek migrants were from rural areas where they had accumulated considerable expertise in being able to continue agricultural activities in harsh environments that had been intensely farmed and often badly degraded for over 2,000 years.

A significant segment of the Murray Darling River Basin’s horticultural industry comprises farmers who are first and second generation migrants. It is important that the Government in its water crisis national action plan extend consultations to include CALD farmers. One of the barriers to accessing information and knowledge is language. With most information in English it is difficult for some new migrants and refugees to access information on climate change mitigation initiatives can leave CALD communities excluded from the consultation process.

As CALD communities are being significantly affected, targeted programs are essential to ensure inclusion in environmental debates.

**FECCA Policy Options**

1. The targeted inclusion of CALD community consultations on water policy through the government’s water crisis national action plan;

2. Targeted environmental educational programs for CALD communities; and

3. The availability of translated material that is accessible for people from CALD and new and emerging communities on water conservation issues.

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5 Correspondence with Ross Tzannes, FECCA environmental advisor
Recycling

Recycling plays a central role in sustainable living by reducing the consumption of natural resources, improving energy use and in reducing the amount of waste going to landfill.

The Australian government has recently announced the development of a national waste policy to deal with Australia’s increasing volumes of waste. Despite recycling efforts and initiatives over the past years between 2003-2007 the amount of waste generated by Australians increased by 28 percent\(^6\).

Recycling is now a common practice among Australians and councils throughout Australia provide residents with recycling services. The Australian recycling industry is currently valued at around $12-15 billion, employing almost 11,000 people directly and another 27,000 indirectly with further industry growth predicted.\(^7\)

While the practice is not a new phenomenon in Australia, Federal legislation introduced in the 1990s and subsequent awareness raising campaigns have meant that many Australians have become more aware of the benefits of recycling and the services available with recycling becoming commonplace among many households.

Newly arrived migrants however may not be familiar with the practice of recycling if they are from a country where recycling is not common.

Recycling education therefore needs to be inclusive of CALD communities particularly, newly arrived migrants and refugees unfamiliar with the practice and benefits of recycling.


FECCA Policy Options

FECCA recommends the following measures raise awareness and educate new migrants and refugees on the importance of waste recycling:

1. Council waste management policy to extend education campaign to CALD communities by providing information in multiple languages
2. Resourcing for Environment Education Officers to be positioned in all ethnic community and multicultural councils
3. Increased funding for environment education officers for schools
4. The inclusion of recycling and environment education as part of newly arrived migrant and refugee on arrival training through Integrated Human Settlement Scheme (IHSS). This could include information on available recycling services.

Green Jobs

Green jobs or green-collar jobs that benefit a sustainable environment are predicted to boom in the 21st century. While the current financial crisis is having a negative impact on many industries, carbon markets grew by 81 per cent over the first nine months of 2008, reaching $US87 billion by the end of September.8

The United Nations and International Labour Organisation have launched a Green Jobs Initiative and in September 2008 released a comprehensive survey of the outlook for Green Jobs which is now being included in government policy across a number of nations such as UK, Germany and the USA.

The 2008 Green Gold rush report by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACR) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)\(^9\) identified six ‘green collar’ industries with potential for growth and development in Australia:

- Renewable energy
- Energy efficiency
- Sustainable water systems
- Biomaterials
- Green buildings
- Waste and recycling

According to the report stimulation of green industry by government has the potential to create up to 500,000 more jobs in Australia than what might otherwise occur.\(^10\)

The creation of green jobs across the identified key green collar industries in Australia has the potential to tap into a potentially lucrative market and provide jobs at a time of financial recession. Such a scheme requires training within the green industries that must be inclusive of CALD workers.

**FECCA Policy Options**

FECCA calls for a national green jobs and skills program that is inclusive of CALD workers to help secure Australia’s economic prosperity into the future.

**Education**

Education is fundamental to a socially progressive, cohesive, equitable and sustainable Australia. FECCA welcomes Australia’s strong participation in education initiatives such as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014),


\(^10\) Ibid.
and the National Action Plan for Environmental Education. The Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1977) clearly stated that environmental education needs a holistic approach aimed at problem solving and addressing community needs.

**Multicultural Environmental Education**

It has often been assumed that members of CALD communities do not have high levels of concern about environmental issues. In a 1997 study by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority titled *The Environment and NSW Ethnic Communities*, and the updated study in 2004 titled *Environment and Ethnic Communities*, it was found that this assumption is incorrect.\(^\text{11}\) When effectively communicated to, people from CALD communities had high levels of concern about environmental issues, particularly relating to the quality of the environment for future generations.

Involvement in environmental groups has often been from Anglo-Australian professional people, resulting in a culturally limited understanding of environmental issues and proposed solutions. The notion of environmental justice challenges this framework by advocating environmental rights for all, through action, empowerment, and environmental knowledge.

One aspect of environmental justice is what has been termed in the United States as **Multicultural Environmental Education** (MEE). MEE has been understood in a variety of ways which include: environmental education within culturally diverse groups; working with ethnic minorities in order to empower them to realise and claim their environmental rights; and as a pedagogy which promotes cross-cultural understanding, respect, and cooperation on environmental issues.\(^\text{12}\) One such initiative in Australia is the *Fostering Environmental Citizenship for Recently Arrived Migrants* project in NSW, which aims at empowering newly arrived immigrants regarding the local natural environment.

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\(^\text{11}\) Cultural Perspectives Pty Ltd (1997). *The Environment and NSW Ethnic Communities*; for the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and Sydney Water: Chatswood.

Environmental problems experienced by marginalised people are usually greater than, and differ from those of other groups.\textsuperscript{13} Compounding this problem is that perspectives of people from non-dominant cultures have been excluded, or played only marginal or insignificant roles in environmental education. A study undertaken in the United States of fourteen MEE programs however, found that the programs working within both a multicultural education and environmental justice framework, tended to be successful in addressing people from all cultural backgrounds, including those from dominant cultures.

National programs such as clean up Australia, and local recycling programmes should ensure material and information is accessible to people from CALD communities. On a practical level, education of environmental challenges could include education on water and energy conservation; recycling and how rubbish systems work, home and community gardening, in addition to relevant rules and regulations such as water restrictions. There is also evidence that some CALD communities need further education on the use and misuse of pesticides and herbicides.

However while we acknowledge the aims of MME as an important tool in addressing environmental issues, on a different level we feel that it is central that the environmental education discourse moves beyond looking for the most culturally appropriate or inherent ways of educating and empowering the multicultural communities’ on environmental issues, to adopting a more balanced approach in the curricula that acknowledges and incorporates the many environmental traits and knowledge that these communities bring with them.

FECCA Policy Options

As part of a comprehensive environmental policy, FECCA advocates

1. Incorporating Multicultural Environmental Education (MEE) principles into environmental education to equitably address the environmental needs of all Australians;

2. Developing a comprehensive and far-reaching education strategy specifically focused on the needs of peoples from CALD communities;

3. The development of culturally specific and culturally appropriate education programs designed to include members of CALD communities in understanding and knowledge of the complex environmental conditions, laws, responsibilities and practices of the Australian nation and its peoples.

Building Partnerships

Traditionally, Australian environment organisations have not thought of CALD communities as a source of expertise in sustainable farming. When seeking to influence decision making at the elite levels of government and business they may tend to work from a mainstream and mono-cultural level. This approach excludes environmental groups from the rich resources of environmental knowledge within CALD communities.

Environmental organisations need to build strategic partnerships with ethnic organisations for joint work on environmental issues. FECCA can provide a ‘bridging’ role between CALD communities and environmental organisations so they are able to draw on the wealth of untapped environmental knowledge held by members of many CALD communities.

Organisations that work with CALD communities on a regular basis know how to reach people and that is why strategic partnerships can be so important and successful. As Australia’s peak representative body of people from CALD communities FECCA and its
members have an important role to play here. They have the connections, skills and resources to disseminate information in culturally diverse to the benefit of CALD communities, environmental groups and government.

Environmental organisations FECCA could develop strategic partnerships with include:

1. **Climate Action Network Australia (CANA):** [http://www.cana.net.au](http://www.cana.net.au)
5. **Climate Institute:** [http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/)

**Population**

FECCA’s position is strongly in support of the implementation of a long-term population policy that incorporates the continuing flow of immigrants geared towards a sound economic, social, cultural and environmental future in which all Australians can prosper. Our ageing population and low birth rates mean that a well managed immigration program, taking into account environmental consideration and resources, remains central to Australia's economic strength.

FECCA does not support the view linking on-going managed immigration intakes and environmental degradation. We believe that increased immigration is conducive to economic growth which can also increase our capacity to economically invest in caring for our environment. Australia is part of a global community and environment and population issues need to be tackled at a global level and not by shutting Australia off from the rest of the world.

The scope for significantly improved environmental practices by the Australian population is expanding through greater environmental awareness and the use of
modern and developing technologies. This can lead for instance to lower per capita greenhouse emissions and lower per capita water use, as already exhibited by some new housing developments which incorporate appropriate sustainable water practices. Making these technologies widely available will lead to a reduced negative effect on the environment in per-capita terms and allow for continued population growth at reasonable levels.

However, with heightened concerns around environmental degradation, the Australian community will rightfully demand that population and economic growth be managed in a sustainable way. Governments must develop clear policies in this area to allay fears from more established Australian communities that on-going immigration programs are damaging our environment. More research and policy development is needed in this area.

FECCA believes that debates regarding population should therefore focus on the responsible use of resources, sound environmental practices and also incorporate Australia’s global responsibilities as a nation committed to human rights. Ultimately Australia must play its role in a global environment characterised by population and trade flows. A person contributes to greenhouse gas emission wherever they may live in the world. One of Australia’s key challenges is to get our per capita greenhouse gas emissions down to a more reasonable level. To argue that stopping immigration is the way to do this ignores the fact that Australia is part of a global community and greenhouse gas emissions is a global problem.
Australia’s Emissions Targets

According to the Garnaut Review\(^\text{14}\) fuel use in transport is a substantial source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 14 per cent of Australia’s emissions in 2005, and is growing rapidly with a projected increase of 67 per cent over 1990 levels by 2020.

Greenhouse gas emissions within the agricultural sector is also a major issue. Agriculture contributed 16.8 per cent of Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2005, making it the second largest emitting sector. Combined with energy and transport used by the agricultural sector this figure rose to 23 per cent.

Conversely, reductions in land clearing and the planting of new forests have been largely responsible for Australia coming close to meeting its Kyoto target of 108 per cent on 1990 levels by 2012 (PMTG, 2007). However, direct emissions have increased in all other sectors, particularly in the electricity, gas and water sector and mining, which increased by 46.9 per cent and 44.8 per cent respectively (AGO, 2007b).

The Australian economy is heavily reliant on both agriculture and forestry and predictions suggest the impact of climate change will have far reaching effects on these industries. Experience in rural communities during the current drought highlights the effect this is having at a social level such as increased workload, family conflict and withdrawal from social groups and communities.

FECCA believes that population and economic growth must also be sustainable growth. This has to involve the responsible use of resources, and sound environmental practices. Australia has a responsibility as a global citizen to address current practices that are contributing to increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Whereas the government has taken a positive step by committing to reduce emissions by 5% to 25% below 2000 levels by 2020, we feel that it can continue to strengthen its
emissions targets based on the responsibility it carries as a wealthy and developed nation.

FECCA believes that Australia must play a leading role in reducing its emissions and meeting set targets on per capita basis. Australia must also lead in the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable technologies, agricultural practices and lifestyles, which must be developed hand-in-hand with comprehensive adaptation strategies for those adversely affected by climate-change within Australia and the neighbouring regions.

Emissions Trading

A recent Australia Institute report highlights the potential impact of emissions trading on the community sector. The report suggests the Government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) could increase costs faced by the community sector by up to $1.1 billion per year.¹⁵

This report predicts that charities and the community groups are more likely to be affected if adequate compensation for increased fuel and electricity costs is not included in the strategy. Unlike for-profit organisations, not-for-profit organisations rely on donations to cover their operating costs and will neither be able to fund any cost increases nor pass them onto to their clients who are the most vulnerable groups in Australia.

Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, including some Australians from migrant and refugee backgrounds and particularly new arrivals, may also be adversely affected by greenhouse gas emission strategies, including for increased energy costs, and it is important they are adequately compensated so there disadvantage is not worsened.

While we acknowledge the urgent need to address climate change by implementing well thought out emission reduction measures, FECCA calls for a well designed compensation package to ensure community and not-for-profit organisations are adequately compensated.

The government should also assist not-for-profit organizations to take a lead in identifying and implementing ways of improving their environmental performance, including the purchase of low-fuel-consumption vehicles (where possible), to set a good example to the communities they engage with.

**Pacific Region**

In 2006 the Australian Labor Party released a Policy Discussion Paper on climate change in the Pacific titled: 'Our Drowning Neighbours' which advocated the establishment of an international coalition to accept climate change refugees. In 2007, the Australian Greens party introduced an Environmental Refugee Bill in the Senate, which though not passed into legislation yet may be re-introduced and debated in the future.

FECCA believes that Australia's position as a leading, wealthy and stable nation of the Pacific demands a higher level of responsibility to the peoples of poorer surrounding nations adversely affected by climate change.

**Impacts of Climate Change**

The predictions of the Stern Review estimate that 200 million people will be displaced by 2050 due to climate change, nearly half of whom will be from island states. The tiny Pacific island nation of Tuvalu is a distressing example of this devastation with around 3000 residents already being forced to flee their homes due to rising sea-levels. In 2001 the Tuvaluan Deputy Prime Minister told a UN conference that scientists have predicted that countries like Tuvalu will be totally submerged by 2050.

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FECCA believes that actions of the Australian government in assisting our Pacific neighbours with climate change prevention and adaptation strategies can help reduce the devastating impact of climate change on them.

This must involve long-term and whole-of-government commitments to comprehensive climate change strategies.

We commend the government in taking steps to address the issue through its commitment of $150 million over three years to assist countries assess and adapt to the likely impacts of climate change, and its support for a Pacific Climate Change Centre.

**FECCA Policy Options**

Adequately assisting peoples adversely affected by climate change requires:

1. Comprehensive adaptation strategies such as those currently being established by the Rudd Government;
2. A national and global commitment to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; and
3. The provision of increased aid to environmentally threatened nations.

**Environmental ‘Refugees’**

Australia’s place and position in the Pacific region demands that Australia plays a leading role in the development of environmental ‘refugee’ models. While the terms environmental ‘refugee’ and climate ‘refugee’ are not legally recognised, they hold particular saliency in Australia and generate a great deal of popular sentiment. As stated by Jean Lambert, ‘by recognising climate refugees you recognise the problem. By recognising the problem you start on the road to accepting responsibility and implementing solutions’. ¹⁷

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FECCA Policy Options

1. That the term 'environmental refugee' to be officially adopted by FECCA for peoples adversely affected by climate change;

2. That a category be established under Australia’s immigration program so peoples adversely affected by climate change, and particularly within our region, can be afforded similar rights to refugees under the United Nations' Convention on Refugees;

3. The 'environmental refugee' category maintains separate definitional and regulatory criteria, and generates separate aid allocation with its own immigration quantification and policy specification; and

4. That government introduces legislation enshrining positive and proactive policies on environmental refugees within our existing immigration policy and legislative framework.

Conclusion

FECCA is a socially responsible organisation that works towards a harmonious and just society for all Australians. In this capacity, it is important that FECCA develops a strong voice on environmental issues as these issues are inextricable from social issues.

FECCA is committed to developing an extensive understanding of environmental issues affecting the nation, and developing policies that promote a socially and environmentally sustainable and equitable future, for all Australians, including those from CALD backgrounds.

Australia does not have to close itself to the world and its diversity to effectively tackle our environmental challenges. Improved and sustainable environmental practices by all Australians can ensure a future for all Australians, from our indigenous first Australians, to our most recent arrivals.