

# Response to Climate Change in Western Australia: Issues Paper

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Dear Premier,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in discussions to formulate Western Australia's new climate policy.

In this paper we take a climate ethics standpoint, by understanding everyone and all species as part of 'community', a broadened concept which includes business. In this way we recognise community as multiple overlapping interests, being children and students, workers, the elderly, ecosystems (including oceans, wetlands, rivers, water, ranges, deserts and species), Indigenous cultures, business and families. From this perspective, no one group is privileged, and the interdependence of each is acknowledged. As a state, we cannot do without the health of any one of these interests or of the whole.

The inspiration for this position was in response to your separation between "business and the community" (p.6). This creates an awkward logical framework which prevents seeing issues in their wholeness – thereby limiting productive climate action. A climate ethics standpoint objects to any one interest being privileged where that privilege forecloses on other alternatives. Rather, we believe that a healthy, creative, engaged and innovative community should drive business in such a way that all interests are enhanced or at minimum, preserved.

## **Issues and opportunities for Western Australia**

Given clear climate responses such as fires, droughts, ecosystem collapse and heightened storm activity, it is clear that emergency action is needed. For this reason, we request the state of Western Australia to join other governments and states across the world and declare a climate emergency. What follows in this paper assumes government is fully aware of the need for immediate drastic action to address the multiple interests with now urgent needs.

In considering climate policy, it is important to remember we need children and students who embody our future; we need the elderly for their wisdom and connection to the past; we need Indigenous cultures as we are part of a land with a multi-millennial socio-ecological history; and we need ecosystems to live within and through, as much as we need business and government to bring together and regulate services for all of these interrelating interests. We endeavour to consider all of these interests as we prepare our response: not just business and a conflated ‘community’ which is understood to be less important than business.

It is important to understand that Western Australians want a clean energy future, and we want to be proud to live in a state that honours all of our interests.

### ***Transforming energy generation***

It seems to us that the main challenge in transforming energy generation relates to government vision and courage. Strong, visionary leaders (such as Gough Whitlam and Geoff Gallop) educate the public on how and why their vision for a healthy future is in the public interest – which explicitly includes each of these subsidiary interests which are equally important. This makes the notion of the public interest a national and international one, since climate is a result of the health (or otherwise) of each of these interests across jurisdictions.

Referring to challenges in decarbonising Western Australia’s electricity supply, it is imperative that powerful economic interests (such as coal and gas) do not claim privilege from any level of government on the basis that they have not responded to climate change imperatives before now. It is too late now – climate change science has been broadcast for over 30 years. Therefore governments need short, medium and long term targets for transition, with incentives, for immediate transition with no exemptions for corporations.

### ***Industry innovation***

#### **What are the barriers to decoupling energy use and emissions in the resources sector?**

The barriers are, quite simply, powerful economic interests who claim privilege for not having decoupled energy production from emissions production. There is the general myth that jobs for workers will be lost in the decoupling process, however this only happens in cases of poor planning, when ‘last stands’ are taken by unprepared corporations who often hold governments and the public to ransom using job loss as their threat. As we now know, there are many effective ways of producing energy with no carbon emissions other than in the production of the technology itself. This is a matter of government and industry planning for

transition from gas and coal fired energy production to renewable energy production. In Collie for instance, governments and industry have known for very many years that Collie's coal industry would need to transition to renewable energy generation, and Collie is perfectly located for wind and solar co-generation facilities, with job security using trials of suitable agricultural co-production using the grounds around the renewable energy infrastructure, and new cultural and ecological tourism ventures. (There is still time for this transition given Collie coal industry's proposed closure dates.) Government policy settings including incentives and disincentives are urgently required, along with immediate and medium term targets. The whole context requires public engagement and consultation, innovative thinking, creativity, flexibility and some degree of risk management.

Powerful economic interests must comply with international policy frameworks designed to regenerate multiple interests (such as ecosystems, water, rivers and Indigenous cultures) already damaged by previous policies. Being subject to international policies and goals relating to each of these interests is of primary concern, as is immediate transition. The time for dithering has passed; urgent action is now. The strongest possible government incentives and disincentives are essential here.

This clearly means no new industry that will extract more water from ground or other sources (such as fracking) or produce carbon emissions can be permitted, and those already in existence must be phased out quickly. We need an urgent transition to a philosophy of regeneration of ecosystems, cultures and local enterprise-based circular economy, based on renewable regeneration.

### *Future mobility*

**How can we further encourage use of public transport and active transport, such as walking and cycling? How can we ensure that Western Australia isn't left behind in the transition to cleaner transportation?**

All existing rail lines anywhere, in use or otherwise – such as in the wheat belt in the southwest – must be immediately recovered for public use and business interests. This is for public transport as well as for goods and services transport. All small towns with aging rail infrastructure – lines and stations – should be brought back into service first, and new stock purchased as quickly as possible. Road trucks currently hauling wheat, agricultural produce and mining products need to be taken off the roads as soon as possible. This will reduce wear and tear on roads (saving road maintenance costs) and lead to improved road safety as well as greatly reducing carbon emissions from improved transport infrastructure. This is part of a state transport infrastructure regeneration.

New stock for rail in metro areas can be brought into use as soon as possible. New buses and attention to bus routes can proceed at the same time as reduced public transport fare structures to encourage increased public use. And strong disincentives to driving to work and return need to be implemented. Car parks in the city can be transformed into beautiful parks and community gardens, supplying food for the population and ecosystem regeneration –

particularly wetlands now threatened. Filtering water for underground recharge can be part of this forward planning.

In terms of carbon-free public transport, greatly enhanced bicycle paths, resting places with water facilities and shade need to be planned and constructed. At the same time programs to encourage children to walk, ride and catch a bus to school such as ‘walking school bus’, and *Your Move* program need to have increased funding to support and encourage participation through schools. Environmental education strategies and sustainability plans for schools, public services and community development contexts are urgent and immediately required. Our state has no environmental education policies in place at the present time. Environment and sustainability education policy development needs to link with revision and enhancing of national and state education curriculum documents. There is an overarching curriculum priority of sustainability, however the NAPLAN distraction effectively removes the priority on sustainability and redirects efforts at passing tests (not learning).

In fact it is highly significant that our education systems at the present time orient children and our future towards narrow economic goals (the intent of NAPLAN) rather than holistic, artistic, creative and innovative thinking and action underpinned by social and cultural skills and knowledge. Aboriginal cultural knowledges for instance needs to underpin Western Australia’s curriculum – along with sustainability education – and these are both national education priorities. It is not common practice though. A focus on regeneration of the state must include as one of its platforms a reorientation of the state’s education system towards Aboriginal cultures and histories, and sustainable futures, from the early years to university. The time for this is overdue and urgently needed.

In the section on Future Mobility, we suggest the target of ‘sustainable growth’ of the city is an oxymoron – it is impossible because there is a limited city footprint, beyond which continuing ecosystem incursion occurs. Rather, population is needed in rural and regional towns to reduce rural decline. To enhance rural towns, improved public transport between the city and towns makes possible an enhanced tourist industry, improves food security by increasing labour supply for innovative agricultural developments, and facilitates regeneration of woodlands and threatened ecosystems through local hands-on actions such as landcare. The resulting widespread soil improvement and revegetation programs enable carbon sequestration, which improves as ecosystem health is restored. We recommend abandoning ‘sustainable growth’ as a mantra for city planning, and instead focus on rural and regional regeneration to serve all interests in our interrelated state.

### *Regional prosperity*

**How will climate change affect your regional community? How can we support the agricultural sector to participate in the low-carbon transition? What opportunities do carbon offset markets present for Western Australian land managers, including Aboriginal groups? What matters should the State Government take into account in developing a strategy for carbon farming in Western Australia?**

Climate change is already affecting each regional community in different ways, but in common is the fact that climate change is already producing ecosystem deterioration across the state in local, regional and city contexts. Chest infections and other diseases of the young and elderly are already increasing through increased smoke exposure and mosquitoes. Food security is already being impacted particularly in the north due to erratic climate conditions, floods which cut roads and increasingly severe storms damaging infrastructure and now droughts are causing ecosystem damage and there is already ongoing unbearable heat. Pre-season heat waves and fire catastrophes are occurring earlier and earlier each year. These are already happening – this is not futuristic. Severe water shortages are increasingly likely across the state. Without immediate action for change – of the type accompanying a declaration of emergency – this will continue to worsen and impact further groups and of course the economy with immediate impact in insurance and industrial and agricultural interruption.

In the Discussion Paper, the section on regional prosperity is limited by the circular questions and statements presented. For instance, the southwest is certainly drying as stated, however research shows that clearing of endemic species also causes drying climate, in addition to climate change. Complexity at all levels needs to be planned for and a platform of recent (and ongoing) transdisciplinary science and social science research to underpin decision-making, taking into account complexity across systems, is urgently required. These problems are popularly referred to as wicked problems and need to be understood and planned for at that level.

So we are saying that with current and future integrated transdisciplinary research, the first mitigation responses need to begin the task of ecosystem restoration – using Aboriginal cultural knowledge partnerships which are now available across the state – to enable regeneration of other dependent social, economic, cultural, ecological and agricultural systems. The key here is planning alongside integrated transdisciplinary system regeneration. Therefore carbon farming (of endemic ecosystems) is one of the strategies to support rural improvement, ecosystem health and initiatives aligned with new, smaller scale circular economic developments. This is a holistic way of planning for complex system renewal at multiple levels.

Therefore to answer the question of how the agricultural sector can participate in the low-carbon transition, a whole of system response that addresses multiple interests simultaneously is required. In the north, this means remote communities with appropriate native title holdings or Indigenous Protected Area access can build upon Aboriginal knowledges for landcare, ecosystem restoration, and scientific knowledge improvement for carbon sequestration through learning partnerships. In the southwest, the South West Native Title Settlement offers the same opportunities, facilitating carbon offset market development as the cornerstone of new economic-cultural-ecological policy development.

Therefore in developing a strategy for carbon farming, the interests of children and students, ecosystems (especially water planning), Indigenous cultures, businesses and families need to be taken into account. This means that schools, health infrastructure, policing, mechanical services, food security, public transport systems with local connections such as taxis and

multiple business types, need to be considered in developing a carbon farming strategy. This same principle applies at multiple levels.

### ***Waste reduction***

We appreciate the WA Government Waste Strategy's vision for Western Australia to become a sustainable, low-waste circular economy in which human health and the environment are protected from the impacts of waste. This needs to be implemented with much stronger targets and incentives, however. This includes plastic-free WA strategies, 100% of waste to be reused or recycled by 2030, and greatly increased environmental and sustainability education in schools, community contexts, businesses and tertiary contexts.

For instance all milk, wine and beer should be sold in glass bottles that are reusable with infrastructure and services in place to clean and return bottles to suppliers. All bread should be produced in local areas to reduce plastic bread bags, and full garden waste and food scraps should be locally composted. Strong incentives and disincentives, and stronger policies need to be implemented for these to be implemented in practice. We fully agree with the principle of circular economy expressed in the policy. The packaging companies supplying non-compostable or reusable products will need to adjust to the current climate context with good planning and research like other corporations.

### ***Safe and healthy communities***

Frameworks for locally- and regionally-based disaster planning need to be developed with urgency, including decisions relating to bodies and departments who will lead disaster responses and where stockpiles of provisions, foods, medicines and supplies of clean water are kept for massive storms, fires, droughts, floods and disease outbreaks. Each of these kinds of disasters are increasingly likely right across Western Australia. Fresh water for present and future needs is an imperative for planning and action in the short, medium and longer term. Personnel need to be trained and ready across the system so that generalists and specialists are available with resources to act. These plans need to be publicly and locally produced, with the resulting plans publicly available so that in such a situation the response is known and leadership is immediate.

### ***Water security***

Planning needs to commence as soon as a climate emergency is called, for water security in the short, medium and longer term. Water security needs to be planned more broadly than is normally understood, so that water for all interests is catered for, for the benefit of the system of connections of which people and places are part. Huge strides have been taken in Aboriginal water governance research in recent times, and this needs to be the basis for water planning and action. The time for privileging powerful economic interests is past. These often result in carbon emissions or downstream costs and this is no longer bearable at any level. Rather, decision-making and government action of the type which takes into account the

needs of all interests particularly the ecosystems upon which we all depend, is vital. There are no substitutes.

Groundwater use and recharge is part of the big picture of planning and renewal of practices. Lawns in summer need to be banned across Western Australia, and other wasteful uses such as hose-squirting cars for cleaning. Water education – in a context of environmental and sustainability education in public services, community development, schools and other institutions – is vital for changed public and government ecological literacy and practices. People need to understand that water is a precious resource. Healthy environmental water is seen by Indigenous people to be living and connected to underground and above ground waters, with big picture stories that help set rules for proper engagement with the spirituality, sacredness and mundaneness of water – that all Western Australians need to learn. We live in a state with a multi-millennial human history. We need to learn and understand Aboriginal ways of relating to our local places, and this needs to begin in the early years and continue through education to university level, and beyond into community development and public services at local and state level.

### *Liveable towns and cities*

Liveable towns and cities foreground ecosystem health and plan for health, exercise, education, housing and services on a needs-basis, rather than a wants-basis. There is sufficient space in this world for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed. Architecture and planning for low energy buildings, towns and cities come to the fore in renovating and building houses which do not need air-conditioning whatever the weather.

Again, environmental and sustainability education and planning is essential for liveability at the same time as climate change mitigation and adaptation. For instance, why do people believe they have a right to air conditioning? How did this situation arise? It is scarcely 40 years since air conditioners were being installed in the first schools, homes and offices. Parents complain if schools do not run air conditioning or their children feel hot, and public servants cannot imagine their offices without air conditioning. In fact it is astounding that air conditioning is often year-round, such as shopping centres. This seems to be such an unfortunate problem of modernity. Rather, it should be that average citizens do not need air conditioning – particularly schools. Rather, buildings need to reflect sustainability principles – as they did in the past in this state. Sustainable architecture is now considerably advanced and low-carbon retrofitting should commence immediately with government subsidies, targets and incentives. Big infrastructure needs to be prioritised. This is an economic task with substantial benefit across the multiple interests, particularly the workers.

In Australia people need to understand that summers are hot, winters are cold and we adjust for it. Shade and water provision perhaps outside under trees are highly significant and cater to everyone's needs. Urban forests and ecosystem renewal (which can integrate food security) is a very important part of this planning and implementation.

### ***Resilient infrastructure and businesses***

It is true that resilient infrastructure and services are crucial for climate change resilience, now and into the future. Sustainable architecture along with local and regional sustainability planning according to the transdisciplinary multi-interest regeneration principles described in this paper is essential. The process of engagement across the departments, agencies, businesses and representatives of interests is itself a learning process. Sustainability research shows that the process itself is often part of the outcome.

Economic prosperity is an outcome of a healthy system which includes all of the interests. In other words it is not planning for economic prosperity if the principles of recognition of multiple interests are not adhered to. Costs associated with climate change cannot be tolerated in any way by any of the interests, which only benefit when the whole interconnected system of interests benefits. Governments and the population need to consider that ignoring even one group of interests (such as Aboriginal knowledges which embed care of ecosystems upon which we all depend) is deleterious to health, home and economy.

### ***Protecting biodiversity***

Climate policy begins with, and centralises biodiversity as described above. It is the cornerstone for system regeneration at the level of benefit to all interests. It is essential for mitigation against and adaptation to climate change. The new climate policy needs to address all interests with an imperative upon to every Western Australian to engage with landscapes and commitment to regeneration and renewal of practices to take this into account.

### ***Strengthening adaptive capacity***

Finally, adaptive capacity needs to be improved beyond all current measure and expectations. The opportunity to have input into – and be part of – climate policy has been a huge task over a great many years by a great many concerned citizens. When the policy is finalised – and the connected policies such as environmental and sustainability education are in place – the government needs to engage fruitfully and educationally to ensure coordination across and between the various systems. This is an ongoing process, in that continuing conversations and learning is integral to policy implementation and ongoing renewal.

With many local government areas grappling with Urban Heat Island Effect through loss of canopy and increased hard surfaces such as car parks and roads, with some having only 9% canopy and over 60% hard surface, an overall strategy needs to be put in place to ensure increased canopy targets are met. This strategy requires all landholders, private and government, to work collaboratively to reach the targets. School bushland is included in Local Government audits and protection of these assets and offers an opportunity for best practise environmental education and through citizen science and health and well being curriculums.