

Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

The "White Paper - call for submissions" consultation paper contains a number of key policy questions around which the strategic framework for the White Paper will be built. These are repeated below. Submissions addressing these key questions and any or all of the others posed throughout the paper are invited by Friday 22nd June.

What are the environmental, social and economic values provided by healthy land and biodiversity?

The traditional owners of this and many other lands on earth were, and still are aware of how the land and all its' key components function as a web. Every strand of the web of life is linked and to upset or destroy one affects the whole. It has taken the European settlers of this country a long time to recognize this fact, but I believe it is finally starting to happen.

The environmental values provided by a healthy land and greater biodiversity are a restoration of the fundamental cycles necessary to sustain all life; healthy water, air and soil.

Some social values provided by a healthy land and biodiversity are; aesthetic, improved physical and mental health, greater recreational opportunities.

Economic values provided by a healthy land and biodiversity are; greater carrying capacity resulting from a healthier soil, improved water quality, less reliance on pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers and diversification into other agribusinesses, tourism etc.

What impacts will climate change have on these values?

Climate change will increase the likelihood of adverse weather events such as El Niño, floods, wildfire causing increasing stresses on environmental services resulting in less food production. An increasingly hostile outdoor environment will impact on all aspects of human life such as energy use, water availability, ultimately law and order, right down to outdoor recreation, tourism potential etc.

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What are the other threats and opportunities?

We have a golden opportunity to improve land health and biodiversity by implementing renewable energy targets, legislating environmental initiatives into building construction, implementing an incentive payment system for landholders to provide land for environmental services, such as planting wood lots, retaining remnant wood land, installing perennial pastures, fencing off waterways, abandoning slash and burn for pasture stubble, direct drill seeding rather than ploughing.

We need to source our energy from a range of renewable sources rather than any specific form, then and only then should we look at nuclear power if at all necessary. Reliance on coal fired power stations should be phased out.

By implementing a payment scheme individual home owners could install renewable energy in their home and sell excess back into the grid. Low cost loans and incentive schemes could help interested individuals and companies install renewable energy systems.

All new constructions should have compulsory water and energy saving devices installed such as grey water systems, water saving shower heads, ceramic washers for taps and this could be extended to solar hot water systems, compulsory wall insulation, rain water tanks and more energy efficient building plans.

An efficient integrated public transport system would reduce reliance on private motor vehicles. Incentives could be offered to help people upgrade their vehicles to petrol alternatives.

Individuals and companies who need to offset their carbon emissions (ultimately all of us) need to be prepared to pay. This may mean a combination of buying into carbon credits, paying more for services and products and paying land holders and primary producers for providing environmental services such as erosion control, replanting and retaining remnant native vegetation etc.

We need to be prepared to pay our primary producers to undertake sustainable land management practices. This means paying a higher price for their produce and by providing greater incentives to do things sustainably. The NSW government landcare program has an excellent incentive scheme to this end, which is worth looking at.

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What are the roles and responsibilities of individuals, community and government and how can we maximise the effectiveness of our joint effort?

Individuals need to become more aware of the impact their actions have and need to understand that their actions do have effects and repercussions.

Communities can be galvanized by individuals in their midst, to take more positive actions towards a sustainable future, we need to seek out these individuals and empower them to act. This could start at local community level then local groups, council, local business, state government bodies etc.

Government needs to be working with people at all levels to encourage adoption of a more sustainable lifestyle, through advertising, incentives, joint community/business actions, funding and coordination and finally legislation when all else fails.

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How well are the current institutional arrangements working and how could they be improved to deliver sustainable land, water and biodiversity outcomes?

There are too many bodies responsible for too many different aspects of land and water management, there not coordinated.

Funding mechanisms are too slow and complicated and not enough.

There is too much emphasis on bureaucratic administration and not enough on providing hands on effective, permanent staff and equipment to get the job done. Eg pest and weed control on private and public land.

There is an over reliance on volunteers without providing effective coordination between them.

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