

## GREENHOUSE POLICY

***This policy was endorsed (in principle) by the 1992 NCC Annual Conference.***

### 1. DEFINITION

The greenhouse effect is a phrase that has come into common usage in referring to the build up of specific gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, CFCs, nitrous oxide, and ozone in the earth's atmosphere.

Each of these gases is accumulating in the atmosphere at increasing rates due to human activity, and each is causing an increase in the temperature of the earth to a varying extent.

### 2. PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The current level of emissions of greenhouse gases is ecologically unsustainable.
- 2.2 The responsibility for reduction of greenhouse emissions is global, national, and local and cuts across all segments of the private and public sectors.
- 2.3 The solutions to the greenhouse problem are multifaceted and relate to a wide range of issues such as:
  - industrial development
  - energy use
  - transport
  - waste management
  - consumerism
  - ecological sustainability
  - population
- 2.4 Due to the immediacy of the problem, both preventative and adaptive approaches are essential. It is necessary to cut back on the levels of emissions, and it is also necessary to mitigate the impacts of the climate change that is inevitable due to the large accumulation of greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere, or that will be emitted before effective reduction commences.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

- 3.1 To recommend legislation, policy and procedural changes to all levels of government.
- 3.2 To recommend ways of bringing about attitudinal and behavioural changes in the community.

## 4. TARGETS

In light of the potentially catastrophic worst-case scenario, an ecologically acceptable level of greenhouse gas emission reduction must be achieved. To establish ecologically acceptable targets, expressed in terms of a specified reduction for each of the types of greenhouse gases over a specified number of years, much work still needs to be done - particularly in understanding the sources and "sinks" of non- CO<sub>2</sub> gases.

While such investigation should proceed without delay, we cannot afford to wait for these results before embarking upon a quest for significant emission reduction. Rather we should adopt a precautionary approach. For example:

The reduction identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as necessary just to stabilise the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere at present-day levels, is in the order of 60-80% - immediately. Comparable levels of reduction for the other greenhouse gases were similarly identified.

A target of this magnitude should be adopted by Australia as the minimum reduction required, based on best available information, and pursued with the urgency it deserves.

Further, it should be noted that, while a 60-80% immediate-reduction target is far superior to the 20% by 2005 target which has received so much attention to-date, it is likely to prove necessary to revise this target upward even further - especially if it is later determined that emission reduction to pre-industrial (1750-1800) levels is required.

Moreover, since the need identified by the IPCC for a 60-80% reduction was based on the global aggregate, and because industrialised countries presently make a disproportionately large contribution to total global emissions, and for them to be in-keeping with the principle of intragenerational equity (as expounded in *Our Common Future* and elsewhere), the emissions reduction required of industrialised countries should be far greater than 60-80%.

Anything less than this will ensure the industrialised world, which includes Australia, remains reliant upon impoverished countries emitting disproportionately less than they do.

For all the reasons given above, a CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target, which is truly acceptable from an ecological and intragenerational equity perspective, would need to be in excess of 90% for Australia. Targets of a similar magnitude should apply to all other human-generated greenhouse gases.

### 4.1 NSW Government targets

The Toronto target of reducing current CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 20% of 1988 levels by the year 2005 has been adopted by the NSW Government.

However, the discussion paper "A greenhouse strategy for NSW" states that this target will be "reassessed on a regular basis" and ignores targets for the other

greenhouse gases. For example, "we will be hard pressed to do much about the release of nitrous oxide" reports the NSW Government.

#### 4.2 Australian Government targets

A joint statement, "Government Sets Targets for Reductions in Greenhouse Gases", issued on 11 October 1990, indicated that "the Commonwealth Government has adopted an interim planning target to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 20% (of 1988 levels) by the year 2005."

However, the statement also indicated "the Government will not proceed with measures which have net adverse economic impacts nationally or on Australia's trade competitiveness in the absence of similar action by major greenhouse gas producing countries."

While the targets of the Commonwealth and NSW Governments are clearly miserable when compared with reduction levels identified by the IPCC, the Montreal Protocol, which sets a target of phasing out CFCs and halons completely by 1998, has been adopted by the Australian Government. This demonstrates what is possible.

#### 4.3 The NCC calls upon the Commonwealth Government to:

- 4.3.1 Act quickly to ratify the Convention on Climate Change signed at the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992.
- 4.3.2 Maintain its current piecemeal commitment to a 20% reduction in order to at least initiate some action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 4.3.3 Give the highest priority to establishing far more ambitious targets to dramatically reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions in keeping with the reductions identified by the IPCC.
- 4.3.4 Ensure that any such targets apply without escape clauses and are unconditional.
- 4.3.5 Ensure that any long-term targets be supported by interim targets for periods of between one and three years.
- 4.3.6 Implement comprehensive planning using legislative controls at both a Commonwealth and State level.
- 4.3.7 Translate overall targets into emission reduction targets for the industrial, commercial and residential sectors.
- 4.3.8 Cease pursuing activities which contribute to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, such as, the wholesale clearing of forests and the subsidisation of the car industry.
- 4.3.9 Achieve a total phase-out of CFCs as soon as possible by upgrading the Ozone Protection Act 1988.

4.3.10 Commit financial and human resources to the development of performance indicators, precise milestones and to ongoing monitoring, with full public access and right to comment and review the effectiveness of the strategies in meeting the targets.

4.3.11 Adopt strategies to meet the agreed targets, rather than, as implied by both Governments, targets reviewed to meet the success of the strategies.

4.3.11 Ensure that the process and the results of any monitoring are open to the public with opportunity for comment and review.

## **5. STRATEGIES TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

The following sections discuss some of the measures which need to be adopted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Funding for such measures could, for example, be raised by applying a 1% (say) levy on all fossil fuel consumed in NSW.

### **5.1 Energy Production**

The NCC recommends:

5.1.1 Current levels of coal consumption be accepted by Government as the maximum and that yearly targets be set for reduction to encourage energy conservation.

5.1.2 Government give top priority to phasing-out the use of brown coal.

5.1.3 There be a decrease in the total export of coal, with an increasing proportion to third world countries.

5.1.4 Development and promotion of technologies that eliminate or have reduced dependence on coal-based energy.

5.1.5 Greater efficiency in the provision of energy from coal be encouraged.

5.1.6 Research and development funding to, and commercial awareness of, renewable sources of energy production be increased.

5.1.7 The use of non fossil sources of energy such as solar, wind and hydro power be vigorously promoted by fiscal, regulatory and marketing strategies.

5.1.8 The promotion of co-generation and facilitation of its use.

### **5.2 Reduction and changing patterns of Energy Use.**

The NCC urges:

5.2.1 The NSW Government to cease extension of the electricity grid to remote areas of NSW where the provision of renewable energy equipment would cost less.

5.2.2 The establishment of a task force to: identify, promote public and commercial awareness of, and facilitate the development of, tradeable goods and services in renewable sources of energy production.

5.2.3 The introduction of effective standards and legislation for the design, manufacture, marketing and labelling of energy efficient:

- housing
- cars
- appliances
- public transport
- industrial processes

The NCC recommends:

- the phasing-in of new buildings standards,
- the promotion of wood from environmentally acceptable sources as the preferred building material,
- appropriate fiscal and other economic incentives and disincentives to accelerate the implementation of such strategies.

5.2.4 Reduction of energy use in the industrial sector by reducing consumption of manufactured goods, especially those which are disposable and non-essential.

5.2.5 The application of least cost utility planning strategies to promote fossil fuel based energy conservation.

### **5.3 Changes to Transport**

Road transport fuels are responsible for 21% of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Australia.

The NCC calls for:

5.3.1 An integrated transport system with priority being given to rail and other fixed track systems for the mass transport of people and bulk goods, supported by mass transit systems on roads, and greatly upgraded sea, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

5.3.2 Urgent conversion of the freight industry away from road, to a rail based mode, backed up by interstate sea transport.

5.3.3 Removal of fiscal and other biases against rail and sea transport.

5.3.4 The evaluation of all government grants for transport to be carried out in terms of their greenhouse gas emissions.

5.3.5 The use of S 96 powers to promote, and immediately switch priority to, the expansion of rail and sea based freight systems.

- 5.3.6 The expansion of public passenger transport systems based on core-rail modes and supported by road-based public rapid transit.

#### **5.4 Changes to Agriculture**

Agriculture is responsible for most of the methane emissions and for a significant proportion of the nitrous oxide. The predicted growth for energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent contributions are 4%.

The NCC calls for:

- 5.4.1 The promotion of alternative non-fossil fuel based energy within the agriculture sector.
- 5.4.2 The introduction of economic incentives for revegetation and agro-forestry, and a moratorium on broad-acre clearing of native vegetation.
- 5.4.3 Research as to the relative contribution of greenhouse gases from the different sectors of agriculture.
- 5.4.4 Research as in 5.4.3 be well publicised and open to public comment.
- 5.4.5 A reduction in the use inorganic fertilisers, and in particular, anhydrous ammonia.
- 5.4.6 Cessation of the current widespread practise of burning biomass (eg. stubble).
- 5.4.7 Large-scale revegetation of agricultural lands in the context of Total Catchment Management (TCM) and the promotion of agro-forestry "carbon sinks".
- 5.4.8 Expansion of timber plantations with no further clearfelling of native forests.

#### **5.5 Changes to Industry**

The NCC recommends:

- 5.5.1 Mandatory energy-use goals be set for all industrial and commercial energy consumers.
- 5.5.2 All such energy consumers carry out an energy audit at least every five years.
- 5.6 Planning

The NCC calls on Governments to:

- 5.6.1 Establish comprehensive zoning plans to co-ordinate development and conservation.
- 5.6.2 Increase funding to ensure there is an adequate conservation system of parks, reserves, buffer zones, botanical gardens, zoos and gene banks for the purpose of maintaining biodiversity in response to climate change.
- 5.6.3 Implement a greenhouse gas reduction strategy with clear goals, priorities, and a timetable for reduction.

- 5.6.4 Develop integrated land-use planning systems that enable the economically efficient and environmentally beneficial use of present, natural resources and limit the expansion of urbanisation and infrastructure development in outer suburban areas.

The NCC calls on Local Government to:

- 5.6.5 Participate in TCM planning in order to promote the more efficient use of water and the mitigation of the adverse impact of flooding, urban run-off and stormwater disposal in response to predicted instability of rainfall patterns.
- 5.6.6 Adopt greenhouse gas reduction strategies at a local level in terms of: land use and planning, energy efficiency in buildings, vegetation conservation and tree planting, waste reduction etc.

### **5.7 Waste Minimisation**

Waste minimisation should not be confined to material waste. Rather, it should also consider energy as waste and aim to reduce energy use (as per the NCC Waste Minimisation Strategy).

The NCC calls for:

- 5.7.1 Each level of government to adopt the NCC Waste Minimisation Strategy and implement the actions required of them.

## **6. MITIGATING THE GREENHOUSE EFFECTS**

The NCC calls on the Federal Government to:

- 6.1 Co-operate with the International Climate Change programs to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- 6.2 Review and adapt Australian aid programs according to changing needs.
- 6.3 Participate in planning towards international disaster and insurance strategies.
- 6.4 Review Australia's population numbers while having regard for our obligations to international refugee programs.
- 6.5 Support family planning education programs.
- 6.6 Identify altered infrastructure needs in terms of an expanding or declining economy.

The NCC calls on the State Government to:

- 6.7 Develop a public awareness program to ensure behaviours that will mitigate as well as adapt to the effects of climate change.
- 6.8 Develop strategies to cope with predicted effects such as flooding, altered river flows and water supplies.
- 6.9 Develop and implement TCM strategies that include provisions for greenhouse effects.

6.10 Identify altered infrastructure needs in terms of an expanding or declining economy.

The NCC calls on Local Government to:

6.11 Develop strategic plans to identify and adapt to demographic changes and the consequent social impact in terms of infrastructure needs, community values and economic activities eg.

- identify population shifts, and,
- identify altered infrastructure needs in terms of an expanding or declining economy.

6.12 Encourage local organisations to develop educational and community awareness programs to help people become aware of the environmental and social implications of climate change.

6.13 Review local health, building and development codes in terms of their relation to the greenhouse problems.

## **7. INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL STRATEGIES**

The NCC urges the Federal Government to:

7.1 Provide assistance to developing nations to move to renewable energy systems and phase-out CFC use.

7.2 Support debt-for-nature swaps with the Third World.

7.3 Support large-scale international tree planting programs.

7.4 Participate in aid programs that will demonstrate how tropical forests and other endangered habitats can be developed without being destroyed.

## **8. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

8.1 Prevention

The NCC urges all levels of government to promote community awareness that individuals can make a difference by:

- reducing the amount of energy used in the home,
- using alternative sources of energy,
- decreasing their use of cars,
- increasing their use of public transport,
- walking or riding a bicycle,
- avoiding plastics, polystyrene and aerosols,

- reducing, reusing and recycling products/materials - in that order of priority,
- rejecting unnecessary packaging,
- eating fresh rather than refrigerated, heated, or preserved foods,
- joining a local community action group.

End Note: An additional policy to be developed in relation to this policy is **Biomass Burning**.