

Advocating for the Care and Protection of the Environment through Ecologically Sustainable Development

Written by Georgy Hadwen – HOPE Researcher Qld

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Understanding Ecologically Sustainable Development



Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) is an holistic approach aimed at integrating economic, environmental, social, and equity considerations into decision-making processes. The core objective of ESD is to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This approach ensures that development is balanced and resources are managed efficiently and responsibly.

Australian Policy and position



The Australian government states it has a long-standing commitment to Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD), which is a key principle of Australian environmental policy. ESD is defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" ([Brundtland Commission, 1987](#)).

The Australian government's position on ESD is outlined in various documents, including:

- ¹The Australian Government's ESD Strategy (1992): This document sets out the government's commitment to ESD and provides a framework for achieving it. The strategy emphasizes the need for an holistic approach to decision-making, considering the social, economic, and environmental implications of policies and actions.
- ²The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act): This act is the primary piece of legislation governing environmental protection in Australia. The EPBC Act requires the Australian Government to consider the potential environmental impacts of its actions and decisions, and to take into account the principles of ESD.
- ³The National Environmental Science Program (NESP): This program is a collaborative effort between the Australian Government and the research community to provide scientific advice on environmental issues. The NESP has a strong focus on ESD, and its research programs aim to support the development of sustainable environmental policies and practices.
- ⁴The Australian Government's Climate Change Policy: The government's climate change policy recognizes the importance of ESD in addressing climate change. The policy aims to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions while also promoting sustainable development and economic growth.

Key aspects of the Australian government's policy on ESD include:

1. Integration of ESD into decision-making: The government aims to integrate ESD principles into all levels of decision-making, from policy development to project implementation.
2. Holistic approach: The government recognizes the need for an holistic approach to decision-making, considering the social, economic, and environmental implications of policies and actions.
3. Stakeholder engagement: The government encourages stakeholder engagement and participation in decision-making processes to ensure that ESD principles are considered and implemented effectively.
4. Research and monitoring: The government supports research and monitoring programs to improve our understanding of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of ESD policies and practices.
5. Education and training: The government provides education and training programs to support the development of ESD skills and knowledge among government agencies, businesses, and communities.

The Australian government's policy on ESD is contingent and based upon, the principles of:

- sustainability,
- equity, and
- social justice.

The government articulates it recognises the importance of ESD in achieving a more sustainable future for Australia and the global community.

The Precautionary Principle



The Precautionary Principle

Central to ESD is the precautionary principle. This calls for proactive measures in the face of scientific uncertainty and underscores collective as well as personal responsibility. This entails the imperative to protect the public from potential harm when there is plausible risk, even if comprehensive scientific knowledge is not yet available.

Policymakers use this principle to justify decisions aimed at safeguarding the environment and public health, relaxing these protections only when new scientific evidence confirms the absence of harm.

The precautionary principle has gained significant traction internationally, first endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in the 1982 World Charter for Nature and subsequently implemented through the 1987 Montreal Protocol. Its integration into numerous international treaties, such as the Rio Declaration and the Kyoto Protocol, highlights its critical role in global environmental governance. [The Welsh government](#) led the world in exercising this prerogative and introduced future proofing into its legislature in 2019

Principles of Environmental Management

Principles of Environmental Management serve as essential guidelines for protecting the environment. These principles are designed to be followed by citizens, companies, organizations, industries, and governments. They are instrumental in driving sustainable development across various sectors, including agriculture, mining, construction, and oil and gas.

The advantages of these principles are far reaching and multifaceted:

1. **Environmental Protection:** These principles are fundamental in preserving our natural environment, ensuring that ecosystems remain intact and biodiversity is protected.
2. **Policy Interpretation:** They provide a framework for interpreting policies, challenging government actions, and guiding local authority decision-making, ensuring that environmental considerations are always at the forefront.
3. **Community and Goal Setting:** Environmental principles offer valuable information to meet community needs and assist in setting environmental goals, fostering a more informed and engaged public.
4. **Sustainable Development Platform:** They lay a foundation for sustainable development by ensuring that environmental sustainability is a key consideration in development projects.
5. **Guidelines for Decision-Makers:** By providing clear guidelines, these principles help decision-makers create laws and policies that protect the environment, balancing development with conservation.
6. **Economic Growth and Development:** Proper application of these principles leads to sustained economic growth by promoting efficient resource use and reducing environmental degradation.
7. **Reduction of Environmental Accidents:** Adhering to environmental management principles reduces the likelihood of environmental accidents, enhancing the reputation of companies and organizations that commit to sustainable practices.

In summary



The care and protection of our environment hinges on the effective implementation of Ecologically Sustainable Development and the adherence to the precautionary principle.

By integrating these concepts into our decision-making processes and following the principles of environmental management, we can all ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future

generations. This commitment not only safeguards our natural resources but also fosters sustained economic growth and improved quality of life, creating a legacy of responsible stewardship for the environment.

References

[1. The Australian Government's ESD Strategy \(1992\)](#) - A Framework for Action. Department of the Environment, Sport, the Arts and Territories.

This document is available on the Australian Government's Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website.

[2. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 \(EPBC Act\)](#) - This act is available on the Australian Government's Federal Register of Legislation website. See Federal Register of Legislation.

[3. The National Environmental Science Program \(NESP\)](#) - Department of the Environment and Energy.

Information about the NESP is available on the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Energy website.

[4. The Australian Government's Climate Change Policy](#)

This policy is available on the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Energy website.