

# EHA POLICY



## EHA Environmental Protection Policy

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### 1. Background

The environmental health profession focuses on '...those aspects of human health ... that are determined by physical, chemical, biological and social factors in the environment' (enHealth 1999). Consequently, maintaining a healthy environment is a fundamental aspect of environmental health and a key focus of environmental health professionals. This is reflected in the vision of Environmental Health Australia (EHA) which is to 'enhance the practice of the environmental health professional to provide a healthy safe and attractive natural, built and social environment for all the communities of Australia'.

### 2. Purpose

This policy articulates EHA's position in relation to environmental protection matters and identifies relevant actions EHA intends to undertake to help achieve its vision.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to general environmental protection matters. EHA policies that address specific environmental issues (e.g. climate change) should be read in conjunction with this policy.

This policy is supported by Environmental Health Australia Ltd (EHA) and all of its member associations.

### 4. Policy Principles

EHA affirms the following principles:

1. The natural and built environment impacts on human health. Consequently, the environment should be protected and managed in a way that creates a healthy environment for all people.
2. To the extent possible, pollution should be dealt with in the following order:
  - Avoid causing pollution;
  - Recycle the pollutant;
  - Minimise pollution;
  - Manage pollutants so their impact is minimised.

3. EHA supports the goal, objectives and principles of sustainable development set out in the National Strategy for Ecological Sustainable Development (NSED) (extract attached as appendix 1).
4. EHA encourages all levels of government to develop and implement policy, legislation and programs in a manner that best achieves sustainable development.
5. EHA encourages all levels of government to act in accordance with the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) including the principles of environmental policy (extract attached as appendix 2).
6. Environmental health professionals play a critical role in environmental protection matters and therefore have an interest in all legislative frameworks that affect environmental protection outcomes. Consequently, it is essential that all levels of government consult EHA when developing or altering legislation that affects environmental protection outcomes.
7. EHA acknowledges our responsibility to sustainably manage natural resources. Consequently, EHA will act in a sustainable manner and encourages other organisations to do so.

## 5. Actions

8. EHA advocate for the protection of the environment having regard to the principles detailed above. Advocacy actions include proactive engagement with government and private organisations, and coordinated submissions regarding government policy and legislation.
9. EHA review the role of environmental health professionals in relation to environmental protection matters including policy and legislation development and implementation, program development and implementation, community education and pollution response.
10. EHA enhance the skills and knowledge of environmental health professionals, by including environmental protection in the requirements for EHA accredited courses, offering professional development opportunities, communicating key information and supporting environment special interest groups (SIGs).
11. EHA support research regarding environmental protection, particularly research that is relevant to the environmental health profession.
12. EHA promote and/or develop environmental protection resources for environmental health professionals.

## 6. Definitions

### ***Environment***

Environment includes:

- (a) Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; and
- (b) Natural and physical resources; and
- (c) The qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas; and
- (d) Heritage values of places; and
- (e) The social, economic and cultural aspects of a thing mentioned in paragraph (a), (b), (c) or (d). (s.528 *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).

Note: this policy focuses on (a) – (c) above.

### ***Environmental health***

The physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors that can potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments.

Environmental health involves those aspects of public health concerned with the factors, circumstances, and conditions in the environment or surroundings of humans that can exert an influence on health and well-being. (enHealth 2014).

'Environmental health '... is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments' (WHO n.d.).

### ***Environmental protection***

The protection of the environment.

### ***Pollution***

The release of gas, liquid, solid, heat, noise or radiation which has an adverse impact on the environment.

Note: this policy focuses on anthropogenic (i.e. man-made) pollution.

### ***Sustainability***

The capacity to endure, the ability of a system to maintain processes, functions, biodiversity and productivity into the future.

### ***Sustainable development***

'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (The World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

## **7. References**

Department of the Environment and Energy, *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/esd/publications/intergovernmental-agreement> (accessed 22 April 2018).

Department of the Environment and Energy, - *Part 1, National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/esd/publications/national-esd-strategy-part1#GoalsEtc> (accessed 22 April 2018).

Department of Health, Overview of Environmental Health, 16 September 2014  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-envhlth-index.htm> (accessed 27 March 2017).

The World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

World Health Organisation n.d. *Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health*, [http://www.who.int/topics/environmental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/environmental_health/en/) (accessed 22 April 2018).

## Appendix 1

Extract from the National Strategy for Ecological Sustainable Development:

*The Goal is:*

Development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.

*The Core Objectives are:*

- to enhance individual and community well-being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations
- to provide for equity within and between generations
- to protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems

*The Guiding Principles are:*

- decision making processes should effectively integrate both long and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations
- where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation
- the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies should be recognised and considered
- the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environmental protection should be recognised
- the need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner should be recognised
- cost effective and flexible policy instruments should be adopted, such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms
- decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues which affect them

## Appendix 2

Extract from the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE):

3.1 The parties agree that the development and implementation of environmental policy and programs by all levels of Government should be guided by the following considerations and principles.

3.2 The parties consider that the adoption of sound environmental practices and procedures, as a basis for ecologically sustainable development, will benefit both the Australian people and environment, and the international community and environment. This requires the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making processes, in order to improve community well-being and to benefit future generations.

3.3 The parties consider that strong, growing and diversified economies (committed to the principles of ecologically sustainable development) can enhance the capacity for environmental protection. In order to achieve sustainable economic development, there is a need for a country's international competitiveness to be maintained and enhanced in an environmentally sound manner.

3.4 Accordingly, the parties agree that environmental considerations will be integrated into Government decision-making processes at all levels by, among other things:

- i. ensuring that environmental issues associated with a proposed project, program or policy will be taken into consideration in the decision making process;
- ii. ensuring that there is a proper examination of matters which significantly affect the environment; and
- iii. ensuring that measures adopted should be cost-effective and not be disproportionate to the significance of the environmental problems being addressed.

3.5 The parties further agree that, in order to promote the above approach, the principles set out below should inform policy making and program implementation.

3.5.1 precautionary principle -

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. In the application of the precautionary principle, public and private decisions should be guided by:

- i. careful evaluation to avoid, wherever practicable, serious or irreversible damage to the environment; and
- ii. an assessment of the risk-weighted consequences of various options.

3.5.2 intergenerational equity -

the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

3.5.3 conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity -

conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration.

3.5.4 improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms -

- environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services.
- polluter pays i.e. those who generate pollution and waste should bear the cost of containment, avoidance, or abatement
- the users of goods and services should pay prices based on the full life cycle costs of providing goods and services, including the use of natural resources and assets and the ultimate disposal of any wastes
- environmental goals, having been established, should be pursued in the most cost effective way, by establishing incentive structures, including market mechanisms, which enable those best placed to maximise benefits and/or minimise costs to develop their own solutions and responses to environmental problems.