



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development - Part 1 Introduction

Prepared by the Ecologically Sustainable Development Steering Committee

Endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments

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Part 1 - Introduction

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What is ecologically sustainable development?

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) represents one of the greatest challenges facing Australia's governments, industry, business and community in the coming years. While there is no universally accepted definition of ESD, in 1990 the Commonwealth Government suggested the following definition for ESD in Australia:

- 'using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased'.

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Put more simply, ESD is development which aims to meet the needs of Australians today, while conserving our ecosystems for the benefit of future generations. To do this, we need to develop ways of using those environmental resources which form the basis of our economy in a way which maintains and, where possible, improves their range, variety and quality. At the same time we need to utilise those resources to develop industry and generate employment.

By developing this Strategy, we have demonstrated our belief that a coordinated approach to ESD is required. There are many reasons for this, including the need to look at management of Australia's ecological and economic resources on a regional, national and international basis, and the significance of potential threats to our environment and economy if we do not take action.

~~Governments recognise that there is no identifiable point where we can say we have achieved ESD.~~ Some key changes to the way we think, act and make decisions, however, will help ensure Australia's economic development is ecologically sustainable. There are two main features which distinguish an ecologically sustainable approach to development:

- we need to consider, in an integrated way, the wider economic, social and environmental implications of our decisions and actions for Australia, the international community and the biosphere; and
- we need to take a long-term rather than short-term view when taking those decisions and actions.

By following an ecologically sustainable path of development, we should be able to reduce the likelihood of serious environmental impacts arising from our economic activity. The number of divisive and damaging confrontations which have characterised some of our development projects should also decrease. More practically, ESD will mean changes to our patterns of resource use, including improvements in the quality of our air, land and water, and in the development of new, environmentally friendly products and processes.

Australia's goal, core objectives and guiding principles for the Strategy

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