

The Intergenerational Nature of Climate Change

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Presentation

- *Background - Role of Commissioner*
- *The ethical dimension*
- *The interface of government policy and ethics*
- *Principles of Intergenerational equity for consideration*
- *Implications of inaction*
- *The final reason for action*

Statutory Functions

- Prepare State of the Environment Reports for Victoria (within 5 year cycles)
- Conduct annual Strategic Audits of state government agencies' and public authorities' Environmental Management Systems
- Audit Public Education programs, relating to ecologically sustainable development for effectiveness
- Advise the Minister for Environment in relation to any matter referred to the Commissioner by the Minister

COMMISSIONER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ACT 2003

No. 15 of 2003

Version incorporating amendments as at 1 February 2008

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 - SECT 7

Objectives of the Commissioner

7. Objectives of the Commissioner

The objectives of the Commissioner are to-

- (a) report on matters relating to the condition of the natural environment of Victoria;
- (b) encourage decision making that facilitates ecologically sustainable development;
- (c) enhance knowledge and understanding of issues relating to ecologically sustainable development and the environment;
- (d) encourage sound environmental practices and procedures to be adopted by the Government of Victoria and local government as a basis for ecologically sustainable development.

20. Commissioner may publish statements and guidelines

21. Public availability

The ethical dimension

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2001 :

Natural, technical, and social sciences can provide essential information and evidence needed for decisions on what constitutes 'dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.' At the same time, such decisions are value judgments....

Garnaut Climate Change Review 2008 :

It is a simple fact of life on earth that there is going to be no successful mitigation of the climate change problem without a truly global effort. All developing countries or all major developing countries have to be part of that and accept substantial constraints on greenhouse gas emissions.

The climate change problem is at its heart an ethical problem. It's a problem of income distribution and it's a problem of income distribution with dimensions that we don't usually think about very much.

The interface of government policy and ethics

- What limit do we place greenhouse gas emissions?
- How do we decide emission levels for countries, industries, individuals?
- In setting emissions targets, how do we weigh the needs and aspirations of the current generation against those of the next generation and the others to follow?
- What emphasis should be placed on historical responsibility?
- What influence should the current needs and aspirations of individual societies have?

Principles of Intergenerational equity for consideration

Each living generation:

- does not unduly restrict the options available to future generations in solving their problems and satisfying their own values”—and thereby recognizes that future generations are “entitled to diversity [of natural and cultural resources] comparable to that enjoyed by previous generations
- maintain[s] the quality of the earth so that it is passed on in no worse condition than [it] received it”—and thereby recognizes that future generations are “entitled to a quality of the planet comparable to the one enjoyed by previous generations
- provide[s] its members with equitable rights of access to the legacy from past generations” and “conserve[s] this access for future generations.

Brown Weiss E, *In Fairness to future Generations*

Implications of inaction

- Failing to deal with climate change constitutes, not failing to help future generations, but inflicting harm on them
- Failing to deal with climate change constitutes inflicting harm on generations who could have been spared all such harm
- Failing to deal with climate change constitutes not simply continuing to make it worse, but unnecessarily creating opportunities for it to become significantly worse by feeding upon itself through positive feedbacks that would otherwise not have occurred
- Failing to deal with climate change constitutes not only unnecessarily creating opportunities for the planetary environment to become significantly worse, but also unnecessarily creating opportunities for it to become catastrophically worse.

Shue H, *Harming the Grandchildren*

Final reason to act on climate change and save the world



*It is the only place that has
chocolate !!!*

Thank you.