

CHAPTER



WOMEN

AND THE

ENVIRONMENT

K

CRITICAL AREA OF CONCERN

Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment

1: Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.

2: Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

3: Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

OVERVIEW

Research has shown that environmental issues are important for women. Areas of particular interest to women include: protection of the environment for future generations; women's involvement in environmental decision-making; sustainable development that ensures the caring and careful use of all resources by individuals, industry and governments; damage to the ozone layer; and food standards in relation to genetically modified products.

The Australian Government has taken a leading role internationally on environmental and sustainable development issues. Australia's environmental policies and programmes seek to ensure that women have access to and are appropriately represented in decision-making forums, as well as having access to relevant information and

education. The Australian Government is also aware that women and children are particularly affected by certain environmental hazards.

The Australian Government has committed around \$1.5 billion to the environment through the Natural Heritage Trust using proceeds from the partial privatisation of Australia's national telecommunications carrier.

Sustainable agriculture is a major environmental goal for Australia. Australian women are actively involved in caring for the environment through a range of government funded, community based programmes such as *Landcare Green Corps*.

Specially targeted public awareness campaigns have been undertaken for environmental issues particularly affecting women. These include information campaigns to reduce risks from lead petrol and paint to women of child-bearing age and campaigns for consumers.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1: Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.

Women are active and well represented in environmental government and non-government agencies. For example, women comprise almost 50% of staff in

Environment Australia, and 30% of appointments on statutory and non-statutory bodies.

Women have held an increasing number of field-based parks and environment positions since 1995. Women also participate in large numbers in many non-government environmental organisations. Women throughout the community, particularly rural farm managers, are actively involved in grassroots community landcare and environmental work. Rural and agricultural women, and Indigenous women, play an active and important role in sustainable practices.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia funds a range of measures to increase women's participation in decision-making in rural communities. *The Guidelines for reaching our clients* - women promotes consultation with women and contains examples of best practice models for increasing women's involvement in decision-making in rural communities. This publication is distributed widely and is free of charge.

See also:

- *G: Power and decision-making* for details on the Rural Women's Advisory Council.
- The 'Rural women' and 'Indigenous women' under *Women with Special Needs* section below.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2: Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

LANDCARE

The *National Landcare Programme* provides \$280 million to the community for projects for the sustainable management of land, water, vegetation and biological diversity. The programme also supports property management planning which provides farmers with improved natural resource and business management skills. There are more than 4,250 Landcare projects around Australia and approximately a third of Australian farmers are involved in these projects. Women as joint farm managers are actively involved in these activities.

Aboriginal Landcare encompasses a number of specific projects involving Indigenous communities. These include the Greening Australia/Northern Land Council project for landcare education (\$45,500) and the Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation land management project (\$64,000).

GREEN CORPS

The *Green Corps Programme* (\$88 million over four years from 1999-2000 to 2002-2003) provides full-time

accredited training opportunities for six months for young people aged 17-20 years interested in cultural heritage protection and environmental issues. To date, around 43% of *Green Corps* participants have been women. *Green Corps* improves participants' employment prospects and provides them with a basis for further education and training in environment-related areas.

See also:

- The 'Mutual obligation' section in *A: Women and Poverty*.

COASTCARE

Coastcare supports direct community involvement in the management of coastal and marine areas. *Coastcare* focuses on practical actions and on-ground work to tackle the causes of environmental degradation. Women are actively involved in *Coastcare* activities both as members of community groups undertaking projects and as facilitators. Of the 27 facilitators currently employed, 16 are women. *Coastcare* regional facilitators work with community groups, including women's community groups, and with local government to facilitate links between groups and local coastal managers and to assist in the preparation of project funding applications.

JABILUKA

The proposal to mine uranium at Jabiluka has been the subject of a comprehensive environmental impact assessment process under the *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974* lasting nearly three years. Several reports have been prepared including the *Environment Impact Statement* and a *Public Environment Report*, both of which were subject to extensive public review.

The Mirrar, traditional owners of the Jabiluka lease, gave consent in 1982 to the Jabiluka mine in an agreement under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. The Mirrar confirmed this consent in 1991 when they agreed to the transfer of the mining rights to Energy Resources of Australia Ltd.

The Jabiluka mine will provide a wide range of social and economic benefits to the local Aboriginal community. These include employment and training opportunities, provision of new housing for about 65 Aboriginal families, assistance for Aboriginal businesses and funding of a women's resource centre, traineeships and university scholarships for Aboriginal students and for adult education. In addition, the Aboriginal communities will receive more than \$230 million in royalty payments over the life of the project.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Australian Government's agreement to the *Kyoto Protocol*, establishing a target to return emissions to an increase of 8% above 1990 levels by the period 2008-2012, represents a significant commitment. Without any measures in place, Australia's net energy emission growth was projected to increase by 43% from 1990 levels to the year 2010.

Australia is committed to robust and credible action in this regard. To address this issue, the Australian Government has committed funding of almost \$1 billion over five years – the largest commitment of funding to address the challenge of climate change in Australia's history.

- The Australian Greenhouse Office was established within the environment portfolio to provide a whole of government approach to greenhouse matters, and to deliver the Commonwealth Government's \$180 million climate change package, *Safeguarding the Future: Australia's Response to Climate Change*. This is the world's first dedicated national government agency to oversee the greenhouse problem.
- The *National Greenhouse Strategy* is a 'whole-of-government' strategy agreed by all Australian governments in 1998. It is a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's international climate change commitments. The Strategy aims to: limit net greenhouse gas emissions, in particular, to meet our international commitments; foster knowledge and understanding of greenhouse issues; and to lay the foundations for adaptation to climate change.
- The *Household Greenhouse Action Programme* encourages community, industry and governments to work in partnership to address barriers affecting the supply of, and demand for, energy-efficient products and services. Grants are allocated to projects that will reduce national greenhouse emissions from households. Areas to be addressed include hot water systems, lighting, refrigeration, and heating and cooling systems.
- The *Greenhouse Challenge* is a joint voluntary initiative between the Australian Government and industry to abate greenhouse gas emissions. Participating organisations sign agreements with the Government that provide a framework for undertaking and reporting on actions to abate emissions. The

measure has succeeded in achieving broad and diverse participation, from public and private organisations, both large and small, and across all industry sectors.

- A wide range of programmes including: the *Alternative Fuels Conversion Programme*; the *Photo-voltaic Rebate Programme*; the *Renewable Remote Power Generation Programme*; the *Renewable Energy Commercialisation Programme*; and a *Greenhouse Gas Abatement Fund* that will support activities with maximum capacity for emission reduction and sink enhancement.
- The *Cities for Climate Protection™ Programme* is a partnership between the Australian Greenhouse Office and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. Cities for Climate Protection Australia is an innovative and internationally recognised programme for empowering Australian local governments to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions and to leverage broader reductions through community partnerships. The programme has been highly successful and since it began in 1997, 74 local councils (covering 39% of Australia's population) have committed to the programme.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

3: Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

Institutional mechanisms have been established to monitor the impact of Australia's environmental policies on women.

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)* places responsibility for environmental issues with State governments and appropriate Commonwealth portfolios. The EPBC Act requires extensive consultation with the community and interest groups in the development of bilateral agreements, environmental assessments and in the preparation of guidelines, management plans, wildlife conservation plans and five-yearly reviews. Women will take an active part in future environmental protection through the *EPBC Act*.

The *EPBC Act* ensures that, for the first time, the Australian Government has the capacity to protect matters of national environmental significance. These matters include World Heritage properties, Ramsar wetlands, nationally threatened species and

ecological communities, migratory species, nuclear matters and the Commonwealth marine area. The Act establishes a strengthened environment protection regime and an integrated approach to the conservation of biodiversity.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED PRODUCTS

Women, often the primary household purchasers, have particular concerns in relation to genetically modified products and have been actively involved in campaigning for safe and appropriate safeguards and consumer information.

In August 1999, the Australian Government announced a stringent new system to control all commercial releases of genetically modified products in Australia. It has committed \$7.5 million over two years to a permanent Office of the Gene Technology Regulator to be established by 1 July 2001. The Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee, currently chaired by Emeritus Professor Nancy Millis AC MBE, will advise on the scientific safety aspects of genetically modified organisms. Environment Australia will advise on all environmental aspects.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Biotechnology encompasses technologies based on the application of biological processes with diverse application in medicine, agriculture, food processing,

manufacturing and environmental management. To realise the benefits of biotechnology, the community must be confident that any associated risks are rigorously managed through regulation that is transparent, accountable and understood and supported by the community.

Women's NGOs have been active in biotechnological and related areas. Work with consumers, including women's consumer groups, is an important part of Australia's approach to biotechnology.

In September 1998, the Australian Government announced its intention to develop a comprehensive strategy to position Australia to benefit from the development of biotechnology. A Biotechnology Consultative Group was formed to guide the development of the strategy. In May 1999, the Government announced measures intended to assist the development and application of biotechnology in Australia. One of these measures was the establishment of Biotechnology Australia to coordinate the Australian Government's activities in biotechnology. There are four women on the Biotechnology Consultative Group (a total of 14 members).

AIR POLLUTION

In June 1998, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments agreed to nationally applicable ambient air quality standards for Australia. The

standards cover six pollutants to which Australians are exposed (lead, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxides, ozone and particles) and are set out in the *National Environment Protection Measure for Ambient Air Quality*. Standards include pollutants particularly injurious to the health of children and pregnant women because of their potential for greater sensitivity to chemicals. The measure will ensure ambient air quality to protect human health and well being. It also establishes mandatory protocols for monitoring air quality and harmonises monitoring and reporting practices across States and Territories.

SITE CONTAMINATION

Australia's National Environmental Protection Council is developing a national environmental measure on Assessment of Site Contamination. This initiative will provide a nationally agreed formally recognised approach for assessing soil contamination and the effects of resultant environmental hazards.

NATIONAL POLLUTANT INVENTORY

The *National Pollutant Inventory* collects information from industry and governments on diffuse and point source emissions of pollutants due to human activity. The Inventory provides information that can be used to assess how and to what extent women are

particularly susceptible or exposed by environmental degradation and hazards.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH POLICY

In late 1996, the Australian Government initiated the second stage of development of a national environmental health policy. The policy is based on the need for broad community information about and support and ownership of decisions about developments which may affect human health and the environment. The current policy focuses on improving access to environmental health information and new initiatives, particularly mechanisms to increase public availability and accessibility of validated information.

See also:

- *C: Women and Health*, the national environmental health policy

WOMEN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

RURAL WOMEN

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA) recognises the significant contribution of women in the rural sector. Women participate actively in a wide range of sustainable resource management activities including whole-farm and land care

practices, the National Heritage trust, catchment management work and the *Rural Partnership Programme*.

AFFA's Women in Rural Industries Section integrates women's perspectives into the Australian Government's agricultural programmes and promotes the significant contribution of women in best practice case studies. The Section has produced a set of guidelines to better integrate the concerns of women into the development of AFFA's policies and programmes.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Aboriginal traditional owners have been the custodians and sculptors of the land for generations and their traditional skills and knowledge are particularly recognised in parks management. Joint management between Parks Australia and traditional owners and the employment of Aboriginal people ensure that traditional skills and knowledge, particularly women's traditional skills, are used in conjunction with modern management practices to ensure the preservation of Australia's natural and cultural landscapes of significance.

Environment Australia provides Aboriginal women with opportunities to participate in environmental tasks at all levels, ranging from community involvement to being employed as

rangers, cultural advisers or training officers. Some of these positions are at the senior management level.

INTERNATIONAL AID

Australia's international aid programme ensures that aid activities make a positive contribution to sustainable development.

In 1998-99 the Australian aid programme will spend an estimated \$193 million on environment activities in developing countries. This includes \$51 million on projects in sectors principally targeted at the environment (such as sustainable resource management, urban environmental management and sustainable energy production) and \$142 million on sectors that are not principally targeted at the environment but have significant environmental benefits (such as water supply and sanitation).

The needs of women and children are taken into account carefully in the design and implementation of these activities.

The Central Visayas Water and Sanitation Project improved the situation of women by reducing distances to water sources, by increasing latrine ownership and by increasing knowledge about the causes of diarrhoea. The community had significant inputs into major project

decisions. The women were trained not only in health education but also in latrine construction. Women reported economic benefits and improvements in more free time, less heavy work and improved relationships with their spouses.

Australia is providing \$10m over 5 years to a Community Resource Management Project in Nepal. The project is implementing activities in income generation, increasing subsistence production, and improving community self-reliance and conservation of the environment. This project builds on literacy, water supply and community forest management activities of the Nepal Australia Community Forestry Project that was completed in 1997.

The Environment Protection Agency has developed an Environment Impact Assessment Training Resources Manual prepared for the *United Nations Environment Programme* (UNEP), under the guidance and technical support of the UNEP International Working Group on environment impact assessments. The Manual promotes the development of local training materials that reflect the economic, cultural and social systems in developing countries and in countries moving to a market economy.

This project is seen as a major step towards strengthening capacity-building in environmental protection in

these countries and establishing the institutional basis for effective, locally supported environmental impact assessment. Women are specifically promoted as stakeholders in this process.

Australia's input to the Global Environment Facility is closely guided by the gender and development policies of the Australian aid programme. In March 1998, Australia committed \$43 million to the replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in conjunction with the first ever GEF Assembly in New Delhi in April 1998. Since GEF's creation, Australia has committed funds to the pilot phase (1991-1994), Phase 1 (1994-1997) and Phase 2 (1998-2002). Australia jointly finances three GEF projects within the Asia Pacific region.

Australia has carried out projects under the *Activities Implemented Jointly Scheme* with Chile, Fiji, Indonesia, Mauritius and the Solomon Islands. The Scheme is a precursor to the 'Clean Development Mechanism' which will enable developed countries to engage in emission reduction projects in developing countries. Such projects help developed countries to achieve their Kyoto targets and at the same time contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals in the host developing country.

Australia is also contributing significantly to the dissemination of information about a range of land care issues. These include campaigns on the effects of land-based pollution on the marine environment in the Asia-pacific region and building the capacity of States in the region to more effectively manage marine environments. In addition, Australia was a key participant in the development of a regional oceans policy for the South Pacific, including input into the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the Pacific Conference* in Tonga in August 1999. Australia also provides marine science and technology training on marine protected areas to countries within the region.

EXAMPLES OF STATE AND TERRITORY INITIATIVES

VICTORIA

The Victorian Action Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management has established the blueprint for action over the next five years. There are a number of components of the action plan which promote the role of women and increase their involvement in natural resource management. The register for Victorian Women in Agriculture and Resource Management

provides opportunities for women to have a role in leadership and decision making through appointments to Boards and Committees.

An advisory body to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) consisting of Victorian Women in Agriculture and Resource Management has also been established. In addition, DNRE has also instigated a programme, titled "Working with Rural Women", which recognises women as clients of the Department.

NEW SOUTH WALES

The NSW Government encouraged women to nominate for the 1997 Rural Lands Protection Boards. Women's representation on these boards increased from 4% in 1996 to 9% in 1997. Women are now on over 50% of the Rural Lands Protection Boards.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The second Western Australian *Two Year Plan for Women* includes commitments for women working for and with environmental issues, including continued support for landcare and other environmental groups. Strategies will improve services to women to improve career prospects and raise the profile of women in the agriculture and resources management sector.

Specific initiatives involve:

- information gathering and planning via the Rural Remote Women's Network;
- interrogation of data on use of parks to identify gender specific requirements;
- improve use of technology to increase the role of women in decision making in relation to the environment (eg leadership training, boards and committees); and
- maximising access by women to environmental information and internet site (eg NatureBase).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The *Women in Adelaide Study* is a major collaborative project between the South Australian Office of the Status of Women, the City of Adelaide Council, the University of Adelaide, Trans Adelaide, Planning SA and the Passenger Transport Board, to explore women's perceptions of the City of Adelaide. The Study includes qualitative and quantitative research. Suggestions arising from the Study have been made to the City of Adelaide Social Development Strategy, the Capital City Development Programme for Adelaide and the Adelaide Parklands Management Strategy.

OBSTACLES AND LEARNING POINTS

CONCERNS OF WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

- There are concerns that the Australian Government should involve women more in environmental decision-making, including proper consultation with Indigenous women in relation to the impact of Government decisions on traditional customs and beliefs.
- There is a concern about a lack of measures to assess, regulate and reduce the impact of environmental hazards, chemicals and toxic pesticides on women, children and unborn babies.
- There is also a concern that legislative changes have weakened the Australian Government's control over most environmental issues and prevented Government involvement in greenhouse pollution, land clearing, forest protection, water allocation and the release of genetically modified organisms, all of which are of particular concern to women.

FUTURE COMMITMENTS

Future commitments for women are incorporated above.

In the Australian Government system, new funding commitments are customarily announced in the annual Federal Budget. Additional commitments may be publicly announced in the context of the election platform or at other occasions.

The Australian Government's future budget commitments for women are comprehensively outlined in *Delivering on our Commitments for Women*, the Budget Ministerial Statement on Women from the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women. A copy of this statement has been provided in response to Part 2 (Financial and Institutional measures).

