

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

ACTU Congress September 1989

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Congress believes that the long term interests of workers and the community depend upon developing an economy which maximises job creation, job security and improves workers' living standards while at the same time is environmentally sustainable for the future. Any policy must recognise that the environment and economic development are closely inter-dependent.

1.2 Congress believes that conserving and repairing the environment is an urgent matter that requires immediate attention. Environment matters and their inter-relationships with employment and the economy are crucial to the interests of workers.

1.3 Congress notes with grave concern that worsening environmental problems like the Greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, oceanic pollution and soil degradation threaten the livelihood and health of workers and their families.

1.4 The number and nature of jobs, the pattern of economic development, the balance of payments, appropriate tax and investment incentives, research and development, education, training and retraining, occupational health and safety and quality of life issues, urban and regional infrastructure are all inextricably connected with the question of environmental management.

1.5 In particular, Congress believes the union movement must promote job creation, training and retraining for workers in industries changed because of environmental issues. Congress believes that the following policy is a first step in establishing a comprehensive environmental policy for the trade union movement. The issue of the environment and sustainable development is increasingly important to Australians. The trade union movement must recognise the critical issue of the environment in determining future job growth for workers.

1.6 Preservation of the environment is not only important to workers' living standards but can be positive for job creation in certain sectors e.g. tourism, public transport and specialist environmentally sound products and services.

2. EXECUTIVE ACTION

2.1 To further research and consider these complex issues of the inter-relationship between ecologically sustainable economic growth, jobs, and the environment, Congress determines that an Environment and Sustainable Development Sub-Committee of the ACTU Executive be established to:

- (i) develop a comprehensive policy on the environment;

(ii) to oversee research and provide a framework for the ACTU'S position on the environment and sustainable development;

(iii) to develop immediate initiatives that workers and unions can pursue to promote environmental consciousness and to preserve the environment.

2.2 In addition, Congress determines that Executive convene industry group meetings to consider policy and determine ongoing action at local and industry levels.

2.3 In the meantime Congress adopts the following proposals as policy and directs the ACTU Sub-Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development to pursue these initiatives:

3. AGRICULTURE AND GRAZING

3.1 The expansion of agricultural activities, increasing numbers of cattle and sheep and inappropriate land management practices has lead to severe soil degradation and contributed to the Greenhouse effect.

3.2 It is estimated that lost productivity from soil degradation alone costs \$600 million per year. Water intensive irrigation, the over use of fertilizers and the massive clearing of trees only accelerate the process.

3.3 Congress supports the following proposals:

(i) The Federal Government's Land-care Scheme of \$300 million commitment to implement land preservation measures;

(ii) The Federal Government's Natural Resources Management Strategy and Re-vegetation Scheme which involves the planting of one billion trees over the next decade;

(iii) Establishing links with rural organisations and environmentalists to pursue issues such as a national approach to conservation of farm lands and the development of methods for reducing the Greenhouse effect through proper fertilizer application and livestock management.

3.4 Recognising that the Government's initiative to plant one billion trees is positive but in fact is at best one twelfth of the required replanting identified by the C.S.I.R.O. the ACTU will seek to develop a proposal in conjunction with the C.S.I.R.O. and relevant State Government Departments to enhance the afforestation program.

Endangered Species

The ACTU supports policies, strategies and programmes that protect Australia's endangered species of flora and fauna. These should include education programmes in schools, union journals and the media.

Governments must develop policies and provide resources to address this issue as a matter of urgency. All developments must take these questions into account as part of overall

impact studies.

4. FORESTS

4.1 Congress recognises that the issues of forests, logging and the environment are complex and immediate.

4.2 Congress believes that a balance must be reached between maintaining a modern forest products industry and ensuring the long term ecological sustainability of Australian forests, particularly of native forests.

4.3 Where ecological sustainability cannot be ensured logging in native forests should be banned.

4.4 Congress believes that the protection of rainforests is not only important for the environment but important for the heritage of our country now and for future generations. Congress believes that Australian rainforests should be preserved and supports government action to secure this objective.

4.5 The ACTU calls on the Federal Government to promote international agreements that preserve the world's remaining rainforest areas and eliminate the importation of timber from threatened rainforest areas.

4.6 In this regard Congress applauds the initiative taken in establishing the Ministerial contact group including ACTU and ACF representation and the consultancy with terms of reference including the making of recommendations on how Australia could adjust its role in the international tropical timber industry after assessing the environmental and socio-economic consequences of all possible options which could result in increased tropical forest protection.

4.7 In the context of this review Congress determines that relevant unions will meet to consider targeted bans designed to enhance rainforest protection.

4.8 Congress notes that over the past 25 years softwood products make up a significant proportion of forest products consumed by Australians. Congress also notes that the potential for expansion of the timber industry relies heavily upon a significant expansion of softwood plantations in strategic regions.

Accordingly Congress supports the expansion of softwood plantations to meet future demands for forest products.

5. PULP AND PAPER

5.1 Congress recognises that pulp and paper mills provide employment, inject capital in the economy and can substantially contribute to Australia's export earnings. Therefore Congress supports the growth of a paper production industry that can be developed in a sustainable manner.

5.2 Congress notes that most pulp mills rely heavily on native forests for feedstock when first established.

Congress believes that as soon as practicable, pulp mill feedstock should be produced from plantations and sawlog residues and that native forests be rehabilitated.

5.3 To provide an environmentally sustainable pulp and paper industry Congress believes that:

(i) The union movement should support the development of an economically sustainable pulp industry. The expansion of this industry should be environmentally sustainable. Such expansion would reduce the export of woodchips from Australia and provide added value to the paper industry as a whole including the processing of materials currently burnt as waste. Also increased processing in Australia would reduce processing in other countries where lack of environment controls results in damaging effluent discharge.

(ii) Research should be conducted into alternate technologies that would eliminate the production of dangerous chemicals that now result from the Kraft process.

(iii) Governments and the private sector should establish a resource base for future pulp mills by means of plantation and agroforestry.

(iv) The use of recycled and unbleached paper products in all Government Departments/Authorities, industry and affiliated unions should be encouraged.

(v) The Government together with industry should introduce a program for recycling paper including funding distribution infrastructure to ensure that the maximum percentage of paper is recycled.

6. STANDARDS FOR PROCESSING PLANTS

6.1 Congress notes that investments in major developments to further process many of our natural resources need to be made against a clear set of national environmental standards as in many industries such processing can involve environmentally hazardous and toxic emissions and effluents such as dioxins.

6.2 Such standards should be set at or above the world's best and should be scientifically determined.

7. ENERGY GENERATION

7.1 Emissions of carbon dioxide resulting from fossil fuel combustion is one of the major sources of Greenhouse gases. Much of Australia's electricity generation depends on brown coal combustion which generates CO₂ emissions. Combined with Australia's use of fossil fuel in transport and industry, per capita CO₂ emission in this country is one of the highest in the world.

7.2 In addition Australia is a highly urbanised society with a high concentration of the population in capital cities. There is also a relatively widespread use of private motor vehicles for transportation which combined with inadequate

resourcing of public transport has led to an overall transport system that is inefficient in its energy use. Congress believes that it is critical that public infrastructure capital is available to ensure an efficient modern public transport system. Accordingly, the ACTU:

(i) Reaffirms the 1981 Congress decisions of the Conservation of Energy Resources and the Environment and Pollution;

(ii) Recognises that the Greenhouse effect must be addressed nationally and as such calls on the Federal and State Governments to:

(a) While recognising the need to develop a detailed, integrated policy approach, adopt the aim of making the 1988 Toronto proposal of a 20% reduction in CO₂ emissions (based on 1988 levels) a target for planning purposes. Congress supports those Governments that have already adopted such an aim and calls on others to follow their example.

(b) Develop national standards for future power stations that optimise thermal efficiency and decrease CO₂ emissions.

(c) Fund research into improving methods of electricity generation, transmission and distribution that will encourage environmentally sound production methods.

(d) Promote energy pricing policies that encourage consumers to make more efficient use of energy including an energy conservation education programme.

(e) Increase funding of research into renewable energy sources as described in the 1981 Congress Policy.

(f) Establish an urban public transport development strategy for Australian cities aimed at integrating land use planning with public transport expansion, to facilitate significant reductions in gasoline use per capita.

8. TRANSPORT

8.1 Congress notes that the relationship between the transport sector and the environment extends beyond concerns about the transport sector's responsibility for fossil fuel emissions and accumulation of greenhouse gases.

8.2 Accordingly, in addition to specific energy conservation strategies aimed at minimising the transport sector's large responsibility for fossil fuel emissions, Congress calls on Federal and State Governments to develop social accounting criteria to fully reflect all environmental benefits and costs associated with decisions about transport infrastructure development, use and pricing.

9. MINING

9.1 Many mining exploration leases occur in national parks. Mining ventures often threaten fragile native environments or occur on traditional Aboriginal land. The environmental

standards applying to mining vary from State to State.

9.2 Therefore Congress supports the production of national standards for Environmental Impact Statements and a mining industry code of practice.

10. ANTARCTICA

10.1 The ACTU calls for the creation of a Wilderness Park in Antarctica and as such supports the Federal Government policy on this matter and their efforts to obtain international support.

11. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

11.1 Congress believes that Australia is well positioned to promote export based industries to focus on environmentally safe manufacturing products and processes.

11.2 Congress supports increases in Government funding to promote such initiatives both from the public and private sector and particularly through the CSIRO. Such funding is to provide a base for export 'environmental products' and environmentally sustainable growth in Australia.

12. LOCAL ACTION

12.1 Congress encourages unions and workers to campaign to change environmentally unsustainable products, practices and processes in the workplace. The Environment and Sustainable Development Sub-Committee will develop a list of such products and processes to be circulated to all affiliated unions along with ideas for campaigns to clean up the workplace.

12.2 Consideration should also be given to pressuring companies to appoint Environmental Officers along similar lines as specialist Safety Officers.

13. EDUCATION

13.1 The aim of the trade union movement should be to have the highest environmental standards possible. A key element of achieving such standards is educating people in preventative methods that they can personally follow to improve the environment. This should be a priority in education in schools and training the workplace.

14. INTERNATIONAL

14.1 Congress resolves that as part of its international program the ACTU will work with other international organisations to develop a global response on these environmental issues.

14.2 Environmental issues are interrelated, and are predicated upon a network of exploitative relationships.

These are underpinned by attitudes which are deeply entrenched in a psyche of the industrially developed world. They are global in character and therefore necessitate a global response. Industrially developed nations have a particular responsibility because:-

- (a) Much of the environmental destruction has been perpetuated by the exploitative role of Corporations.
- (b) Less developed countries have been unable to break the "cycle of destruction" because of the oppressive debt burden they experience.
- (c) The availability of markets in the industrially developed countries who have continued to accept products which have a direct role in sustaining the chain of destruction without question.
- (d) In the absence of appropriate monitoring this poses more serious consequences in the freer trade relations being encouraged by the major industrialised nations.

14.3 Congress recognises the urgent need for:

- (a) The establishment for an effective global and environmental "watch dog", under the auspices of the United Nations.
- (b) That such body include among its principal terms of reference:
 - (i) Detailed enquiry into the economic, political and cultural factors which served to perpetuate environmental destruction, in particular the examination of the exploitative role of Transnational Corporations, and the relationship between the mounting debt burden of less developed countries and their dependency upon the "cycle of destruction".
 - (ii) Establishment of proper global monitoring of environmental destruction.
 - (iii) Development of appropriate responses on a global scale, including the establishment of guidelines for environmental control, the basis for an international legal framework to restrain and eventually eliminate practices which are environmentally destructive.
 - (iv) Encourage governments to make necessary funding available for this work, and to provide relief sufficient to break the nexus between dependency and the perpetuation of the global practices referred to in this resolution.