



EcoSummit 2023 Conference Declaration: Building a Sustainable Wellbeing Future

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We - an international community of environmental researchers and practitioners - met in Australia for the 6th International EcoSummit. We acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land on which we met and their elders, past, present, and emerging. We met at a time of multiple, escalating, interconnected crises, including:

- (1) Biophysical planetary boundaries and being exceeded, including that the climate crisis is here and fast approaching irreversible tipping points, creating a world that human civilization has never experienced.
- (2) Natural ecosystems and their biodiversity are being lost and degraded resulting in ongoing destruction of sustainable life-supporting functions and services.

- (3) Social capital is eroding due to runaway inequality and political polarization - people around the world recognize that life is not getting better.
- (4) Levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout are skyrocketing in parts of the world, while poverty and famine still exist in others.
- (5) Our economic system remains dependent on fossil fuel, continues to extract renewable natural resources at rates that exceed their regeneration, and has insufficient concern for the loss to biodiversity and damage to valuable ecosystem services, both on land and in the sea.
- (6) We are faced with increasingly uncontrollable conflicts in various regions linked to resource depletion.

We have come together here around the theme of “Building a sustainable and desirable future: Adapting to a changing land and sea-

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scape.” During this conference, we have presented leading, cutting-edge research showcasing a way forward to achieve sustainable wellbeing for humanity and the rest of nature.

Sustainable wellbeing represents a vision of a future society with harmoniously intertwined environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Achieving sustainable wellbeing is vital for safeguarding the planet and ensuring a good life for present and future generations, as well as the greater community of life with whom we share Earth as home. By embracing responsible environmental stewardship, striving for social equity, fostering economic sufficiency, and promoting holistic wellbeing, we can lay the foundation for a future society where people thrive in harmony with the rest of nature. Our collective responsibility is to work towards this sustainable wellbeing vision, making choices that align with long-term sustainability goals and embracing a more inclusive and fulfilling notion of the good life.

The world is changing in many ways, and our challenge is to create a world that operates within biophysical, bioregional, and planetary boundaries while providing sufficient wellbeing for all and future generations – a sustainable and desirable future that focuses on the interdependent wellbeing of humans and the rest of nature. Only then can we avoid the catastrophes that science can clearly see looming on the horizon.

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- 1. Adopt whole systems thinking:** We cannot think of the environment, the economy, and society as separate issues, or even as the three “pillars” of sustainability. In the current Anthropocene epoch, we must recognize that all human lives are dependent upon the rest of nature, so human societies – including our economic systems – must be understood and managed in an integrated way. This is a core underlying conceptual framework for the EcoSummit and is reflected in many of the conference contributions.
- 2. Change the paradigm:** The root causes of these crises are twofold: (i) a dominant cultural world view that sees humans as separate from nature and (ii) widespread societal addiction to an outdated economic paradigm based on the single-minded pursuit of GDP growth. It is a paradigm that claims that all people want is more income and consumption with no limit, the market economy can grow forever, massive inequality is justified to provide incentives to promote growth, and efforts to address climate and other environmental problems must not interfere with growth. We must change the fundamental goal of society from mindless growth of GDP to sustainable wellbeing, recognizing that marketed production and consumption is only one input to that goal. Economic prosperity cannot be pursued at the expense of the planet but must be redefined and aligned with its long-term wellbeing. We must work to end poverty and provide a decent life for all in ways that protect and regenerate Earth's life support systems.
- 3. Appreciate Ecosystem Services:** Better recognize, understand, measure, and value the complex interdependencies between humans and the natural ecosystems on which they depend. It must be stressed that valuing ecosystems and their benefits to humanity (in monetary units or other ways) does not imply trading them as commodities or privatizing them. To the contrary, they must be viewed at common assets to be stewarded for current and future generations. There has been substantial progress in this regard over the last few decades, but there is much more to be done to inform policy and decision-making. Many of the contributors to the EcoSummit have shown the latest developments in this rapidly evolving area.
- 4. Limit Resource Extraction and Shift to Clean Renewables:** Urgently phase out fossil fuel use and impose limits on raw material extraction. Encourage circular production and consumption and the use of clean renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. Enhance nature protection and restoration measures for healthy and resilient soils, forests, oceans, and other ecosystems.
- 5. Use Adaptive Governance:** Adapt our governance systems to the complex reality of a global Anthropocene. We need polycentric, socially inclusive, evidence-based governance that addresses the goal of sustainable wellbeing for all of humanity and the rest of nature. This requires a commitment to build strong, community based, local and bioregional governance systems so that everyone can play a part in ecological stewardship and creating socially just human societies. Processes for this can include citizen assemblies with mandates to formulate socially acceptable strategies and strengthen policies based on ecological limits, fairness and wellbeing for all. We must create a world where all individuals have access to quality education, healthcare, clean water, nutritious food, and safe housing – where the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are met everywhere within biophysical planetary boundaries. This includes empowering marginalized communities, promoting gender equality, and ensuring fair distribution of resources to foster social cohesion and harmony.

This EcoSummit stressed the urgency of making these changes and the necessity to overcome our societal addiction to the current system. This will require a broad consensus and a movement of movements around the shared goal of sustainable wellbeing for humans and the rest of nature.

Signed:

Members of the Scientific Committee and Plenary Speakers listed as authors of this article.

Additional signatories who participated in the conference are listed in supplementary information

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoleng.2023.107052>.