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Principles

Although some people view humans and the environment as distinct and separate, in reality humans rely on the environment in the same way as any other species. All animals and plants utilise what they need to survive and flourish, adapting to the environment and making it adapt to them. Inevitably, the environment changes as a consequence.

There is nothing inherently superior about the "natural" environment, a term that simply refers to that part of the environment man has not extensively modified, nor anything inferior about the man-made environment. The elevation by some people of the natural environment to semi-religious status is no more than a reflection of their personal beliefs and values. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) aims for a more balanced perspective.

The high value placed on the natural environment and on minimising the impact of humans is largely a consequence of society's prosperity. In less prosperous nations and times, particularly when survival was more uncertain, concerns such as the biodiversity of wetlands and the majesty of rainforests rarely received serious consideration.

The LDP values the natural environment within the context of a prosperous society that provides equal protection under the law and is based on respect for individual freedom, personal responsibility, small government and the defence of private property.

We recognise that government's record of environmental management is very poor, that most species extinctions have occurred in public ownership, that government is the single biggest polluter, and that big government schemes and agencies have seriously damaged our forests, rivers, water resources and rural lands.

We recognise that societies in which government is smaller rather than bigger have produced better environmental quality and a better and fairer outcome for all members of society, including the poor.

We reject compulsory confiscation and encroachment of property rights and restriction of individual freedom in the name of the environment.

We recognise that the best protection for the environment is usually achieved through ending government control over natural resources.

Native vegetation

Native vegetation simply means the species of vegetation that were present prior to European settlement. It is a somewhat artificial term as it includes all such species, whether they arrived the day before European settlement, 40,000 years ago with Aboriginal migration or 100,000 years ago by bird migration.

The popularity of native vegetation is based on aesthetic and adaptation grounds. Some people simply prefer the look of them and, because they have been here longer, many native species are also more practical because they are better adapted to Australian conditions. However, a lot of species introduced by Europeans are far more useful to humans. Indeed, Australia would not be able to support a fraction of its current population were it not for exotic species.

The decision to grow native or exotic vegetation is a matter for landowners, not the government. The same applies to its removal. While it may make a lot of sense to grow native vegetation in some situations, the LDP rejects the use of government power to impose any obligation on private landholders. Any government, person or group that wants to use another person's property for growing native vegetation must either buy the property or make some other consent based arrangement with its owner.

The LDP will abolish any law compelling private landholders either to do, or not to do, any act for purposes of satisfying other people's values or opinions about native vegetation. The

LDP will also prohibit government officials from using surveillance such as planes or satellites to obtain intelligence or control over native vegetation on private property.

By providing clarity of tenure in regards to vegetation on private land, property owners will in fact be able to feel confident in allowing currently fallow land to re-vegetate. The current perverse incentive to keep cleared land clear will be removed.

Forestry

Australia's hardwood industry is severely handicapped by extremist policies that refuse to acknowledge its benefits and sustainability. Locking up vast areas of forest on the basis that it is "old growth" is folly. Trees are a renewable resource. Relative to alternate construction materials, timber is potentially more ecologically sound as well as an economically superior choice.

A vibrant forestry industry creates employment in rural areas. Locally produced timber and wood pulp reduce the need for imported products, often originating from less developed countries and collected under unsustainable conditions. In time, regrowth forests are indistinguishable from old growth forests.

The LDP supports a vigorous, sustainable forestry industry. However, we regard governments as unsuitable providers of forestry services, incapable of achieving the goals of forestry more efficiently than private owners. Moreover, public funding of government forestry bureaucracies has contributed to waste and poor resource utilisation for decades.

We support the abolition of government ownership and control of forestry and believe many forests under government ownership should be privatised. We absolutely oppose the transfer of forests to national parks.

We do not support the locking up of old growth forests in the name of environmental protection; forestry and conservation are not incompatible. In some cases, sustainable forestry practices contribute to better environmental outcomes.

We support the principle of the landowner's freedom to choose whether or not to use land for forestry purposes. When land is used for forestry, it must always be the landowner's sole decision when to harvest the trees.

Genetically modified crops

Genetically modified crops offer many benefits for the environment including reduced use of pesticides and higher yields. In the future, GM crops will enhance food quality, thrive in drought conditions and ameliorate environmental damage such as salinity.

Millions of hectares are sown worldwide to GM crops and their safety as a group is not in question. Australia is now in the ludicrous position of importing food from crops that our farmers are banned from growing.

The LDP believes individual farmers should decide on the basis of market economics whether to grow GM crops. A routine check to confirm that released varieties present no unacceptable health hazard would be retained.

Endangered species

The species most in danger of extinction are those owned by government or which are not the subject of private property rights.

The best way to protect native species from extinction is to make them valuable. This is obvious from the fact that apple trees and cats and dogs are in no danger of extinction, despite being entirely unprotected by the government.

The Wollemi Pine was in danger of extinction all the time it was in government ownership and 'priceless' - or rather valueless. The wise decision to permit private ownership of the Wollemi Pine permitted it to become properly valued and widespread, thus rescuing it from the danger of extinction. The same approach should be taken with other endangered species.

The LDP will reform legislation governing ownership and control of endangered species to permit private ownership, breeding and trade. The lack of such freedom of trade and the inability to place a market value on endangered species is the principle reason that private conservation initiatives, including John Wamsley's Earth Sanctuaries, have so far been limited in their success.

This reform will give environmental and conservation groups the freedom they are now denied, to buy the relevant natural resources and devote them to conservation purposes. This will greatly increase the ability of genuine conservation groups to protect endangered

species at the same time as it fosters civil society and respects private property, removing bureaucratic vested interests in the publicly-funded neglect of endangered species.

The LDP will also abandon endangered species protection laws applying to private property. These currently make it harder for people who have endangered species on their property to preserve them. Indeed, they have the perverse effect of creating an incentive to remove any evidence of endangered species from their property so that they are not subject to the legally imposed consequences.

The LDP would remove regulatory barriers to the keeping of native animals as pets. Ownership would merely be subject to animal welfare principles and the liability of owners for damage to others caused by such ownership.

Water

Government policies, by trying to supply water to the entire population at below market rates, have caused an unnecessary water shortage at taxpayers' expense while robbing natural ecosystems that rely on water.

Government is intrinsically incapable of balancing the different social, economic and environmental values of water, while politicising water divides the community and leads to both irrational shortages and surpluses.

As far as possible, the LDP will abolish government ownership and control of water.

The LDP will establish mechanisms for trading water that ensure it is priced in accordance with its value.

The LDP will abolish mandatory water requirements on private property, such as an obligation to install water tanks. This is not an area that warrants government intervention.

The LDP supports the right of private property-holders to sue others for nuisance, trespass, negligence or other civil wrongs that cause damage to rights to collect and use water.

The LDP supports the recycling of water for human consumption, subject to market principles being applied to its cost.

Global warming

The LDP's policy on global warming can be found in the Energy policy.

Hunting and Eating Native Species

The hunting of certain native animals is one of the few means by which they can be given a commercial value that ensures their survival. In some areas of Africa, commercial hunting of big game species has made them so commercially valuable that poaching is no longer a problem.

In Australia, certain species of kangaroos are hunted professionally on a sustainable yield basis, with scientific monitoring to ensure no long-term threat to the species. The result is a thriving, million-dollar industry exporting kangaroo meat to 21 countries. However, kangaroos shot by non-professional hunters must be left to rot. This is a disgraceful waste of a renewable resource.

Duck hunting, of both native and introduced species, is a time-honoured practice among both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Despite the fact that ducks are abundant and the ducks shot by hunters are eaten as food, most State governments have banned duck hunting on "ethical" grounds. This is an abuse of government power; those who oppose duck hunting have enlisted the coercive power of the government to impose their values on others.

Saltwater crocodiles in the north of Australia are reaching high levels and pose a serious threat to human life and recreation. Sustainable yield hunting would put wild crocodile management on a commercial footing and ensure numbers were managed on a long term basis. Further, many Aboriginal groups have successfully made a good living from hunting crocodiles; preventing them from doing so - especially when they use traditional methods - undermines both their economic prosperity and cultural confidence.

The LDP would remove regulatory barriers to sustainable yield hunting by both amateur and professional hunters of kangaroos, crocodiles and ducks.

The aversion of some people to the consumption of food from native animals such as kangaroos and crocodiles is purely aesthetic. Both are safe, nutritious foods that deserve to be available. The LDP would remove any regulatory barriers that prevent food based on native species from being available to consumers in a similar manner to other foods.

Recycling

Recycling is the reprocessing of materials into new products. In theory, recycling prevents the waste of potentially useful materials, reduces the consumption of raw materials and reduces energy usage compared to virgin production.

In practice recycling can consume more resources than disposing of the items and making new ones. All recycling techniques consume energy for transportation and processing and some also use considerable amounts of water.

The economics of recycling ebb and flow with the cost of collection and reprocessing compared to the cost of producing virgin materials. Some materials like aluminium can be recycled indefinitely as there is no change to the materials. Others require substantial reprocessing.

In general, only glass and aluminium recycling are unequivocally viable in their own right and even then only when transportation costs are within certain limits. Virtually all other forms of large scale recycling are viable only when performed by or with a subsidy by government.

Recycling must be economically viable in its own right.

The LDP would remove all recycling subsidies along with any regulatory barriers that inhibit recycling on commercial terms.

National Parks

National Parks are established in order to preserve selected examples of the natural environment from human modification. Many people approve of the creation of National Parks on the basis that they represent areas in which the flora and fauna are largely unchanged from hundreds or thousands of years ago.

However, National Parks have no purpose if they are not accessible to the people who pay for them (ie taxpayers) and protected from threats that would destroy the attributes for which the park was established.

Except in rare cases where the mere presence of humans would constitute a threat to those attributes, National Parks must be open to the public for multiple recreational purposes That includes reasonable vehicle access to allow access by members of the public who are elderly, disabled or otherwise unable to walk for long distances in rough terrain. The LDP is strongly opposed to the locking up of large areas of National Parks so that only privileged public servants and politicians are permitted to enter them.

National Parks must also be actively managed to remove or reduce the threat of exotic animals and damaging bushfires (not all bushfires are damaging). This includes the use of

methods such as amateur and professional hunters to control pest animals (eg pigs, foxes, feral cats and rabbits) and regular, large-scale fuel reduction burns.

The LDP does not oppose the charging of entry fees to National Parks provided the funds are used to help offset the cost of park maintenance.

Fishing and Whaling

As with any species living in the wild, the best way to ensure the preservation of fish and whales is to make them subject to commercial value.

The LDP supports tourism activities that focus on whales, since these provide an incentive to preserve the species.

The LDP does not oppose the harvesting of certain species of whales for food provided the survival of the species is not threatened. We respect the cultural significance of whales as food to some people and do not support Australia's opposition to such traditions simply because our culture is different.

The LDP does not support subsidising the whaling or fishing industries by any government.