



Supporting the environment

An APS insights paper

Summary

Funding for environmental causes remains a small percentage of overall philanthropy; however, climate change exacerbates the inequities in society in many areas philanthropists care about, including health, education, food security, and human rights. This paper explores the critical environmental issues not-for-profits and philanthropists are working on together.

We hope it will provide givers interested in making a difference to this cause with a better understanding of how and where they could place their charitable funds.

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Head of Philanthropic Giving

Introduction

Australia's ecosystem is unique. Most of our native plants and animals don't exist anywhere else. Our way of life and our economy are dependent on healthy water, soil, climate, oceans, and biodiversity. The environment, specifically climate change, is a consistent and growing concern for many worldwide, particularly the next generation. Whilst younger philanthropists want to focus efforts in this area, in 2019, environmental charities only received 0.5%¹ of charity revenue.

There are several key environmental areas that philanthropists can look to fund:

1. Climate change
2. Conservation, including wildlife and marine environments
3. Farming and agriculture
4. First Nations knowledge and management

Climate change

Here's what we know:

- The Earth is warming
- Humans are causing it
- We're sure
- It's bad
- We can fix it

But it's not just about the environment. Climate change has begun to exacerbate issues and inequities in many areas philanthropists care about, such as education, health, human rights, equality, and food security. And this impact is only going to get worse.

Climate hazards will become more frequent and more intense over the coming decade, with research showing that levels of physical risk will increase unless global emissions are drastically reduced.² Net-zero emissions by 2050 and containing global warming to less than 1.5 degrees are critical, as are the next ten years of action.

Australia's contribution to global emissions is three-fold: domestic emissions (1.4% of the worldwide total, primarily generated from energy); exported emissions (fossil fuel exports, we are currently the world's largest exporter of gas and second-largest exporter of coal – the latter being 1.4 times greater than Germany's domestic emissions); and as a global player on the global stage (through our membership of the UN and our international commitments).

One area of particular concern is the impact of climate change on health. Not only is climate change leading to increased illness and death through more frequent extreme weather events (heatwaves, floods, disruption of food systems, food, and water-borne diseases), but it is undermining many of the determinants for good health such as livelihoods, equality, access to health care and social support. The people whose health is being harmed first and worst by the climate crisis are the people who contribute least to its causes and who are least able to protect themselves and their families against it - people in low-income and disadvantaged countries and communities.³ Climate change also has a proven impact on mental health, with climate anxiety rising.⁴

There are national and international charities working on the two critical areas of climate change, namely mitigation and adaptation. Charities in the mitigation space are working to reduce emissions through research, development, implementation of new technologies and clean energy. They are also increasingly involved in the advocacy space, working to influence politicians, businesses and individuals. Those working in the adaptation space focus on helping communities most impacted by climate change to transform areas of their communities and way of life, by preparing for longer bushfire and flood seasons, diversifying food crops, reforestation of farms and urban areas, climate change mental health resilience, and providing affordable in-home air-conditioning.



Conservation, including wildlife and marine environments

Australia is one of the most critical nations on Earth for biodiversity. Most of Australia's wildlife is unique, making its conservation even more important. Currently, more than 1,700 species and ecological communities in Australia are known

to be threatened and at risk of extinction.⁵ The main threats come from loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitat, invasive species and altered fire regimes.

Additional threats include:

- Unsustainable use and management of natural resources
- Changes to the aquatic environment
- Water flows
- Climate change

When it comes to the marine environment, the most significant threats include overfishing, destructive fishing practices, sedimentation, and pollution from land-based sources. In conjunction with increased carbon in oceans, coral bleaching, and diseases, there are no pristine reefs anywhere in the world.

Organisations working specifically on conservation (both land and marine) cover various critical areas through advocacy, community engagement, land purchase, habitat regeneration, rewilding, bushfire recovery initiatives, and river and ocean cleanups. In addition to the practical conservation efforts, scientists are researching and developing innovative solutions to land and marine ecosystem challenges.



Farming and agriculture

The agricultural sector contributes to and suffers the effects of climate change. The Australian agricultural industry constitutes 55% of Australia's land use and 15% of Australia's total emissions.⁶ Agricultural businesses occupy over half of Australia's total land area.⁷ The conversion of forests into farmland and the greenhouse gases produced by cows and other ruminant animals are major contributors to Australia's emissions.⁸ As well as contributing to climate change, agriculture is susceptible to the extreme drought, flooding and temperature variability that is increasingly occurring.⁹ The National Farmers Federation has adopted a net zero by 2050 policy to recognise of the need for action.

Not-for-profit organisations are working to support the industry through restorative and regenerative agriculture, research and innovation across the supply chain, sustainable food systems, education and training for farmers and political and industry advocacy.



First Nations knowledge and management

Internationally, First Nations people make up 5% of the population but manage 80% of the world's biodiversity¹⁰ and are more likely to be impacted by changes in seasonal weather patterns, increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and changing water. First Nations knowledge, systems and practices around climate and environment are increasingly being applied to climate solutions, both independently and in collaboration with western climate science. These efforts are taking place across the broad spectrum of environmental challenges, including fire management, wildlife protection, coastal and marine restoration, urban clean air and renewable energy. Several First Nations-led charities, particularly at a grassroots and local community level, are working on these issues.

Find out more

If you are interested in learning from and collaborating with other philanthropists, we encourage you to reach out to the [Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network](#). The AEGN brings funders together to learn about environmental issues and solutions and share networks and funding opportunities. They also provide a supportive, collective space where members can share openly and explore possibilities to enable the most effective giving.

The team at APS have also put together categorised lists of some of the charities working on environmental issues. Please contact us at giving@australianphilanthropicservices.com.au if you would like us to provide you with a copy of any of the below:

- Climate change
- Conservation (Australia)
- Conservation (International)
- Environment (Indigenous-focused)
- Marine and plastics
- Renewables
- Bushfire and flood relief

Footnotes

1 <https://www.aegn.org.au/environmental-and-climate-change-giving-trends-2022/>

2 <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability/our-insights/climate-risk-and-response-physical-hazards-and-socioeconomic-impacts>

3 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

4 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3918955

5 <https://www.awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/species>

6 <https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FCA-EY-FINAL-Report-Low-emissions-future-for-Agriculture.pdf>

7 <https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FCA-EY-FINAL-Report-Low-emissions-future-for-Agriculture.pdf>

8 <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/nggi-quarterly-update-mar-2019.pdf>

9 <https://www.science.org.au/curious/policy-features/whats-happening-australias-rainfall>

10 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/27/we-want-to-be-included-first-nations-demand-a-say-on-climate-change>