

## Indigenous issues

In December 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) presented its final recommendations to the Government after a decade-long formal process. The Government has rejected most of the Council's recommendations, refused to consider its draft legislation, and ignored CAR's strategies.

### In addition, it has:

- triggered an alarmist and divisive debate over the Wik decision, and introduced the 1998 Amendments (based on Howard's 10 Point Plan), significantly increasing the extinguishment of native title,
- refused to offer a formal apology to the Stolen generations (and questioned whether there was a 'Stolen Generation'),
- decided to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) without any consultation with Indigenous communities.

## Refugees

The Australian Government's policy of detaining asylum seekers who enter the country without valid visas is one that has come under significant international and domestic criticism. Australia is the only western country to have a policy of mandatory, non-reviewable detention.

## Foreign aid

Our current aid is at an all time low under the Howard government, currently 0.26% of our Gross National Income (GNI).

A critical assessment of the ALP from 1996 - 2004 is available on our website: <http://www.foe.org.au>

## How to vote in the federal election

We do not endorse specific parties, but would urge you to consider the negative social and environmental track record of the Coalition government since they were elected in 1996 when casting your vote.

## Action for a sustainable future

### A responsible federal government would:

- ratify the Kyoto Protocol and set mandatory targets to reduce greenhouse emissions by 60-80% by 2050,
- immediately halt subsidies for fossil fuel use in Australia, place an immediate moratorium on any further development of coal fired power stations,
- create an intake program for climate refugees above and beyond the current intake of refugees,
- stop the proposed nuclear reactor in Sydney, and the federal nuclear waste dump,
- commit to the accelerated phaseout of uranium mining in Australia,
- oppose Free Trade Agreements such as the Thai-Australia Agreement and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER),
- support a legally binding code of conduct for Australian corporations operating outside Australia,
- save the Murray River by increasing annual environmental flows of water by 1,500 gigalitres,
- halt all large-scale clearing of remnant native vegetation, protect all old growth and high conservation value forests across Australia,
- abolish mandatory detention of asylum seekers, and institute community based arrangements for asylum seekers while their claims are being processed,
- commit to increasing our foreign aid to at least 0.7% of GNI in the next national budget.

For further details, the sources for this leaflet and a full list of our recommendations to the political parties, please see our website: [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au)

## Polls and Politics – the environment and the election



## Friends of the Earth (FoE)

Is a membership-based social and environmental justice organisation. We do not endorse 'people, parties or products' and are completely independent of all political parties. However, we are concerned that the prospect of another term of the Coalition government will mean continued social impacts and environmental destruction.

Accordingly, we have taken the unusual step of preparing this sheet: it details what we consider to be the consistent failings of the Coalition on key social and environmental issues since their election in 1996. It also outlines some of the actions that we believe any political party must take in order to 'do its part' in ensuring adequate and visionary protection for the environment.

## The Coalition's track record on the environment, 1996 – 2004

### the good, the bad and the mostly ugly

Over the last 12 months, the Federal Government has announced major policies on protecting the Great Barrier Reef, water rights and heritage protection. However, the Howard government has consistently claimed strong green credentials while running a largely anti environment agenda. A longer assessment is available at: [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au)

### Some of the more significant aspects of its policy and actions include:

#### Greenhouse

Climate change poses perhaps the single greatest threat to life on Earth. Australia is the largest per capita producer of greenhouse gases in the industrialised world, yet the Government's record has been very disappointing.

- There is no comprehensive national greenhouse strategy, and no real commitment to renewable energy, significant reductions in greenhouse pollution, or commitment to a carbon tax; it has opposed the Kyoto Protocol. Funding for renewable energy research has been slashed, and substantial funds have been allocated to fossil fuel use and research.

- In 2004 the government committed to itself to geosequestration (collecting greenhouse emissions and storing below ground) - this is expensive and largely untested.

- It refused to increase the Mandatory Renewable Energy (MRET) target.

- It disbanded the Energy Research and Development Corporation in 1997, and de-funded the Centre for Renewable Energy in 2002.

#### Water & land management

Australia is now fifth behind Brazil, Indonesia, the Congo and Bolivia in terms of the area of land cleared annually.

There have been some encouraging signs, for instance, in May 2004, the federal and Queensland governments announced a moratorium on land clearing in Queensland.

But it has failed to seal the deal, and until it does, the Government falls short of the mark.

On the Murray River, the government has committed to putting "up to" 500 gigalitres of extra water per year back into the Murray, which is less than one third of what is needed.

The Government seems to be going backwards in protecting high conservation forests in Tasmania and elsewhere.

#### General approaches to the environment

Some positive institutional reform has occurred. But these have failed to achieve their full potential because of under funding, an absence of clear goals and targets, the potential for important environmental approval powers to be devolved to the States, and reliance on voluntary mechanisms for policy implementation.

There has been a profound reluctance to enact definite sustainability targets or to legislate to meet international treaty obligations.

#### Our international standing

Prior to 1996, Australia had a good reputation in international forums aimed at protecting the environment. This is now largely in tatters. We are increasingly seen as being self interested (eg. in the case of the Kyoto Protocol) or too closely aligned to the USA (a nation which, under GW Bush, has been highly destructive in most international forums).

Australia refused to support nomination of Antarctica as a world park (June 2004).

#### Funding

In 1996, Australia witnessed 'privatisation by stealth' as the Howard government linked the partial sale of Telstra with funding for the environment. If it had been serious about providing long term funding for ecological restoration, it would have kept Telstra in public hands and allocated some or all of its profits to the environment. Instead, the money received through the partial sale is now gone, and many projects have lost funding.

The benefits from the National Heritage Trust (NHT) Fund, set up with Telstra money has been, according to an expert review, "severely wanting in the first few years of its operation". The NHT mid-term reviews showed that spending is often poor value for money.

The \$5.5 million "Lend a Hand" advertising campaign is essentially political images in a pre-election environment.

#### Marine issues

The commitment to protecting 33% of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) was excellent but there are still critical areas of the Reef that won't be protected, and the whole reef is at threat if Australia doesn't deal with greenhouse pollution, as coral reefs are lost to global warming.

In 2004, a government paper identified four sensitive offshore basins close to the GBR Marine Park as high priority for oil exploration.

The government didn't attend the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting, July 2004; a critical time for the IWC, with some countries trying to overturn the existing moratorium on commercial whaling.

Over the next 10 years, up to 80 planned plutonium fuel shipments are likely to pass through the Tasman Sea and Pacific. The government has refused to oppose these shipments.

#### Federal environmental laws

The government re-wrote federal environment laws, creating the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) act, promising 'the best legislation in the world', but then failed to provide better protection.

In his time as environment minister, Dr Kemp only listed one species as being 'critically endangered' under the EPBC (the government had committed to list 654 species). He also failed to give protection for 'endangered ecological communities'.

#### Nuclear issues

The government has engaged in unprecedented lobbying when it forcefully opposed moves to have Kakadu listed as 'In Danger' at UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. It facilitated the commercial development of the Beverley uranium mine in northern South Australia despite this mine using a acid based leach mining technique not commercially approved in any other comparable developed nation.

The government has actively pursued plans for a new nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights in Sydney's southern suburbs.