

ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN ASIA

A submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade *Foreign Policy White Paper*
2017 Taskforce

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Executive Summary

- Environmental degradation is directly implicated in a range of challenges of global significance that deserve to be addressed in the forthcoming *Foreign Policy White Paper*.
- Environmental security should become a focus of greater importance within Australia's foreign policy, aid and development framework.
- Australian foreign policy should actively promote regional collaboration and evidence-based trade, aid and development policies that systematically take account of long-term environmental impacts.
- To ensure foreign policy engagement offers the most promising long-term contribution to the protection of Austral-Asia's environmental security, Australia should
 - (1) extend inter-governmental collaboration on good governance to emphasise environmental security; and
 - (2) expand research collaboration and scientific exchange between Australia and its Asian counterparts.

Environmental deterioration is directly or indirectly implicated in a range of challenges of global significance that are already having serious political and economic implications for Australia as well as its Asian neighbours, notably in the areas of migration,¹ food security,² health³ and bio-security.⁴ These impacts of inadequately understood environmental security risks suggest that:

- National governments can no longer afford to trade off protection of environmental values and services for economic development, and cannot rely on domestic policy alone to assure national environmental security.
- The extent and seriousness of Australia's engagement with its immediate neighbours in the Asian region is not only essential for economic development and political security, but for the viability of Australia's environment and quality of life.

Several areas of environmental deterioration have or will significantly affect sustainability of the economy and quality of life in Asia and Australia: pollution, fossil fuel dependence and degradation of forest and marine environments. These are independently important issues, as well as contributing to cascading impacts by virtue of their cause and effect relationship to climate change.⁵

Effectively addressing these issues at the highest level of international trade, aid and development policy is not only important to the future sustainability for the nations which must steward these resources, but is also of profound significance to the provision of environmental services which underpin local livelihoods as well as the global economy. Interdependencies between economic and environmental security, as well as their effects on broader aspects of human wellbeing, are most evident with respect to the predicted health and food security consequences of

¹ Khalid Koser (2013) The Lowy Institute. Environmental Changes and Migration - Implications for Australia. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/environmental-change-and-migration-implications-australia>

² FAO (2016) Climate Change and Food Security: Risks and Responses. Rome: FAO; FAO-HLPE (2012) Food Security and Climate Change: A Report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

³ Sly, P.D. (2011) Health Impacts of Climate Change and Biosecurity in the Asia Pacific Region. *Reviews on Environmental Health*. 26 (1): 7 -12; Shuman, E.K. (2010) Global Climate Change and Infectious Diseases. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 362:1061-63.

⁴ Worldwatch Institute (2015) State of the World 2015: Confronting Hidden Threats to Sustainability. Washington: Island Press; Dobson, A., K. Barker and S. Taylor (2013) Biosecurity: The Socio-Politics of Invasive Species and Infectious Diseases. Routledge.

⁵ IPCC (2014) Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and sectoral aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/>

climate change, which have cross-sector feedback effects on (and from) agriculture, fisheries and forest ecosystem services throughout the region.⁶

The 2016 FAO report on *Climate Change and Food Security: Risks and Responses* points to changes in resource distribution; fish, animal and plant productivity; increasing risk of extreme weather events, disease and pests; competition for water; reduced options for local diversification; loss of marine and forest ecosystems and the services and resilience these previously provided to livelihoods directly through food self-sufficiency and incomes. The report concludes:

Climate change is already impacting, and will increasingly impact, food security and nutrition. Through effects on agro-ecosystems it impacts agricultural production, the people and countries depending on it and ultimately consumers through increased price volatility... [In each domain] from climate to biophysical, to economic and social, to households and food security... vulnerabilities exacerbate effects, with rural poor and especially women, who tend to be most directly dependent upon land, forest and water resources, most adversely affected. (FAO 2016:34)

Several widely-reported examples of intensifying impacts that link local to global health and economic livelihood issues with environmental degradation in the Asian region include:

- **Annual burning of Indonesia's forests**, largely driven by oil palm plantation development, contributes directly to global carbon emissions and reduced capacity for carbon sequestration. It also has immediate and costly impacts on the health of Indonesia's population as well as those of neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore.⁷
- **China's urban industrial pollution similarly** has well-documented impacts on the health and longevity of its population. The economic costs of inadequate attention to environmental impacts of economic development strategies in these cases threaten the very prosperity that current development policies have produced.⁸

⁶ Beukering, P., ed. (2013) *Nature's Wealth: The Economics Of Ecosystem Services And Poverty*. Cambridge University Press.

⁷ World Bank (2016) *The Cost of Fire: An Economic Analysis of Indonesia's 2015 Fire Crisis*. Washington: World Bank. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/643781465442350600/Indonesia-forest-fire-notes.pdf>

⁸ World Bank and State Environmental Protection Administration (China) (2007) *Cost of Pollution in China: Economic Estimates of Physical Damages*. Washington: World Bank. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPENVIRONMENT/Resources/China_Cost_of_Pollution.pdf. See also, 'Pollution - The cost of clean air', *The Economist*, 7 February, 2015.

- **Illegal and unregulated exploitation of the marine environment** has decimated coastal resources in many parts of Southeast Asia where competition for increasingly scarce natural resources has led to intensified destructive practices including use of illegal gears, blast fishing, potassium cyanide and the clearance of mangroves. In Indonesia, out of livelihood insecurity and indebtedness, fishers resort to high-risk practices, including illegal trans-boundary fishing, smuggling and trafficking in people. Apprehension in Australian waters send boat crews into a spiral of debt and dependence, often forcing further risk-taking.⁹

It is clear from these examples that good governance is a matter of great importance for environmental security and that it requires engagement with populations and institutions at every scale within the region to be meaningfully addressed. Australia's domestic policies on environmental protection therefore cannot be delinked from foreign policy. Leadership on environmental governance in the Asian region and beyond will depend upon demonstrable implementation of best-practice and scientific evidence-based policies, and adherence to high governance standards throughout the region.

Australian Foreign policy should actively promote evidence-based policies and regional collaboration that systematically take account of long-term environmental impacts. Opportunities for engagement that offer the most promising contribution to the protection of AustralAsia's environmental security lie in expanding our commitments in the areas of good governance and scientific collaboration. They would be best served by:

- Extending the focus on good governance in Australian foreign policy to emphasise multi-lateral agreements that support environmental security; and
- Increasing the foreign policy focus on scientific and educational exchange between Australia and its Asian neighbours.

⁹ Fox, J. (2009) Legal and Illegal Indonesian Fishing in Australian Waters. *Indonesia Beyond the Waters Edge: Managing an Archipelagic State*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 195-220; Jaiteh, V. et al. (forthcoming) *Marine Policy*. Special Issue.

Recommendations:

Governance Aid and Development

Australia's aid and development policies have previously focused on promoting good governance from national through to local scales. Building on its experience in governance capacity building and reform in the region, future foreign policy should:

- Ensure that agreements on trade include internationally monitored frameworks for environmental and social protection, and devote resources to ensuring that governance of these frameworks is effective.
- Expand direct support of translational scientific research and collaborative policy development in the areas of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and renewable energy through ACIAR, CSIRO, and ARC linkage research.
- Strengthen the relationship between Australian and Asian environmental agencies and NGOs at provincial and district as well as national level.
- Support community-based sustainability programs that bolster local NGOs and their community and government engagement on a long-term rather than ad hoc project basis.
- Incorporate governance capacity building, skills development and access to scientific information in country-based small grant programs, rather than limit these programs to infrastructure development, as currently applies to DAP programs in Indonesia, for example.
- Collaborate with regional governments and international agencies to support a wide range of experiments with Blue Carbon, REDD +, Fair Trade, Organic and Stewardship Certification schemes that would overcome the heavy transaction costs imposed on local communities and natural resource user groups.

Education and Research

Australia should respond to the threats posed by regional environmental degradation by enhancing the following areas of collaboration and exchange with governments in Asia:

- Expand the support for short course training programs in environmental policy and management.

- Build on the success of the New Colombo Plan and Endeavour initiatives by expanding opportunities for practical placements, funded short courses and collaborative research at postgraduate as well as undergraduate level.
- Establish collaborative postdoctoral fellowships involving both environmental and social science research teams that focus specifically on environmental issues and regulatory regimes of importance to the Asian region.