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A guide to reducing Australia's environmental footprint

Australia has one of the world's largest ecological footprints per capita. If the rest of the world lived like we do in Australia, we'd need the regenerative capacity of over three and a half earths to sustain our demands on nature. This ecological footprint is mostly made up of carbon emissions from electricity use, transport, direct fuel combustion from fossil fuel refining, processing and mining, as well as cropland and grazing for the production of food. It is clearly unsustainable in the long term.

So what can we do about it?

Living within the one planet is possible. Most individuals and businesses can help by:

- Preserving our natural capital (the wildlife, ecosystems and the benefits they provide);
- Producing goods and services better and smarter;
- Consuming more wisely;
- Redirecting financial flows to more sustainable options.;



Top: Sugarcane © WWF-Aus / Greg Coggiola
Bottom: © WWF-Aus / Holly Bassett

Individuals, communities, businesses, cities and governments are **making better choices to protect our natural capital and reduce our footprint**, with environmental, social and economic benefits.

Image: © Kerry Trapnell / WWF Aus

Changing our course and finding alternative pathways will not be easy. But it can be done. But where to start?

1

Be a conscious consumer

Whether you're buying for your business or yourself, it's important to know where your products and services come from. Is your business buying ethical and environmentally sourced products?

You don't have to do everything at once. Start by identifying priorities; establish where there may be a risk within your supply chain of for example, illegally sourced timber, unsustainable seafood, or human rights abuses, and progressively take steps to improve your purchasing patterns. Where possible look for products and services that have been independently certified. Importantly also work with your suppliers and get them to shift their policies and practices.

Be honest about your achievements and share with others your journey so people can learn from your experience.

2

Use less energy

It makes good economic sense to reduce your energy consumption to save money. It's also important given that our main source of energy production in Australia comes from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, which is contributing to global warming.

To avoid dangerous climate change, science is telling us we need to keep additional warming of the planet to no more than 2°C. Setting science-based targets for your business that are within a 2°C economy are ambitious but achievable. This will mean decarbonisation of the global energy sector by mid-century.

As a start making sure our buildings, machinery and appliances are as energy efficient as possible, and then over time, plan to convert buildings and precincts to be "carbon positive" (where buildings are net producers of energy and water) and clever precinct developments, along with technological advances in energy production and materials.



Image: © National Geographic Stock / Sarah Leen / WWF

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Join the Renewable Energy Revolution

Once businesses have looked at reducing their energy footprint, another opportunity is to investigate using renewable energy as a core element of the businesses' energy and sustainability strategy. Businesses are actively and successfully adding renewable energy to their own facilities and entering into contracts to buy or invest in offsite renewable energy.

While there are still challenges regarding the development of cost-effective projects on favourable terms, exponential leaps taking place in renewable energy technologies will mean that, together, businesses can join the two million households that have already installed renewable energy on their rooftops.



Image: © Global Warming Images / WWF

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Use less, recycle, reuse, share

Making better choices about the things we buy and use as well as reducing water consumption, consuming less and reducing waste will save resources as well as money. Up to 40 per cent of waste that ends up in landfill is building waste.

By setting a target of Zero Waste, we can find ways to change our habits, and reuse and repurpose the items that we currently dispose of. The sharing and collaborative economy is here to stay and businesses need to understand how to jump on the opportunities it presents.

As a start remove individual waste bins and introduce recycling facilities. Promote car share programs, invest in bike and shower facilities for staff and convert the company car fleet to electric and hybrid-electric cars.



Image: © Bruce Clapham / WWF Aus

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Redirect financial flows

Smart investment choices now can help us create healthy, sustainable workplaces and cities and protect our biodiversity, which can improve the quality of our lives and reduce our environmental footprint. Let's make sure our investment and superannuation dollars are going to create the future we want.

7

Join the Conversation

There's no better place to start a conversation than over a meal – ideally a candle-lit one during Earth Hour! Talking to work colleagues, and inviting friends and family over to talk about how we can all be a part of the solution and what we can do to reduce our footprint is really powerful.

8

Talk to your local politicians

Advocate for good environmental policies that preserve Australia's beautiful, treasured natural capital and create wellbeing and quality of life for now and future generations. Political leaders will only aim as high as we demand.

