

Environmental Wellbeing and Responsibility to Society

Caring for the natural world is critical to our own wellbeing. We are an integral part of nature and yet we have been slow to recognize the detrimental effects we humans are having on the environment. To accept nature's nurturance while allowing our lifestyles to undermine its life-giving capacity is to jeopardise our own health and future survival.¹

As psychologists, we function to promote the wellbeing of society. So it is vital that as a discipline, we acknowledge the profound impact humans collectively are having on the environment and urgently work to counter the ill-effects to the health and wellbeing of people and planet.

WHAT WILL WE DO?

We acknowledge that the implications of environmental damage and climate change bring in new responsibilities and require an extended understanding of the nature of wellbeing.

We will work to ensure that psychologists contribute to mitigating the ill-effects of a climate-turbulent future, strengthening our capacity as practitioners at individual, community, governance and academic levels.

We will work with other disciplines, agencies and networks to achieve shared understandings, pooling energies and insights to influence and to find our way through conflict; to shape thinking, provide direction for interventions, and contribute to the task of mobilizing a collective response towards a healthier sustainable future.

To start this process the New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS)

- Recognises the need to actively encourage psychologists to promote understanding of the human and psychological dimensions of global climate change and to develop the role of psychology in climate change issues affecting New Zealand.
- Commits to auditing the Society's own environmental impacts and developing sustainable practices and strategies to reduce its contribution to global climate change.
- Seeks opportunities to work with government, political organisations and other agencies to ensure they understand the potential roles (policy, practical and research) for psychology in promoting understanding, encouraging climate-friendly practices and responding to communities and individuals experiencing climate related distress.

¹ Adapted from the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) website introduction to the Transpersonal Narratives in Eco-Psychology Conference 24-26th November 2017, Cornwall, U.K.

<http://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/events/others-events/249-transpersonal-narratives-in-eco-psychology>

WHAT INTERESTS US?

While there are many questions that have captured our attention the following have a psychological focus:

- What does it mean to live sustainably? How will this impact on our consumer and carbon rich lifestyles? What can be done to communicate environmental messages so that sustainable lifestyles are adopted?
- What effects will climate change have on people's lives, health, wellbeing, cultures and communities? How can those impacts be ameliorated and what adaptive responses are needed at the individual, community and government level?
- What can we do to flourish in a finite world within ecological and social limits? How can cities become places for nature, promoting the wellbeing of an increasing population?

WHAT WE CAN OFFER?

To counter environmental degradation and facilitate action based adaptation, mitigation and transformation psychologists can offer:

- Interventions to ensure understanding of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation, especially climate change (given the 2014 NZPsS AGM remit).
 - Knowledge based interventions to stimulate interpersonal/public discussions and enhanced engagement in climate action
 - Process-based interventions to facilitate the development of self and community efficacy in community-led solutions
- Interventions to overcome emotional responses associated with this understanding. These responses including depression, anxiety, helplessness and hopelessness
- Community-based climate protection interventions to facilitate:
 - A reduction in urban energy consumption
 - More sustainable urban waste disposal and water conservation
 - Low carbon urban living transitions to sustainability
 - Consumer/citizen participation in above (i.e. environmental conservation)
 - Citizens, communities, commerce and councils (local governments) working together to contribute to sustainable urban development
 - The formation of people-networks that encourage new ideas and promote the learning, experimentation and creative problem solving required for resilient communities.

Note that psychologists in many parts of the world are moving to use their expertise in these endeavours. Health professionals will be increasingly involved in a comprehensive response to climate change and the transition required to sustainability. The NZPsS's responsibility is to ensure

that our own psychologists have the opportunity to contribute to these endeavours in the near future.

April 2018