Information Sheet 54

WASTE

More land is appropriated from wildlife for food production than any other purpose. So using more land than we need because of high food waste levels has direct impacts on animals.

Background

Not all waste is created equal. There are considerable differences in the impact on wildlife and eco-systems of various kinds of waste. These differences allow us to rank waste issues and focus on the most critical ones.

Waste can be broadly considered in the following categories: land, water, energy and materials.

Land

Animal Justice Party (AJP) aims to minimise our human footprint to allow the recovery of wildlife populations. High levels of food waste mean we need to appropriate more land for food production than we would otherwise need. It is also particularly tragic when an animal is raised in pain on a factory farm, trucked and slaughtered in fear, only to end up in the bin. Australians are reported to throw out $825 million[1] worth of fresh meat each year.

Food and other waste are intimately connected and show some of the hidden complexity in the trade-offs and dilemmas associated with tackling waste.

For some foods, extra or more sophisticated packaging can reduce food waste at the expense of increasing packaging waste. Recycling packaging can reduce packaging waste, but at the expense of the extra energy required to do the recycling. In a real sense the refrigerator is the ultimate illustration of waste trade-offs. It reduces food waste by allowing us to keep foods longer at the expense of consuming material in the form of steel, aluminium, plastic, and copper to name a few. The fridge is also a fairly heavy user of energy in the average household.

Water

Of the 8 million tonnes[2] of plastic waste entering the ocean each year, Australia contributes approximately 130,000 tonnes. Single use plastics are wreaking havoc with marine life; plastic bags, balloons, straws and drink bottles to name a few, frequently find their way into the ocean. This not only causes injury, entanglement and death to sea animals, but contaminates marine life, with approximately 700 species[3] found to have ingested plastic. While single use plastic may currently be an everyday convenience for many, these items are simply not necessary in today's society. We believe it is important to educate the public about the impact of their choices and on sustainable alternatives while also encouraging enterprises that are actively reducing their waste. Solutions to all damaging plastics require further research and development, but it is clear that we must rely less on plastic in our future.

Abandoned fishing nets are also a significant part of the plastic pollution problem in the oceans, which travel great distances, trapping and killing large numbers of marine animals[4]. Forty-six per cent of the 79,000 tonne Great Pacific Garbage Patch, for example, is comprised of fishing nets[5] alone (not including other fishing gear). Along with the devastating environmental impacts created by harvesting the oceans of fish (see our Marine Animals fact sheet), we believe that addressing the plastic pollution problem must involve stressing the importance of focusing on fishing as a primary solution.

Energy

While many forms of waste, like food, plastics, paper and old phones are obvious, wasted energy is invisible. A modern mobile phone embodies as much energy[6] as it took to produce a motor vehicle in the 1980s. And while cars are typically kept and maintained for well over a decade, many people upgrade their phones without a second thought. They might rage against users of disposable cutlery, while their 5th phone in a decade has produced a huge amount of invisible waste. This invisible energy waste can have a large impact; particularly when the energy comes from burning fossil fuels. Invisible waste produced by damming rivers or cutting and burning forests or crops for biofuel, can also be significant.

[1] http://www.tai.org.au/sites/defualt/files/PB%206%20What%20a%20waste%20final_7.pdf
[2] https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stemming-the-plastic-tide-10-rivers-contribute-most-of-the-plastic-in-the-oceans/
[3] https://ocean.si.edu/conservation/pollution/marine-plastics
[4] https://www.worldoceanfest.org/new-blog/2017/6/9/the-impact-of-abandoned-ocean-fishing-nets-on-marine-life
[5] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-22939-w
[6] http://pubs.rsc.org/en/content/articlehtml/2014/cs/c3cs60235d

ANIMAL JUSTICE PARTY

Want a voice for animals in Parliament? Join, donate, or find out more about the Animal Justice Party at **animaljusticeparty.org**. You can also read our policies, here: **animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist**.

Authorised by: Geoff Russell, 6 Fifth Ave, St Morris SA 5068

But does it matter about using energy if it is clean energy? Sweden consumes almost 40 percent more electricity per person than Australia but produces merely 1/4 of the carbon dioxide per person. We need to understand that generalisations may need to be revised, and the public educated, as our information improves and as technology changes.

Materials

Materials are components of the natural world that mined or grown and are then processed. Australia's mining industries use tens of thousands of hectares of land, but with highly variable impacts. This is much lower than the hundreds of millions of hectares affected by animal agriculture and the 25 million affected by cropping.

Some mining technologies are virtually invisible[7]. Others involve total devastation, but over a small area. Something like the McArthur River mine in the Northern Territory is smaller than Sydney airport. In contrast to these small intense impacts, our food industries appropriate hundreds of millions of hectares. But there is a wide variation in the kinds of land use between mining and food, and their impacts on wildlife. Measuring the impact of wasted materials is complex but wasted food likely has more impact on wildlife and habitat than other forms of waste; simply because of the massive land use changes required to produce food

Recycling issues

As the recycling industry has grown it is evident that it is just like any other large industry, particularly when handling toxic material. Adelaide has more recycling 9 per person than anywhere else in Australia and has experienced a string of recycling plant fires over the past decade, all spreading toxic smoke over a large area; Recycling is not always benign.

Recycling may be different from to other industries, but it still has costs and benefits which need to be measured and considered when decisions are made. Recycling some goods may be hazardous and costly in both time, energy, water, strong solvents or other materials.

Australia has been exporting its recycling to developing countries and has had an "out of sight, out of mind" attitude to the extreme hazards associated with recycling some goods. While we support recycling in our policy and objectives we understand that it isn't an end in itself but a means to an end; namely to reduce our adverse impacts on the planet.

The circular usage conundrum

In 2018 a committee of the Australian Senate called for the Government to *"... prioritise the establishment of a circular economy in which materials are used, collected, recovered, and re-used, including within Australia."*

But consider timber, a traditional, popular, renewable material used for building, furniture, and energy. Is its use and disposal considered "circular"? Forests are habitat and their harvesting impacts many animal species. The forestry industry has also always been one of the most dangerous for humans. In essence it is a *sustainably destructive* industry.

Other grown materials, such as hemp, biofuels, wool or cotton, are also complex industries needing careful analysis. Simply being *natural* isn't enough. Wool, for example, involves substantial suffering, regardless of how sustainable it is. Some materials are sustainably destructive and wool is sustainably cruel. Circularity makes the most sense with elements, particularly metals and their alloys. But even here there are tradeoffs and compromises. What if an element is more energetically expensive to recycle than to mine? Recycling in that case may only be sensible if clean (meaning near zero CO_2 emissions) is abundant.

Some materials may be easily recycled, but undesirable for toxicity and safety reasons, such as batteries. Lead acid batteries are readily recycled but also a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands. Unfortunately the nature of battery use makes control impossible.

In summary, we aim to minimise our eco-footprint while providing a good standard of living for everyone on the planet. When a circular economy of some material helps, then we should support it, but when it doesn't then we shouldn't. To assume that circularity is always good is to prejudge complex technical issues when we should be measuring impacts and making intelligent choices.

Policy

The AJP aims to eliminate food waste and environmental pollution while reducing energy and material use. We support recycling and a "circular economy" where these have positive impacts. We recognise that the environmental problems we face ultimately also require a reduction in consumption and an end to the consumption of animals (see our policies on Population and Farming)

Key Objectives

1. To invest in further development of biodegradable products and work toward the banning of harmful plastics (see our Marine Animals policy).
2. To encourage recycling and composting programs in businesses and public institutions and educate the public about waste issues.
3. To stop the dumping of clothing and edible food by retailers and to ensure these products are sent to people in need.
4. To invest in innovative enterprises which are reducing and reusing waste.
5. To oppose "planned obsolescence" and barriers to repairing or upgrading consumer goods.

[7] https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/MRF/Areas/Resourceful-magazine/Issue-07/Invisible-mining

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