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Globalisation threat to the environment

Globalisation poses the greatest challenge to environmental management in Australia, according to Tor Hundloe, Professor of Environmental Management at the University of Queensland.

In a report released today by the Australia Institute, Professor Hundloe says that world population growth, increased consumption, the Asian financial crisis and the development at any cost approach in countries like China will have significant impacts on Australia. Increased export demand for coal and foodstuffs will affect land use in Australia, but pressures for further land clearing must be resisted. And the increased global build-up of greenhouse gases will require Australia to reduce its share of emissions by much more than presently agreed.

Professor Hundloe's report is being released on the eve of World Environment Day. It says that while there has been some progress since the Earth Summit in Rio six years, most countries including Australia have failed to integrate environment strategies into economic policy. Australia actually subsidises wasteful usage of natural resources and energy and resulting in both environmental damage and economic inefficiency.

Professor Hundloe argues that there are enormous lags in tackling environmental problems. Problems being addressed in 1998, such as water pollution, were recognised as serious three decades ago. "The public will get very impatient if this glacial response continues. The kids of today won't tolerate what we did 30 years ago".

On the positive side, Professor Hundloe said some industries were taking on board environmental protection through cleaner production and pollution prevention technologies. Some are becoming smart enough to advertise their 'green' credentials, but for the necessary change to occur all industries will have to recognise that long term profitability is dependent upon a healthy environment.

Professor Hundloe said that Australia needed to face up to the critical issue of its own population growth. He said the optimal population for the country depended on what we eat. "If we were happy to eat only potatoes and vegetables we could add a further 50 million people."

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