

## Climate change and other environmental problems

### How psychology can help

Psychologists have been substantially involved in collaborative, multi-disciplinary work on environmental issues in Australia and internationally for decades. Psychological research has covered the whole spectrum of environmental problems, including:

- Developing **theories** about how people perceive the environment, what motivates people to behave in particular ways, and how people make decisions about how they are going to behave.
- **Measuring** changes in perceptions, motivations, attitudes, and concerns relating to the natural environment
- Understanding how human behaviour has **contributed** to environmental problems.
- Identifying **barriers** that get in the way of helping people to develop more pro-environmental behaviours.
- Identifying **incentives** that encourage people to develop more pro-environmental behaviours.
- Helping people to **change** their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours with respect to the environment.
- Better understanding, measuring, and monitoring individual and community perceptions of the **impact** of humans on the natural environment, and their understanding of **changes** to the natural environment.
- Identifying, and utilising the many **psychological and health benefits** of people being involved with natural environments and settings (and natural ecosystem functioning and sustainability).
- Developing and promoting **alternative dispute resolution** techniques, and using these to facilitate the peaceful and fair resolution of conflict over natural resources, avert escalation of conflict, and re-establish regional peace and stability.
- Clarifying how the public **understands** 'environmental' problems and issues, and how people make sense of media coverage and representation and their understanding of the underlying science.

- Understanding the role the **media** plays in shaping public perceptions of problems, and how can the media be used to communicate effective messages.
- Designing and implementing effective, persuasive **communications**, media coverage, and educational materials concerning environmental problems and what can be done about them.
- Understanding the complex **emotions** and reactions that people experience when faced with serious environmental threats
- Developing theories on **disaster preparedness** and response, and developing policies and educating the public on the best ways to psychologically prepare for natural disasters.
- Understanding the impact of environmental problems and natural disasters on **individual and community wellbeing**.
- Helping individuals and communities **adapt** to changes in their environment.
- Exploring the **neuro-mechanisms** by which environmental toxins disrupt normal psychological development and functioning.

### **Maximising the effectiveness of addressing environmental problems and challenges**

Environmental problems and challenges are complex and require collaborative, multidisciplinary, 'ecological', analyses and 'solutions'. Psychology provides an essential perspective to addressing environmental problems and sustainability issues.

Psychologists should be involved at all levels of the planning, implementation and evaluation of environmental projects and campaigns:

- Psychologists can help to maximise the effectiveness of projects aiming to reduce adverse environmental impacts such as major consumer purchases, residential location, house purchase or renovation, travel mode and patterns.
- Psychologists can advise on more effective conservation communications and interventions.
- Psychologists can help influence more sustainable corporate and institutional decision making and policies.