

# **Ecological Economics: Solutions Now and in the Future**

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RMIT University, Swanston Academic Building, Melbourne

As we face the escalating impacts of climate change and ecological crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there is an urgent need to address significant (local and global) problems of a changing climate, degrading forests, degrading agricultural land, polluted inland waterways and oceans and dislocated social and cultural systems. Adequate and appropriate approaches and techniques for re-balancing the human–nature interaction are central to the study and practice of ecological economics. What will low-carbon cities look and feel like in 2050? How might we mend urban–rural rifts and reach a truly sustainable society? How can we humans work together locally and globally to solve these and emerging significant problems?

We welcome presentation papers, posters and opinion pieces focused on ecological economic solutions, especially on the following themes and questions:

- **Ecological economics**
  - How might we best define, frame and/or understand ecological economics for current ecological and economic challenges?
  - Where to for ecological economics now and in the future?
  
- **Sustainable, urban and rural futures**
  - How can cities and towns become more ecologically and socially sustainable and/or collectively sufficient?
  - How can we advance the transition towards post-anthropocentric cities and towns?
  - Nexuses and interactions between urban, rural, regional and remote sustainability: social and cultural, financial and economic, environmental and ecological, political and long-term
  - Have rural and regional communities got it right? If so and if not, how and why?
  - Applications of concepts and tools promoted by ecological economics
  
- **Ecological limits and planetary boundaries** Ecological limits discussed and debated since the late 1960s have been breached. Key questions include:
  - Which current conceptual tools and practical approaches to building economic systems best assist with living within our limits?

- What case studies and emerging models offer ways for transforming economic systems so we live within planetary boundaries?
- How can we bring ideas such as the 'I = PAT' formula (which explains the environmental pressures from humans) back into key debates and policies?
- Is denial of our predicament a key problem accepting ecological limits?
  
- **Ecological ethics and worldviews** — In the 1970s and 80s ecological economist Herman Daly argued nature has *intrinsic value*, implicit in the concept of a steady state economy. Many other models in ecological economics do *not* foreground such ethics. Questions include:
  - How might we bring ecocentrism, ecological ethics, ecojustice, the rights of nature and ecodeмокracy into economics?
  - How might we foreground ecological ethics in ecological economics today to assist solutions to transform society?
  
- **First Nations and Indigenous economies.** Like many other First Nations peoples, the traditional governance systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' and Māori were highly sophisticated, often representing what today we call 'steady state', Earth-centred and/or bioregional economic systems. We will explore interconnected questions, such as:
  - How can ecological economics contribute to decolonising economic systems and reaffirming First Nations Peoples' sovereignty and connection to land?
  - What can non-Indigenous communities learn from First Nations Peoples' relationist ethos and land-based economic laws?
  - How can we address the debt that the contemporary Australian economic system owes First Nations' Peoples?
  - Where and how are First Nations' Peoples building ecologically sound economic strategies for the future?
  - Where and how are First Nations' and non-First Nations' people working successfully together to solve common or dual problems
  - Protecting and advancing the cultural heritage of First Nations' Peoples.
  
- **Transformative technologies in a bounded world**
  - What are necessary characteristics and examples of appropriate and adequate technologies for transforming towards ecologically balanced human societies?
  - Which proposed technological futures threaten transformation towards ecologically balanced human societies?
  - How can we encourage *appropriate* technology as a key solution to climate change?

- Do we need to control and regulate emerging technologies because of their tendency to reshape our societies and cultures in ways that were not democratically decided, unintended or have been overlooked?
- What is the nature of work, life and sustainability given the transformative shifts resulting from AI, Machine Learning, IoT, Big Data, and other transformative technologies?
- **Embedding ecological economics into our education systems**
  - How can we embed learnings for greater wellbeing and sustainable, happy individuals and communities into curricula and syllabuses using concepts and approaches from — or to apply to — ecological economics?
  - How can we make key concepts and approaches of ecological economics accessible for use in popular everyday communication, journalism and learning?
  - Where are we succeeding and where and how can we do better?
- **Communicating ecological economics and influencing decision makers**
  - How are ecological economists and practitioners communicating effectively about ecological economics to affect change?
  - What main concepts and lessons can an ecological economics framework offer for ecological and economic transformation?
  - What barriers and challenges need to be addressed to increase the understanding and use of ecological economics in Australian society?
  - How can we best define and frame ecological ethics — given the variety of interpretations?