

PERMACULTURE AND POLITICAL ACTION

Permaculture is a design system for the creation of sustainable agricultural systems as the basis of a sustainable society.

Permaculturalists adhere to 3 ethics: Care for the Earth, Care for People and Fair Share. Fair Share involves limiting population and consumption and redistributing surplus resources to further the first two ethics.

How should the Permaculture Movement pursue its ultimate objective of creating a sustainable society?



30 Groups representing 60,000 people protest corrupt NSW planning practices - Sept 09

There are many strategies that could and should be pursued:

- ☺ **Lead by Example** – by creating demonstration permaculture sites in both urban and rural settings
- ☺ **Education** – by educating people as to what behaviours and consumption patterns really are sustainable we can persuade them to change
- ☺ **Motivation** – by painting a picture of an alternative future where happiness is based on quality relationships and community rather than on consumerism
- ☺ **Political Action** – by influencing the decisions made by those elected to govern we can promote permaculture solutions to societal problems and move society towards becoming sustainable

Political action is unavoidable. Permaculture is not a 'survivalist' movement. We are not about telling people to retreat to veggie patches and cabins in the woods and to divorce themselves from society. We operate as part of society and in attempting to influence the direction society takes we are taking political action.

The question we should be considering is what forms of political action should the Permaculture Movement be taking?

There are several possible answers to this question and these answers are not mutually exclusive. Many different types of political action could be pursued simultaneously. Some of the types of political action available to us are:

- ☺ **Lobbying** – Lobbying by the permaculture movement can take place at an individual level, at a Local Group level, or at a higher organisational level such as Permaculture Sydney North representing the movement across the whole of northern Sydney. The permaculture movement currently lacks a democratically elected, accountable, national lobby group. The creation of such a group would be a major asset for the movement and this matter is to be discussed at APC10. The focus of lobbying efforts can be all three tiers of government and government agencies.

- ☹️ **Demonstrating** – another option is to demonstrate against decisions with which we disagree. For example, the Nature Conservation Council has organised demonstrations protesting against the planned construction of two new coal fired electricity generators in NSW. While members are at liberty to join such demonstrations as individuals or under the banner of the body organising the protest, it would be more meaningful if permaculture groups joined in such protests under the banners of their own organisations. Additionally, permaculture groups could organise and promote demonstrations themselves, for example against the lifting of the moratorium in NSW on genetically modified crops.
- ☹️ **Direct Engagement with established Political Parties** - One strategy would be for all permaculturalists to become members of a political party of their choosing. Very few Australians are members of political parties. The few people who are members wield considerable influence over the selection of candidates and the determination of policy. It would not matter which party or parties permaculturalists joined. They could have a positive influence on all parties by advocating the adoption of permaculture solutions from within. Direct engagement can also take place at an organisational level, for example PSN could formally advise councils on appropriate street plantings.
- ☹️ **Form a Permaculture Party** - Bill Mollison has written a manifesto for a **Permaculture Peoples' Party**. The manifesto deals with fundamental human rights and needs such as Housing, Food, Water, Energy and also deals with Aboriginal Rights, Animal Rights, Forests and Poisons. Under this approach permaculturalists would be not only trying to influence the policies of other politicians they would be striving to become the politicians making the decisions.

What should we do?

As Advocacy Tem Leader of PSN I believe that we should be:

- Pursuing non-political strategies such as Leading by Example, Education and Motivation, **and;**
- Engaging in the political strategies of Lobbying, Demonstrating and Direct Engagement.

However, I do not believe that we should form a Permaculture Political Party. I encourage people to read Bill Mollison's manifesto as it raises many important issues, but there are several reasons why forming our own political party could be counter productive.

To form and maintain a political party requires a great deal of energy and resources and other activities would surely suffer. The creation of a political party would automatically draw our attention away from a focus on permaculture and sustainability . There would be an expectation that we should have policies to address all manner of issues, for example, where do we stand on the Mining super Profits Tax? While we could perhaps formulate policy responses using permaculture principles as a moral compass do we have the resources to do this and would our efforts be appreciated?

Finally, our political system is highly adversarial. If we form a political party we would be seen as not just **For Permaculture** but **against Labor, against the Liberals** and **against The Greens**. As permaculturalists we should be promoting cooperation and collaboration not competition.