Environment and sustainability plans and policies: Solutions, straightjackets or meaningless drivel?
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Given the complexity and compelling challenges, there is much interest globally in the environment and sustainability – generally, and in higher education specifically.

BASE	ASSOCIATION
International	International Alliance of Research Universities Campus Sustainability Initiative (IARU)
International	International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN)
Europe	University Educators for Sustainable Development (UE4SD)
Europe	COPERNICUS Alliance (European Network on Higher Education for Sustainable Development)
United Kingdom	The Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC)
Scotland	Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland (UCCCfS)
United States	Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
United States	Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF)
United States	Campus Ecology Program of the National Wildlife Federation
United States	College and University Recycling Council (CURC) of the National Recycling Coalition
United States	Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (HEASC)
United States	Second Nature (SN)
United States	US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development (USPESD)
South Korea	Korean Association for Green Campus Initiative
China	China Green Universities Network (CGUN)
Asia and the Pacific	United Nations University: Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research (ProSPER.Net) - Asia and Pacific Islands
Australia and NZ	Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS)
Australia	Australian Education for Sustainability Alliance (AESA)
Africa	Mainstreaming Environment & Sustainability in African Universities (MESA)

o Australian university environment and sustainability policy (26 identified and selected of possible 40)

o Australian university environment and sustainability plans (11 selected of 21 identified)

Criteria:

o Level of prescription (low/high)

o Scope (governance, operations, education, research, outreach) after Yarime and Tanaka (2012)

YEAR	TITLE OF DECLARATION
1972	Stockholm Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
1975	The Belgrade Charter: A global framework for environmental education
1978	Tbilisi Declaration
1990	Talloires Declaration
1991	Halifax Declaration
1992	Agenda 21
1993	Kyoto Declaration
1993	Swansea Declaration
1994	COPERNICUS – The University Charter for Sustainable Development
1997	Declaration of Thessaloniki
2001	The Lüneburg Declaration on Higher Education for Sustainable Development
2004	Declaration of Barcelona
2005	Graz Declaration on Committing Universities to Sustainable Development
2009	Turin Declaration

Source: Adapted and updated from Wright (2002) and Lozano, Lukman, Lozano, Huisingh & Lambrechts (2013).

While the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (NGER) legislation stipulates greenhouse gas emissions monitoring and reporting requirements, government policy does not specifically require universities to institute mitigation strategies or formulate policy responses.

KEEP
CALM
AND
MAKE A
POLICY

o Level of prescription: low

o Length: short

o Content: scant and patchy

"SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT is that which MEETS THE NEEDS of the ----------> PRESENT WITHOUT COMPROMISING the ability of future generations to MEET THEIR OWN NEEDS"

This definition of sustainable development comes from Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway and author of Our Common Future (1987).

Table: Nomenclature for environment and sustainability policies (n=26)

ENVIRONMENT		ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY		SUSTAINABILITY	
Environment Policy OR Environmental Policy	Environmental Management Policy	Environment and Sustainability Policy	Environmental Sustainability Policy	Sustainability Policy	Sustainable Built Environment Designs Policy
7 (27%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)	4 (15%)	9 (35%)	1 (4%)
11 (42%)		5 (19%)		10 (38%)	

Table: Regulation shaping Australian university environment policy, operations and sustainability initiatives

Legislation and regulations (Commonwealth)	- Clean Energy Act 2011 (Cth) - Energy Efficiency Opportunities Act 2006 (Cth) - Energy Efficiency Opportunities Regulations 2006 (Cth) - Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth) - National Environment Protection Measures Act 1998 (Cth) - National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 (Cth) - National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Regulations 2008 (Cth) - National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (Measurement) Determination 2008 (Cth) - Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989 (Cth) - Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 (Cth)
State and territory	- Various state and territory acts and regulations
Standards and guidelines	- Australian/New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS) ISO 14001:2004 Environmental management systems – Requirements with guidance for use (Standards Australia) - Green Star Building Rating System (Green Building Council of Australia) - HB 203:2006 Environmental risk management – Principles and process (SAI Global, 2006) - National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS) (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage) - National Construction Code (NCC) - National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (Measurement) Technical Guidelines
International declarations	- Talloires Declaration (ULSF, 1990)

Operations:

Minimise waste, energy, greenhouse gas emissions and water. Introduce sustainable design, transport and procurement practices.

Education and research:

Foster sustainability literacy and knowledge.

Conduct research.

Community outreach

KEEP CALM AND MAKE A PLAN

o Level of prescription: higher than policy

o Length: longer than policy

o Content: detailed and comprehensive, but not overly constraining

Table: Nomenclature for environment and sustainability plans (n=11)

ENVIRONMENT	ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS) FRAMEWORK	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	SUSTAINABILITY	
Environmental Management Plan	EMS Framework and Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability Enabling/Strategic Plan	Sustainability (Action) Plan	Sustainability Strategy
			2	3
2 (18%)	1 (9%)	3 (27%)	5 (45%)	

o Talloires Declaration

o The Future We Want (United Nations, 2012, Rio+20)

o Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education (TLSHE) project (OLT)

o Declaration of commitment to local, national and global sustainability (ATN)

o National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESDSC, 1992)

o Heads of Agreement on Commonwealth/State Roles and Responsibilities for the Environment (COAG, 1997)

Operations:

Minimise waste, energy, greenhouse gas emissions and water. Introduce sustainable design, transport and procurement practices. Biodiversity.

Education and research:

Foster sustainability literacy, cross-disciplinary environmental knowledge.

Conduct research.

Community outreach

WE HAVE A STRATEGIC PLAN IT'S CALLED DOING THINGS.
-Herb Kelleher

There is no doubt Australian universities need leadership, cultural awareness, systems, instruments and infrastructure to address the urgent challenge of environmental sustainability.
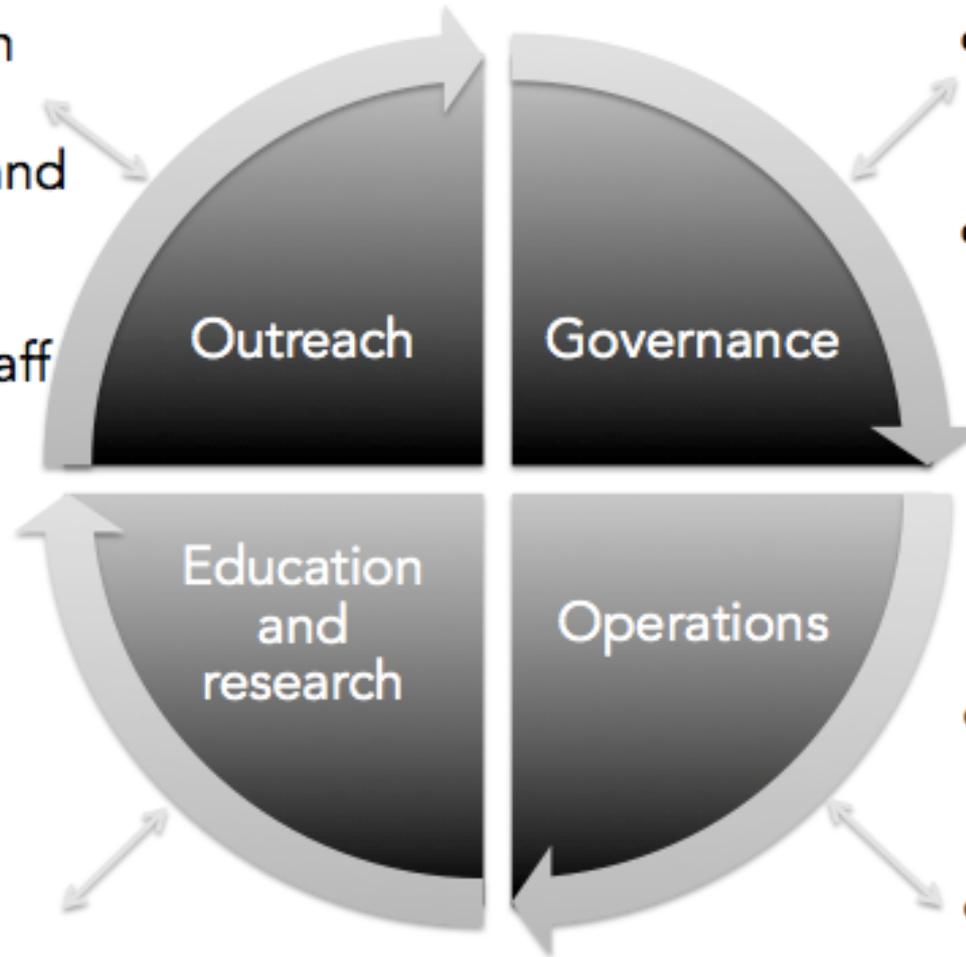
Are environment policies and plans solutions, straightjackets or meaningless drivel?

o Difficult to claim they are straightjackets (low to moderate level of prescription only)

Solutions or meaningless drivel?

o Environment policies are heavily reliant on environment plans for sensemaking.

o Where policy text is meaningful, and relationship to plan is strong, policy and plans read together can provide solutions.

o Note: These are two big "ifs"!

- Intellectual leadership and best practice in sustainability
- Sustainability and environment organisations
- Community, staff and students

- International declarations
- Environmental Management System (EMS)
- International and national sustainability organisations

Outreach

Governance

Education and research

Operations

- Strategic Plan
- Learning & Teaching Plan
- Research Plan

- Legislation, regulation and codes
- ISO standards and design guidelines
- Waste, energy, emissions, water, design, transport, procurement

Unlike almost any other matter addressed at the governance level through university plans and policies, there is a globally compelling urgency for large organisations such as Australian universities to act in the name of sustainability.

Both governance artefacts – environment policies and environment plans – together represent contemporary solutions to tacking this most challenging of areas: sustainability.