

The Hobart Declaration on EcoHealth

Ecological restoration that supports human health

The world is witnessing global environmental degradation, displacement and undermining of Indigenous communities, accelerating climate change, and rising public health costs. Environmental degradation and public health are intrinsically linked, and need to be tackled together. Mistreatment of our environment is closely bound with a drastic rise in the allergies, immune dysfunction, infectious disease, and mental health disorders so pervasive in modern society, causing a loss of livelihood and human wellbeing across the globe and straining public health systems.

The EcoHealth Network (EHN) is a global action initiative working at the interface of ecological restoration and human health (www.ecohealthglobal.org). The Four Islands EcoHealth program has been established to work across the North and South Islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Tasmania, and the Australian mainland. While there are of course many other, smaller islands in Australian and Aotearoa/New Zealand territories, the Four Islands represent those where EHN projects and partners currently operate.

We note that:

- The science and practice of restoration has improved the ecological quality of thousands of square kilometres of degraded land in our Four Islands region.
- Restoration occurs at different scales from local backyards to cities to large-scale ecosystems, reconnecting and reinvigorating fragmented landscapes.
- The communities involved in ecological restoration benefit from improved social cohesion, physical and mental health, and ecosystem services.
- The involvement of Indigenous people in restoration contributes significantly to cultural healing and social support, as well as ecological repair.
- The evidence base for health and wellbeing benefits from restoration is rapidly growing.

Our core message is that ecological restoration activities are good for both ecosystems and people. Restored riparian areas deliver clean water. Participation in restoration programs can have mental health benefits, particularly for disadvantaged and disconnected people. The soil microbiomes in natural and restored areas have the potential to significantly improve the health of human gut microbiomes, as do healthy agricultural soils. Newly-planted native forests contribute to long-term carbon storage, provide enhanced habitat at landscape scales, and reduce air and water pollution.

While our knowledge of all the precise mechanisms involved in providing public health benefits from restoration work is developing, there is clear evidence to support action which combines ecological restoration and public health programs.

Our interdisciplinary working group has agreed to address the key issues that we consider most important:

- 1) Establishing holistic research frameworks which include the robust monitoring of cultural, social and public health benefits of ecological restoration programs.
- 2) Documenting the beneficial effects that occur when restoration processes are integrated, with attention to human wellbeing.
- 3) Communicating the results of our findings in an impactful way.

We have much in common across the Four Islands, enabling us to compare results and easily exchange information on approaches and outcomes.

Our collaborative strategy addresses the underlying causes of ecosystem and health dysfunctions, rather than just treating the symptoms of each.

By the end of 2020 we expect to have established a number of human health studies that are embedded within both established and new ecological restoration programs in our region in order to elucidate and evaluate the benefits of linked conservation, restoration and human health approaches.

For further information please contact fourfriendlyislands@gmail.com or info@ehnglobal.org

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Note that NSW – New South Wales, QLD – Queensland, SA - South Australia, Tas – Tasmania, UK – United Kingdom, Vic – Victoria, WA – Western Australia, etc.; NZ – Aotearoa/New Zealand.