



RESEARCH REPORT INTO ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AUSTRALIA

POSITIONING ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP AND POLICY REFORM IN AUSTRALIA

Abstract

This paper critically examines The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World and its relevance to Australian human services and environmental governance, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous-led frameworks. It explores the systemic gaps between social welfare and environmental protection and presents eco-social justice as a guiding paradigm for place-based reform. Drawing on policy analysis, literature review, and field placement insights with HOPE Inc., the paper identifies opportunities for integrated systems that centre Indigenous sovereignty, ecological wellbeing, and participatory governance. Recommendations include embedding ecological determinants in human service models, reforming education pathways, and enabling grassroots organisations to advocate for transformative change.

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Glossary of Terms

To enhance accessibility and understanding, the following glossary provides definitions for key terms and concepts used throughout the paper. This section aims to support readers who may be unfamiliar with some of the specialised language.

Term	Definition
Boolean	A search theory that combines words and phrases using the words AND, OR, NOT (known as Boolean operators) to limit, broaden, or define a search.
Buen Vivir	A concept from Andean Indigenous cultures meaning “living well,” emphasizing harmony with nature, community, and collective wellbeing.
Co-governance	Shared leadership between government and communities, especially Indigenous groups, in managing land, resources, and policy.
Community-controlled sector	Services and programs that are owned and operated by the communities they serve, often Indigenous led.
Cultural fire management	Traditional Indigenous practice of using controlled burns to manage land, promote biodiversity, and prevent wildfires.
Eco-social justice	A framework that integrates ecological sustainability with social equity, advocating for systemic change that supports both human and non-human wellbeing.
Ecological grief	Emotional distress caused by environmental loss, degradation, or climate change, particularly affecting communities with strong ties to land.

Environmental racism	Disproportionate exposure of marginalised communities to environmental hazards due to systemic inequality.
Grey literature	Informal or non-peer-reviewed sources such as reports, community publications, and websites that provide valuable insights outside academic journals.
Non-violent lobbying	Advocacy that uses peaceful methods, such as education, storytelling, and policy submissions, to influence systemic change.
Participatory governance	A model of decision-making where communities actively shape policies and programs that affect them.
Phenology	The study of seasonal changes in plants and animals, often used in Indigenous knowledge systems to guide land management.
Place-based reform	Policy or practice changes that are tailored to the specific cultural, ecological, and social context of a geographic area.
Relational accountability	A principle in Indigenous research and ethics that emphasizes responsibility to relationships, between people, land, and knowledge systems.

Acknowledgment

In the spirit of respect and recognition, the author acknowledges the Miriwoong people of the East Kimberley as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which much of this work was undertaken. Their literature, shared knowledge, and generous permission to engage on Country meaningfully supported the development of this paper. The author pays deep respect to Elders past and present and celebrates the strength and contributions of emerging leaders.

Introduction

This paper is a critical analysis of *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* (People's Global Summit, 2022), with a focus on its resonance within the Australian eco-social justice framework, an intersect between human services and environmental justice landscapes. It examines alignment between The People's Charter's core principles and current policy approaches in Australia, particularly in relation to Indigenous-led frameworks of care, governance, and environmental stewardship.

Overview of The People's Charter and Eco-Social Justice

Launched during the 2022 Global Online Summit, *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World*, hereafter referred to as The People's Charter promotes a shared global vision through five guiding principles: *co-developing reciprocity*, *co-building peace*, *co-living with nature*, *co-creating social justice*, and *co-realising equality*. Drawing on value systems such as *Buen Vivir* (Andean) and *Ubuntu* (Southern African), The People's Charter positions Indigenous knowledge, ecological wellbeing, participatory governance, and community-led transformation as essential to achieving an eco-social world (People's Global Summit, 2022).

The theory that the environment impacts on one's wellbeing, is not new, however, the linkage between social welfare and environmental practices is a new concept and one that is being referred to as eco-social justice. It's underpinned by the theory that for humans to live a fulfilling life, they must be supported by a strong social and natural environment, whereby they have connection with land, water, air, access to strong social networks and systems (Peeters, 2012, p. 288). Eco-social justice is a broader philosophical and ethical paradigm that seeks to transform the structural conditions underpinning both social inequality and ecological harm. It calls for systemic change that recognises the interdependence of human and non-human life, and prioritises equity, sustainability, and relational accountability (Jesuit Social Services, n.d.; Wienhues, 2020). Eco-social justice critiques growth-oriented capitalism, settler-colonial frameworks, and the marginalisation of non-human life forms. Instead, it advocates for a rights-based approach that includes ecological rights alongside human rights (People's Global Summit, 2022). Unlike eco-social work or green social work, which primarily focus on the individual's response to environmental conditions and incorporate ecological concerns into direct practice, eco-social justice expands beyond individual engagement to advocate for structural transformation through activism, policy reform, and place-based resistance (Peeters, 2012). This paper will focus on eco-social justice as the guiding framework for evaluating the People's Charter and its potential to

reshape Australian human services and environmental protection through culturally grounded, place-based transformation.

Australian Literature review

During the literature review process in writing this paper, it became apparent that while peer-reviewed academic databases offer methodological rigour and theoretical depth, they often struggle to represent the nuance and relationality of lived community experience, particularly within Indigenous-led, place-based, or activist contexts in Australia. The search for sources aligned with *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* involved careful use of Boolean operators and targeted phrases such as "eco-social justice," "co-building a new eco-social world," and "Indigenous environmental knowledge" within the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) library system and its affiliated databases. Yet even with refined terms, search results overwhelmingly favoured formalised, Western knowledge frameworks that tend to exclude voices that are oral, experiential, or community authored. Refer to Appendix A for a detailed overview of supplementary searches conducted during the research process that were not formally cited within the main body of this paper.

This disconnect underscored a broader limitation: academic indexing systems often prioritise formal publication pathways over place-based knowledge that is generated in practice, at the grassroots, in community forums, or through intergenerational oral transmission (Norström et al., 2022, p. 599). Indigenous knowledge systems, for instance, are deeply contextual and place embedded. Their expression may be relational, ceremonial, or story-based, and as such may not conform to the structures required for journal publication or even grey literature archiving. As a result, their presence in conventional academic sources is limited.

To navigate this gap, while researching the use of *The People's Charter* in Australia, it was necessary to turn to grey literature, community websites, project evaluations, and audio recordings, often retrieved via open web searches rather than structured databases.

These sources provided crucial insight into the practices of eco-social justice, especially in Australian contexts where Indigenous communities are leading sustainability and justice initiatives. However, verifying the credibility of such sources also posed an ethical and methodological tension: how to honour and include practice-based knowledge while meeting academic standards of legitimacy. In addition, ensuring that the information within these sources has been ethically sourced and not in breach of any custodian restrictions (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020).

This process highlighted the importance of ethical place-based knowledge sharing in research. The absence of lived knowledge in scholarly databases is not a reflection of its value or impact, but rather a consequence of the structures that shape what is deemed legitimate knowledge. To be truly transformative, eco-social justice research must broaden its conceptual and methodological lens. This involves not merely incorporating diverse voices, but actively reimagining evidence as a co-held, co-created, and contextually grounded resource. Such an approach shifts inquiry from extractive knowledge gathering to relational scholarship, one that honours situated wisdom, lived experience, and collective agency (Indigenous Knowledge Institute, 2021). This ethos is firmly aligned with the mission of *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World*, which calls for co-building inclusive futures that leave no one behind (People's Global Summit, 2022).

Alignment with Australian Policy and Practice

While no direct evidence in formal literature or grey material that *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* has been explicitly endorsed to guide the delivery or direction of programs, services or decision making within Australia. The Peoples Charter's global framing and inclusive values have strong alignment with Australian contexts, especially in areas listed in Table 1:

Table 1

Political Alignments in Australia

Alignment of contemporary political initiatives in Australia that demonstrate thematic alignment with *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* principles.

Australian Initiative	Charter Principal Alignment	Summary
Stronger Places, Stronger People	Co-developing reciprocity; Co-creating social justice	A community-led reform program emphasising the use of local knowledge to inform systems change (National Leadership Group, 2021). https://www.dss.gov.au/stronger-places-stronger-people
National Disability Insurance Agency (pre-2025 pricing changes)	Co-living with nature; Inclusion	Previously enabled nature-based interventions, particularly in Indigenous and very remote settings, before policy shifts limited flexible access to therapy that could be delivered in environmental stimulating environments. Further aiding a person to build and or maintain their independence (Kutchel, 2025). https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-06-23/ndis-pricing-therapy-cuts-disability-government-physiotherapy/105433024

Australian Initiative	Charter Principal Alignment	Summary
Closing the Gap	Co-realising equality	<p>Aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; however, implementation gaps persist and fail to meet Government set targets to Close the Gap (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2025).</p> <p>https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-02/NIAA%20CTG%20Combined%20Report.pdf</p>
Yoorrook Justice Commission	Self-determination; Co-creating social justice	<p>Operates as a truth-telling platform grounded in Indigenous law and governance. The Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) outlines its mandate as Australia's first formal truth-telling inquiry led by Indigenous people (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2025).</p> <p>The Commission presents oral histories and archival evidence that can be viewed via the Commissions website https://www.yoorrook.org.au/ (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2025).</p>

The People's Charter speaks of how the government continues to have majority power over people and the environment. It calls for a need for co-design, where people from all communities will lead a world driven by solutions that make our world fairer, safer and more sustainable. In Australia, this is very relevant, where the governments continue to hold the decision-making power. While there is not explicit reference to The People's Charter, in

political Australia, there are evolving policy reforms that seek to improve the way government interface with communities and people accessing government funded programs and services (Australian Public Service Commission, 2023). Initiatives such as Stronger Places, Stronger People, draws on the methodologies that people and communities know best how to support themselves. It aims to work with and empower people and communities to take the lead in guiding government on how best to work with its people in achieving improved outcomes that leads to eco-social justice. In addition, Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative highlights the intent of working from the lens of ecological and environmental justice and how communities and its people need to not just be involved in decision making, but lead the process (Department of Social Services, 2024). Stronger Places, Stronger People is just one example of how federal government in Australia is working in-line with the priorities of the Peoples Charter.

Despite government rhetoric around empowering communities to take agency over their own futures, systemic constraints such as rigid reporting requirements, funding limitations, and administrative deadlines often undermine these efforts. This paradox is especially evident in disability service delivery, where well-intentioned reforms can inadvertently deepen disadvantage (Ombudsman, 2025).

A recent and locally observed impact of the July 2025 funding cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been the significant reduction in travel subsidies for allied health professionals delivering services across remote Australia (NDIA, 2025). In the writers' experience of working and living in very remote regions, including the Kimberley, they witnessed how place-based therapy models, such as water therapy conducted at local rivers and movement sessions on community ovals, were central to supporting young people with disabilities in culturally and ecologically meaningful ways. These models reflected not only clinical innovation but also community empowerment, as therapists collaborated with residents to build therapeutic knowledge and skills, ultimately generating employment

pathways and enhancing community capacity. Communication frequently relied on interpreters and culturally safe engagement strategies that upheld local knowledge systems and relational practice. These deeply embedded approaches highlight eco-social justice, fostering connection to land, identity, and collective wellbeing, in alignment with culturally responsive care principles.

However, the funding changes now require many participants to access therapy via video screens in clinical settings, severing ties to the very environments that supported their growth and sustainability. This shift is in direct contradiction of The National Indigenous Australians Agency (2022) strategies to strengthen the community-controlled disability sector under Priority Reform Two (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2022). This shift not only disempowers individuals but also contradicts the principles of eco-social justice practice, which advocates for place-based, and emancipatory relationships between people and their environments (Peeters, 2012). It also runs counter to the values outlined in *the People's Charter for an Eco-Social World*, which calls for co-creating social justice through community-led, preventative systems that honour reciprocity, dignity, and ecological integrity (People's Charter, 2022).

The People's Charter affirms that sustainable wellbeing arises from inclusive, culturally grounded practices that respect both people and place. When governments prioritise administrative efficiency over relational, community-led models of care, they risk eroding the very foundations of eco-social justice and deepening systemic inequities (Ioakimidis & Maglajlic, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there are many organisations in Australia supporting every-day people to work towards the principles set out within The People's Charter. One such organisation is HOPE Inc. (Householders' Options to Protect the Environment). HOPE Inc. embodies the principles of eco-social justice through its strategic commitment to ecological stewardship, participatory governance, and community-led reform. As an

Australian grassroots organisation, HOPE Inc. operationalises the global vision set out in *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* by advocating for place-based sustainability and inclusive policy transformation. Its guiding ethos, "Think Globally, Act Locally", translates into tangible action via educational outreach, media engagement, and strategic partnerships that elevate both environmental and social equity (Householders' Options to Protect the Environment Inc., n.d.). The organisation's Strategic Plan (2024–2029) outlines priorities such as climate resilience, circular economy awareness, and citizen-led environmental reform, which closely align with The Peoples Charter's values of co-living with nature, co-creating social justice, and co-realising equality (HOPE Inc., 2024). This alignment is further demonstrated through the podcast series *Eco-Social Work in Australia*, where Australian practitioners and academics discuss grief responses to climate change, sustainable service delivery, and the relational ethics of land and wellbeing, reinforcing HOPE Inc.'s role in shaping eco-social transformation from the ground up. Through its integrated approach to public education, community mobilisation, and policy advocacy, HOPE Inc. serves as a living example of how global eco-social justice frameworks can be effectively enacted within localised Australian settings.

Indigenous Frameworks: Resonance and Friction

The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World emphasises Indigenous wisdom as central to ecological and social transformation, a principle that resonates strongly with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander frameworks in Australia. These frameworks are grounded in holistic relationality, particularly through understandings of Country, which encompass far more than physical geography. In Indigenous contexts, Country refers to a deeply interconnected relationship between people and their ancestral lands, waters, skies, and ecosystems, encompassing identity, belonging, lore, and Dreaming (Evolve Communities, n.d.). Within eco-social justice, Indigenous communities play a vital role through practices such as cultural fire management, traditional food systems, and community-led healing, approaches that reflect mutual benefit, ecological respect, and

collective wellbeing (Peeters, 2012). Despite ongoing government commitments to consultation and inclusion, these frameworks continue to be marginalised in mainstream policymaking (Indigenous Knowledge Institute, 2021). Although The People's Charter has gained global recognition, its integration into Australian policy remains minimal and undefined. There are currently no formal mechanisms linking the Charter's principles to government efforts that support Indigenous-led environmental governance. This disconnect highlights a broader implementation gap one where aspirational global visions are yet to be meaningfully embedded in localised, culturally grounded systems of eco-social justice by the Australian government.

However, there is emerging evidence that certain initiatives across Australia particularly those led by Indigenous communities or grounded in place-based practice, do reflect The Peoples Charter's guiding principles. As outlined in Table 1, these efforts prioritise ecological integrity, cultural safety, and community-led decision-making, echoing The Peoples Charter's emphasis on reciprocity, dignity, and co-building sustainable futures (People's Charter, 2022). Such examples demonstrate the potential for The People's Charter to inform transformative approaches to eco-social justice in Australia, even if not yet formally embedded in government frameworks.

Throughout history and still today, Indigenous people in Australia are reliant on the knowledge they have of seasonal trends on Country. The Indigenous Knowledge Institute (2021) describe:

Indigenous people's close interaction with their Country and attention to seasonal change across space and time was once critical to their survival. Today, many groups still draw on an intimate understanding of weather events and seasonal changes, and the resultant influence on phenology (plant lifecycles) and animal behaviour, to discover the availability of plant and animal resources to harvest, and to trigger land and sea management activities. Moreover, this knowledge has been used to promote sustainability

through an awareness of animal breeding times, as well as availability of plants and medicines (Indigenous Knowledge Institute, 2021).

Aside from colonisation, which led to a significant loss of connection to Country, there are, and continue to be, profound changes both globally and within Australia due to climate change, which further impacts Country. Indigenous people are acutely aware of these shifts, and as highlighted in a HOPE Inc. (2021) podcast, many are grieving the loss of connection to a Country they once intimately knew (HOPE Inc., 2021). This grief is not only cultural and spiritual, but also ecological. As Bailey and Gerrish (2024) explain, ecological grief arises from the experienced or anticipated loss of ecosystems, species, and meaningful landscapes due to environmental degradation (Bailey & Gerrish, 2024). For Indigenous peoples, this grief is deeply entwined with identity, as the changing climate disrupts seasonal knowledge, land-based practices, and ancestral relationships with Country (Indigenous Knowledge Institute, 2021). The erosion of these connections contributes to a profound sense of dislocation and loss, where identity itself is compromised by the inability to engage with Country in the ways that have sustained communities for generations. As Jo Anne Rey (2021) argues, Indigenous identity is deeply relational and enacted through ongoing connection, caring, and belonging with Country. When these connections are disrupted, the sense of self and community is fractured, leading to cultural and emotional dislocation. Similarly, the Bugmy Bar Book (2025) chapter on cultural dispossession highlights how colonisation has severed ties to Country, language, and ceremony, undermining identity and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In response to these challenges, one initiative was the 2021 National First Peoples Gathering on Climate Change, hosted by CSIRO and supported by the National Environmental Science Program, marked a significant step toward embedding Indigenous leadership in climate governance. Over 120 Traditional Owners from more than 40 Indigenous groups gathered in Cairns to share knowledge, co-design climate responses, and propose governance models for Indigenous-led adaptation (Morgan-Bulled et al., 2021).

One tangible outcome from the meeting was the Indigenous-led Digital Climate Stories Platform, enabling communities to act as on-ground researchers and share climate knowledge through culturally grounded, technologically supported storytelling frameworks (IWGIA, 2023). The platform supports seasonal calendars, participatory mapping, and consequence diagrams to document climate impacts and guide future actions. This initiative reflects the principles outlined in *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World*, particularly its emphasis on co-building inclusive systems grounded in reciprocity, dignity, and ecological integrity (People's Global Summit, 2022).

However, recent legal developments have highlighted the limitations of Australia's institutional response. In July 2025, the Federal Court ruled against Torres Strait Islander elders Uncle Paul Kabai and Uncle Pabai Pabai, who had brought a landmark class action against the Commonwealth for failing to take adequate climate action (Doherty, 2025). Despite acknowledging the existential threat posed by climate change to the Torres Strait Islands and their inhabitants, the court found that the Australian Government did not owe a legal duty of care under current negligence law (Doherty, 2025). This decision underscores the disconnect between moral responsibility and legal accountability and reinforces the need for systemic reform that centres Indigenous voices in climate policy, not just through consultation, but through co-governance and legislative change.

The case and its outcome serve as a stark reminder that while initiatives like the CSIRO Gathering and HOPE Inc.'s advocacy reflects movements toward eco-social justice, structural barriers remain. For eco-social transformation to be realised, Australia must move beyond symbolic inclusion and embed Indigenous knowledge systems into the core of environmental decision-making.

Moreover, The Peoples Charter's critique of sovereignty in favour of global solidarity (People's Global Summit, 2022) aligns with Indigenous calls for sovereignty as the foundation for justice and environmental governance in Australia. For many communities, autonomy over Country is inseparable from long-term sustainability, social cohesion, and

identity (Rey, 2021). This tension calls for organisations like HOPE Inc. to engage in non-violent, indirect forms of lobbying that uphold Indigenous' rights within climate and environmental policy discourse. Guided by its "Think Globally, Act Locally" ethos, HOPE Inc. is well-positioned to advocate for reforms that embed Indigenous governance frameworks into place-based climate adaptation strategies. Through podcast storytelling, community partnerships, and policy submissions, HOPE can align with The Peoples Charter's principle of co-building inclusive systems while maintaining respect for the self-determination and sovereignty essential to Indigenous-led eco-social justice.

Integration Gaps and Emerging Opportunities

This paper has identified ongoing and systemic gaps between Australia's human services and environmental sectors that continue to operate largely in policy silos. Such fragmentation presents a core challenge to the cross-disciplinary eco-social justice integration proposed in *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* (People's Global Summit, 2022), which emphasises holistic approaches to wellbeing, justice, and sustainability. However, there remains considerable opportunity for organisations, institutions, and government bodies to respond more effectively and intentionally. Following are three areas of opportunity to strengthen the use of *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* in Australia.

1. A critical issue is the tendency of social services to overlook environmental determinants as a cause for adversely impacting on health and wellbeing. As evidenced throughout this research, individual and community wellbeing is deeply interconnected with access to safe, thriving, and culturally significant environments. Despite this well-established link, mainstream service systems, including health, disability, and housing, often fail to incorporate environmental and ecological considerations into their frameworks. This disconnection manifests in diverse settings for example.
 - a. Post-Disaster Relocation Without Cultural Consideration

In the wake of environmental disasters, such as floods, bushfires, or coastal erosion, social workers may assist with relocating affected individuals without understanding the cultural significance of land and place. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families displaced from Country may experience compounded grief, disconnection, and identity loss when moved to unfamiliar urban centres with little cultural support. Without an eco-social justice lens, service responses risk exacerbating trauma by ignoring the relational nature of land, wellbeing, and belonging (Bugmy Bar Book, 2025).

b. Urban Heat Stress Among Marginalised Populations

During extreme heat events, communities in poorly designed public housing or areas with minimal tree cover are disproportionately affected. Social workers operating without an eco-social justice framework may focus solely on short-term medical interventions, overlooking systemic factors like environmental racism, infrastructure inequality, and inadequate urban planning. This limits the potential for advocacy and policy reform aimed at ensuring equitable access to cooling infrastructure and climate-resilient environments.

The findings of this research recommend using The Peoples Charter's principles as guiding tools to address these gaps. Specifically, the principles of co-living with nature, co-realising equality, and co-creating social justice can inform a reimagining of human service systems that centre ecological wellbeing alongside cultural continuity and community agency. These principles can be applied in practice through non-violent, systems-focused advocacy, strategic education campaigns, and partnerships that elevate Indigenous voices. Like those delivered by HOPE Inc. Such efforts not only bridge service siloes but reinforce the transformative potential of eco-social justice within Australian policy, practice, and governance.

2. A second critical issue concerns the historical underrepresentation of Indigenous leadership within Australia's environmental protection programs, particularly in the domains of land stewardship and climate-responsive disaster management. Despite long-standing government commitments, social equity and First Nations ecological knowledge remain marginalised in mainstream environmental frameworks. To redress this, it is recommended that governments and institutions actively embed Indigenous governance into the revision of climate strategies by resourcing and recognising the leadership of Indigenous in high-risk regions impacted by bushfires, floods, and ecological degradation. This approach aligns with Outcome 14 of the Closing the Gap framework, which prioritises Indigenous-led efforts to enhance social and emotional wellbeing, and Outcome 15, which affirms the cultural, spiritual, and economic connection to land and waters (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2025). Moreover, Outcome 16 highlights the revitalisation of Indigenous languages as integral to wellbeing and climate resilience, as these languages often encode deep ecological knowledge and seasonal indicators.

By actively interfacing Outcomes 14, 15, and 16 of the Closing the Gap frameworks with its overarching principles of The People's Charter, particularly empowerment, shared decision-making, and structural reform, governments have a clear opportunity to move beyond tokenistic inclusion and foster transformative partnerships with First Nations communities. Embedding Indigenous leadership into environmental governance not only strengthens Australia's climate resilience, but also affirms cultural identity, community wellbeing, and ecological stewardship in policy frameworks.

Grassroots organisations such as HOPE Inc. are well positioned to advocate for this shift. Through localised practice, strategic storytelling, and policy alignment with *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World*, HOPE and like-minded services can play a vital role in lobbying for systems change. Their work highlights how eco-social justice

principles can inform disaster planning, land management, and recovery in ways that centre Indigenous agency, relational care, and intergenerational knowledge.

Harnessing this momentum represents not just a policy adjustment, but an ethical imperative to embed place-based wisdom into Australia's climate future.

3. Thirdly, to advance eco-social justice in practice, it is recommended that formal education in social work and human services embed eco-social principles as core curriculum content. Reu and Jarldorn (2022) identified a persistent gap in the integration of ecological and social justice frameworks within social work education, despite increasing student awareness and concern. Embedding these principles would equip future practitioners to address the interconnected challenges of climate change, systemic inequality, and community resilience. This aligns with The People's Charter, which calls for education systems that foster dignity, participation, and ecological integrity through inclusive and preventative approaches (People's Charter, 2022). It also reflects the ethical obligations outlined in the Community Work Australia Code of Ethics, which emphasise social justice, human rights, and the practitioner's responsibility to challenge unjust policies and promote inclusive, community-led solutions (Community Work Australia, 2024). By integrating eco-social justice into foundational learning, educators can uphold the Community Work Australia principle of ethical practice and prepare graduates to co-build a more just and sustainable world.

Conclusion

This paper has examined if and how eco-social justice within Australian human service and environmental systems, draws on or aligns with *The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World* (People's Global Summit, 2022), with a particular emphasis on Indigenous-led responses to ecological disruption and social inequity. The research explored how participatory governance, place-based knowledge, and relational accountability can guide system reform. The findings highlight persistent siloes between social services and

environmental policy, alongside opportunities for integration through culturally responsive frameworks and community-driven leadership.

Evidence of ecological grief, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experiencing climate displacement and cultural loss, signals a pressing need for ecological decision-making that centres Indigenous sovereignty and wellbeing (Bailey & Gerrish, 2024; Doherty, 2025). While national initiatives such as the *National First Peoples Gathering on Climate Change* and commitments outlined in the 2025 *Closing the Gap* report offer some traction (CSIRO, 2021; National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2025), legal and governance structures remain limited in their capacity to uphold Indigenous rights in the face of environmental harm.

Recommendations presented in this paper urge governments and organisations to adopt The Peoples Charter's principles as guiding tools for reform. This includes embedding eco-social justice into service design and formal teachings, supporting Indigenous land management practices, and amplifying Indigenous voices in policy and research. HOPE Inc. was positioned as a model organisation for localised eco-social justice advocacy, exemplifying how non-violent, systems-focused lobbying and knowledge-sharing can reinforce Indigenous leadership and drive structural change.

Ultimately, eco-social justice in Australia requires a shift from extractive consultation to genuine co-governance, where sovereignty, cultural identity, and environmental integrity are upheld through ethical collaboration and systemic transformation. This paper calls for ongoing partnerships that reframe evidence as relational, lived, and co-created, in pursuit of futures where no one is left behind.

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Appendix A

Supplementary Research Sources

This appendix outlines the scope of research conducted during the thesis development process. It documents exploratory searches, including the specific search terms used, materials located, and their sources. These resources, though not formally cited within the main body of the paper, contributed to contextual understanding.

Search Term	Search Findings	Search Location
“The People’s Charter – for an Eco-Social World”	<p>Buchko, K., Connon, I. L. C., & Dominelli, L. (2024). <i>Country on the move</i>: Comparing the impacts of service provision during the waves of displacement before and after full-scale aggression against Ukraine. <i>Journal of Human Rights and Social Work</i>, 9(4), 474–484.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-024-00337-9</p> <p>This article examines how Ukraine and the UK responded to two major waves of displacement caused by the war in Ukraine, first after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and then following the 2022 full-scale invasion. It highlights the evolving strengths and persistent gaps in service provision for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine and externally</p>	USQ Library

	displaced persons (EDPs) in the UK. The authors argue for a more holistic, rights-based, and psychosocially informed approach to displacement policy and social work practice.	
“The People’s Charter – for an Eco-Social World”	<p>People’s Global Summit. (n.d.). <i>The People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World</i>. https://newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world/</p> <p>Review of a living document, developed through the 2022 People’s Global Summit, outlines a shared vision for a just, sustainable, and inclusive future. It draws on diverse global voices, including Indigenous wisdom, youth leadership, and community-led movements to propose values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and eco-social justice as foundations for systemic transformation. The People’s Charter serves as both a call to action and a framework for co-building a new eco-social world.</p>	<p>Google Scholar</p> <p>Google Search</p> <p>Web database searches</p>
	<p>Hope for the Future. (2025). <i>Statement submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women, sixty-ninth session (E/CN.6/2025/NGO/174)</i>. United Nations Economic and Social Council. https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.6/2025/NGO/174</p> <p>This NGO statement, submitted to the 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, outlines Hope for the Future’s advocacy for gender equality, climate justice, and</p>	

	<p>inclusive development. It emphasizes the importance of community-led, eco-social approaches and aligns with the values of <i>The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World</i>, particularly in its call for systemic transformation grounded in human rights and sustainability.</p>	
<p>The People's Charter Values</p> <p>"Love and care for people and the planet, responsibilities and holistic rights. And Respect, dignity, harmony and social justice and Diversity, belonging, reciprocity and equity and togetherness, accountability and community and Solidarity, equality, inclusion and collaboration."</p> <p>Search was carried out in "", and, or.</p>	No document was found	USQ Library

<p>The People's Charter Values</p> <p>"Love and care for people and the planet, responsibilities and holistic rights. And Respect, dignity, harmony and social justice and Diversity, belonging, reciprocity and equity and togetherness, accountability and community and Solidarity, equality, inclusion and collaboration."</p>	<p>Durham, S. (2023, March 28). Respecting diversity through joint social action. South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP). https://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/social-work-community-development/respecting-diversity-through-joint-social-action-world-social-work-day/</p> <p>Published by SACAP in March 2023 to mark <i>World Social Work Day</i>, this article explores how social workers play a pivotal role in promoting diversity and driving joint social action. It highlights the importance of inclusive practice across cultural, socioeconomic, and identity-based differences, and connects these values to the principles of <i>The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World</i>.</p> <p>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). <i>Embedding values and attitudes in curriculum</i>. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/embedding-values-and-attitudes-in-curriculum_aee2adcd-en.html</p> <p>This OECD report explores how national curricula can embed values and attitudes to support lifelong learning, equity, and social cohesion. It highlights the importance of clearly articulated values—such as respect, empathy, and responsibility—in shaping inclusive</p>	<p>Google Scholar</p> <p>Google Search</p> <p>Web database searches</p>
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	<p>education systems. The report aligns with <i>The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World</i> by promoting learner agency, wellbeing, and diversity as foundational to curriculum reform. It also emphasises stakeholder engagement and culturally responsive pedagogy as key to effective implementation.</p> <p>Let me know if you'd like this linked to your thesis discussion on education policy or integrated into your eco-social justice framework.</p>	
<p>The People's Charter Principles</p> <p>"Co-developing reciprocity, Co-building peace and Co-living with nature and Co-creating social justice and Co-realising equality"</p>	No document was found	USQ Library
<p>The People's Charter Principles</p> <p>Co-developing reciprocity, Co-building peace and Co-living with nature and Co-</p>	<p>Department of Home Affairs. (2024). Multicultural Framework Review: Towards fairness – A multicultural Australia for all [Report summary]. Australian Government.</p> <p>https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multicultural-framework-review/towards-fairness</p>	<p>Google Scholar</p> <p>Google Search</p> <p>Web database searches</p>

creating social justice and Co-realising equality	<p>The Multicultural Framework Review is a landmark document that assesses the state of multiculturalism in Australia and proposes a roadmap for inclusive reform. It draws on over 200 consultations and nearly 800 public submissions, including significant input from First Nations communities and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups.</p> <p>These priorities strongly align with The People's Charter principles of co-living with nature, co-building human solidarity, and co-creating eco-social justice. The Review's emphasis on relational governance, cultural belonging, and inclusive public services reflects a commitment to dignity, equity, and sustainability.</p>	
	<p>International Federation of Social Workers. (2023, December 4). <i>Urgent call for transformative action at COP28 to address the climate crisis</i>. https://www.ifsw.org/urgent-call-for-transformative-action-at-cop28-to-address-the-climate-crisis/</p> <p>This statement from the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) calls for urgent, systemic action at COP28 to address the escalating climate crisis. It critiques the lack of meaningful commitments from global leaders and highlights the disproportionate impact of</p>	

	climate change on marginalised communities. The article reinforces the role of social workers in advancing eco-social justice, advocating for a transition from extractive systems to inclusive, sustainable models. It draws on <i>The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World</i> to propose a new eco-social contract rooted in reciprocity, co-living with nature, and collective wellbeing.	
"Eco-Social Justice Indigenous"	No document was found	USQ Library
Eco-Social Justice Indigenous	Environmental Justice Australia. (n.d.). <i>Resources to support Indigenous justice</i> . https://envirojustice.org.au/allyship-resources/ The <i>Allyship Resources</i> page by Environmental Justice Australia offers practical tools, media, and educational materials to support non-Indigenous Australians in becoming effective allies to Indigenous communities. It emphasizes listening, learning, and taking action to uphold Indigenous-led justice, cultural safety, and environmental protection.	Google Scholar Google Search Web database searches
	CSIRO. (2021). Traditional Owners and scientists working to tackle common climate challenge. https://www.csiro.au/en/news/All/News/2021/March/Traditional-Owners-and-scientists-working-to-tackle-common-climate-challenge	

	<p>This article outlines the 2021 National First Peoples Gathering on Climate Change, held in Cairns, where over 120 Traditional Owners from more than 40 Indigenous groups collaborated with climate scientists. The event focused on co-designing climate adaptation strategies and strengthening Indigenous-led responses to environmental change. It highlights the importance of Indigenous leadership, knowledge-sharing, and culturally grounded governance in shaping climate resilience across Country.</p>	
Closing The Gap	<p>Closing the Gap. (n.d.). <i>Closing the Gap targets and outcomes</i>. Australian Government. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets</p> <p>This webpage outlines the 19 national socio-economic targets established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These targets span areas such as health, education, housing, justice, and cultural wellbeing, aiming to improve life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The targets are monitored by the Productivity Commission and reflect a commitment to shared accountability and data-informed progress tracking.</p>	<p>Google Scholar Google Search Web database searches</p>

Environmental Justice	<p>Ferdinand, A., Massey, L., Cullen, J., Temple, J., Chamravi, D., Meiselbach, K., Paradies, Y., Baynam, G., Savarirayan, R., & Kelaher, M. (2019). <i>Understanding disability through the lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – challenges and opportunities</i>. Lowitja Institute.</p> <p>https://www.lowitja.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/migrate/20190905_NDIS%20Report_final.pdf</p> <p>This 2019 report by Ferdinand et al. explores the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It examines how cultural, geographical, and systemic factors influence disability support outcomes in Indigenous communities. The report highlights issues such as access to culturally safe services, the complexity of navigating NDIS processes, and the importance of incorporating First Nations knowledge into disability policy design. It offers recommendations for improving engagement, co-design practices, and equity within the NDIS rollout across remote and urban Indigenous communities.</p> <p>SBS NITV. (2025, July 15). <i>No duty of care: Torres Strait Islander Uncles lose their climate case against the Australian Government</i>. https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/federal-court-hands-down-decision-in-australian-climate-case/av8f97gqv</p>	<p>Google Scholar</p> <p>Google Search</p> <p>Web database searches</p>
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	<p>Doherty, B. (2025, July 15). <i>Torres Strait Island landmark climate case dismissed by Federal Court</i>. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jul/15/torres-strait-island-landmark-climate-case-dismissed-federal-court</p> <p>Allam L (2021b). 'We want to be included': Indigenous demand a say on climate change, <i>The Guardian Australia</i>, Sydney, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/27/we-want-to-be-included-first-nations-demand-a-say-on-climate-change.</p> <p>These articles document the outcome of a landmark climate litigation case brought by Torres Strait Islander Elders Uncle Pabai Pabai and Uncle Paul Kabai. The Federal Court ruled that the Australian Government does not owe a legal duty of care to protect Torres Strait communities from climate change. Despite acknowledging the existential threat posed by rising sea levels, the court found the matter to be political rather than legal. The decision has sparked widespread grief and renewed calls for policy reform, with Elders and supporters vowing to continue their advocacy through legal, political, and community channels.</p>	
	<p>Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. (2021). National Environmental Science Program. https://www.environment.gov.au/science/nesp</p>	

	<p>The National Environmental Science Program (NESP) is a long-term Australian Government initiative that funds applied environmental research to support evidence-based policy and decision-making. It builds on previous programs to deliver high-quality science across key areas such as biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, Indigenous knowledge integration, and sustainable land and water management.</p> <p>NESP operates through multiple research hubs, including the Resilient Landscapes Hub and Marine and Coastal Hub, which collaborate with universities, CSIRO, Indigenous communities, and land managers. The program prioritises partnerships that embed Traditional Owner knowledge, promote community-led conservation, and strengthen climate resilience through place-based research.</p>	
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