

# GREG HUNT & THE FACTS ABOUT AGENDA 21

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This article draws attention to various claims made by the Minister for the Environment, Mr Greg Hunt, in regard to the United Nations Agenda 21 program and its implementation in Australia. Has Mr Hunt been telling the truth? Has he honourably discharged his duties as a representative of the people? You be the judge.

## MR HUNT'S CLAIM

1. Regarding suggestions that the Commonwealth applied pressure to local Councils to implement Agenda 21.

[In personal correspondence received in 2012 Mr Hunt stated:](#)

*"we have no powers over local Governments.....Councils can use any number of excuses to justify their actions.....Councils should not misuse a 20 year old agreement."*

## THE TRUTH

Since 1992, when the UN Agenda 21 program was introduced to Parliament, the Commonwealth has been utilising various means of coercing local Councils into complying with the dictates of the UN, as the Commonwealth confirms in 2002 in their [WSSD - Australian National Assessment Report](#):

*"The Federal Government is also working in partnership with local government through its Environmental Resource Officer and Local Agenda 21 programs to promote sustainable development at the local government level.....The Federal Government is also developing a national framework of milestones for adoption and use of Local Agenda 21 by local government"*

In 1999 the Howard government introduced the EPBC Act to give the Commonwealth power over States and Councils, power that is exercised by the Minister for the Environment, as noted by the government's own web sites.

<https://www.environment.gov.au/resource/local-government-and-australian-environment-law>  
<http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/information-for/local-government>

According to the web site:

*"Projects in a local government area may need the approval of the Australian environment minister in addition to local and state approvals. Developments that comply with local and state requirements may still need to be separately approved by the Australian environment minister. Failure to gain the minister's approval can leave developers open to unnecessary delays, and even prosecution, if matters protected by the EPBC Act are significantly affected."*

As the Commonwealth points out, non-compliance with the Act may result in severe penalties.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/compliance-and-enforcement/mechanisms>  
<https://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/compliance-and-enforcement/case-judgments>

In fact, various Councils have been prosecuted by the Commonwealth, using the discretion of the Minister, even though the Minister says the Commonwealth has *"no powers over local Governments"*.

[https://www.footprintnews.com.au/nl06\\_news\\_selected.php?selkey=44346#a](https://www.footprintnews.com.au/nl06_news_selected.php?selkey=44346#a)

*Council to pay \$131,000 penalty for EPBC Act breach*

*Victoria's Greater Geelong Council will pay a penalty of \$131,000 after failing to obtain EPBC Act approval for road works that destroyed almost one hectare of rare grassland.*

*The enforceable undertaking with the Federal environment department requires the council to contribute \$44,000 towards rehabilitating the damaged area, \$67,000 to a review of its work processes and environmental planning programs and \$20,000 towards a grassy groundcover research project.*

*In April, Victoria's Pyrenees Shire Council undertook to pay \$155,000 after road works damaged half a hectare of protected grassland*

According to Ballarat Council in their "[Environment Sustainability Strategy 2012-2014](#)":

*"A number of Local Governments in the western Victorian region have recently been found in breach of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. These LGAs have received significant fines from the Federal Environment Department. One Local Government in particular estimates that the cost of its breach has cost them in the order of \$1 million, including the fine, legal costs and internal costs. This LGA also has a significant ongoing annual cost as a result."*

All of these Councils according to Mr Hunt it seems, have been forced to pay fines by a government which has no powers over local Councils.

As noted by Cripps, Binning, and Young, in [Opportunity Denied](#), the UN Local Agenda 21 program has been driving restrictions on property rights or usage rights in local council areas around Australia:

*"The merit of a stronger role for local governments in environmental management, including native vegetation management, is now well recognised, both at an international level through the development of Local Agenda 21 (ICLEI, 1996) and at a national level through numerous policy statements, including the Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment (Brown, 1994)."*

[As Gwydir Council admitted during their Committee Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013](#), Agenda 21 had, "for 21 years, been very influential in developing public policies that directly impact upon every level of government", including regulations pertaining to ecologically sustainable development. [As the Council pointed out](#):

***"Many of the subsequent matters introduced to encourage a sustainable society, such as the carbon tax, are the outcome of the Australian Government's attempt to introduce the objectives of Agenda 21."***

But if Greg Hunt's climate change policies are the result of the dictates of the UN being imposed through the Agenda 21 program, why does Mr Hunt pretend this is not so?

## **MR HUNT'S CLAIM**

2. Mr Hunt, and also other politicians, often seem to suggest, when asked about Agenda 21, that it is an old or dead agreement from 20 years ago, and therefore there seems to be an assumption it has no relevance today. Is this correct?

[In personal correspondence received in 2012 Mr Hunt stated](#):

The United Nations Agenda 21 program is a "20 year old, dead, non-binding declaration"

## **THE TRUTH**

In spite of Mr Hunt's claim about Agenda 21 being "dead" and "non-binding", the [Australian](#)

[government admits on their current web site](#), “Australia's commitment to Agenda 21 is reflected in a strong national response to meet our obligations under this international agreement.” The Australian government also admit in their “[Road to Rio+20” fact sheet](#):

*“Australia has participated in sustainable development discussions for more than four decades. We have signed international treaties, supported regional initiatives and enacted international commitments through new laws and policies at home”*

Given Mr Hunt’s claim, it is interesting to note that in 1995, then Prime Minister Paul Keating reinforced how diligently Australia was complying with the UN’s Agenda 21 implementation requirements in the [Foreword to Australia’s report to the UNCSD in 1995](#). In 1999, then Environment Minister in the Howard government, **Robert Hill**, issued an instruction manual or [Local Agenda 21 guide for councils](#). In the February 2000 edition of Local Government Focus Magazine, **Senator Ian Macdonald** emphasised that the Commonwealth was driving the implementation of [LA21](#) at the local council level by providing funds. In the May 2003 edition of Local Government Focus, then Environment Minister **David Kemp**, confirmed his satisfaction with the implementation of Agenda 21 by Councils around Australia. By 2002 even the [Australian Defence Force was obeying the AG21 dictates of the UN](#). And During Parliament, on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2002, Christopher Pyne, [Liberal Member for Sturt, sought credit for the Howard government’s Agenda 21 achievements](#).

As the UN points out in their paper “[Guidance in Preparing a National Sustainable Development Strategy: Managing Sustainable Development in the New Millenium, Background Paper No. 13](#), Agenda 21/ESD needs to be embedded or undemocratic to ensure there is no disruption as a result of the electoral process;

*“Agenda 21 promotes national sustainable development strategies as mechanisms for translating a country’s goals and aspiration of sustainable development into concrete policies and actions.....*

*A national strategy for sustainable development requires long-term and uninterrupted effort. Mechanisms, thus, need to be put in place that would enable the strategy development to be carried out as a continuous and cyclical process with broad national support, regardless of the political party in power.....*

*A key element of successful national sustainable development strategies is the existence of a strong political commitment from the top leadership as well as from local authorities of a country.....*

*46.2 Institutionalization of the national sustainable development strategy process. The national sustainable development strategy process needs to be fully institutionalized, and not be seen as ad hoc or one time undertaking....*

*46.3 Putting in place appropriate legal and enforcement mechanisms. The relationship among institutions as well as the relationship between people and their environment and among themselves is governed by laws and regulations.”*

In an address to the Kenya National Judicial Colloquium on Environmental Law, 10-13 January 2006 entitled “[The Role of the Judiciary in Promoting Sustainable Development: The Experience of Asia and the Pacific](#)”, Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales, Justice Brian Preston details the history of sustainable development and Agenda 21, which was agreed to at the [United Nations Conference on Environment and Development \(UNCED\)](#) in 1992, and their inclusion in Australian laws through two guiding documents developed by the Australian government, the [Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment](#), and the [National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development](#).

While Greg Hunt tells the Australian people that Agenda 21 is ‘non-binding’ and ‘dead’, [Justice Preston points out](#) that the instruction to force the provisions of Agenda 21 upon the people with Australian laws came directly from this UN agreement:

*“The judiciary is also a crucial partner in promoting environmental governance, upholding the rule of law and in ensuring a fair balance between environmental, social and developmental consideration through its judgements and declarations”. Agenda 21, the programme of action for sustainable development, emphasises in Chapter 8, the need to provide an effective legal and regulatory framework:*

*“8.13 Laws and regulations suited to country-specific conditions are among the most important instruments for transforming environment and development policies into action, not only through ‘command and control’ methods, but also as a normative framework for economic planning and market instruments...”*

*8.14 To effectively integrate environment and development in the policies and practices of each country, it is essential to develop and implement integrated, enforceable and effective laws and regulations that are based upon sound social, ecological, economic and scientific principles. It is equally critical to develop workable programmes to review and enforce compliance with the laws, regulations and standards that are adopted...*

*8.15 The enactment and enforcement of laws and regulations (at the regional, national, state/provincial or local/municipal level) are also essential for the implementation of most international agreements in the field of environment and development, as illustrated by the frequent treaty obligation to report on legislative measures...”*

The judiciary, responsible for penalising Australians for failing to comply with the provisions of Agenda 21, have discussed the relevant enforcing laws in various papers such as, [“Internalising Ecocentrism in Environmental Law”](#), [“The Role of the Judiciary in Promoting Sustainable Development: The Experience of Asia and the Pacific”](#), [“Ecologically Sustainable Development in the Courts in Australia and Asia”](#), [“Judicial Implementation of the Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development in Australia and Asia”](#), [“The Rise of Environmental Law in New South Wales and Federally: Perspectives from the Past and Issues for the Future”](#), and [“Synopsis of the Queensland Environmental Legal System”](#).

In 2002, 10 years after introduction of AG21, the Commonwealth government **proudly announced**, in [the WSSD Assessment Report](#), that *“it is impossible to document all of the initiatives which Australia has put in place to turn the principles to which we agreed into action”* since the 1992 Rio summit. It may well be ‘impossible to document’, but Greg Hunt seems to know nothing about it, the people have been given no democratic choice, and government, to this day, refuses to state the costs, including those costs which have been transferred to local Councils.

As far as Agenda 21 being ‘dead’ is concerned, in 2012 then [Prime Minister Julia Gillard](#) renewed Australia’s commitment to this UN program at the [Rio +20 Conference](#). Details of that commitment were recorded in the outcomes document from Rio +20 entitled, [The Future We Want. At that time Greg Hunt was Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage](#). Additionally, the [2030 SDG agenda](#) signed by [Foreign Minister Julie Bishop](#) in September 2015, was also clearly stated in [The Future We Want](#), to be a [continuation and expansion of Agenda 21](#).

How is it possible that Greg Hunt continues to pretend Agenda 21 is ‘non-binding’ even as the judiciary continue to penalise Australians for failing to comply with laws attributable to this insidious pervasive program, and yet Mr Hunt still remains a Minister in the Australian Parliament?

### **MR HUNT’S CLAIM**

**3.** Mr Hunt claims he had never heard of Agenda 21.

[In personal correspondence received in 2012 Mr Hunt stated:](#)

*“For the final time i had never heard of the issue, heard it raised by Ministers, MP's or constituents until 19 years after the thing was apparently signed .”*

Ok, Mr Hunt says he knows nothing about the 20 year discussion and implementation of Agenda 21/ESD by his political colleagues, or the enforcement of the provisions of Agenda 21/ESD by the judiciary, state governments and local Councils, right around Australia. But is he also unaware that, in 2003, he was part of the [Employment in the environment: Methods, Measurements and Messages](#) enquiry, chaired by Bruce Billson, which discussed methods used by the Commonwealth to coerce Councils into implementing AG21?

According to that enquiry:

*4.63 **The Local Agenda 21 program assists local governments to integrate environmental, social and economic objectives. The Local Agenda 21 was developed from the global blueprint for sustainability that was agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (the Rio Earth Summit).** It identifies local authorities as the sphere of governance closest to the people, and provides a framework for local authorities to consult with their communities and develop and implement a local plan for sustainability. The program aims to build upon existing local government strategies and resources (such as corporate plans, vegetation management plans, and transport strategies) to better integrate environmental, economic and social goals.*

*4.64 Although developed in 1992, the Local Agenda 21 program is active in Australia and continues to provide the principles for sustainable development at the local government level. DEH provides a number of guides to assist local government authorities in the implementation of the Local Agenda 21 program. The Australian Government is also developing a national framework of milestones for local governments to measure the implementation of Local Agenda 21.*

*4.65 The national framework will assist local governments to systematically assess their progress towards sustainability. Consultation during the development of the draft framework suggested that there was local government support for this initiative.*

#### **Environment Resource Officer Scheme**

*4.68 DEH gave evidence to the Committee that:*

*... the Department of Environment and Heritage has had a program of environmental cooperation with local government. In a concrete sense, perhaps the most visible form of that at the moment is funding of what we call ‘environmental resource officers’ in the relevant state-local government associations in each state. Each of those officers has a responsibility to act as a facilitator and a coordinator of action within the state, as the disseminator of information and particularly as a bridge between the national and local levels of government.*

*4.69 The Environmental Resource Officer (ERO) Scheme places dedicated officers in the peak local government associations in each State and the Australian Local Government Association, to assist councils to better manage their local environments, especially through improved take-up of Australian Government programs. The ERO scheme was funded until 30 June 2003. The Committee is of the view that work with local governments is important to provide ‘on the ground’ local initiatives and to ensure a unified approach to ESD from all levels of government. The Committee supports the work being done and is pleased to note that ERO funding was extended in the 2003-04 Australian Government Budget. The Committee supports the continuation of this funding into future years.*

The facts are perfectly clear. Mr Hunt’s claims are perfectly clear. Has Mr Hunt discharged his duties competently and honourably as Minister for the Environment and representative of the people?