

Willoughby Environmental Protection Association, 10 March 2026

# Combatting threats to Climate, Environment & Society

## Why we need system change

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# Plan of Presentation

1. Climate, energy, environment, social justice, human rights & peace: the bad news and some good news
2. What are the driving forces of existential & other major threats?
3. How we, the people, can weaken these driving forces





# 🙄 Climate Change: an Existential Threat

Global heating has already exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial  
Time is running out to avoid crossing tipping points



# Recommended Energy Transition Strategy

In the nutshell: renewables + electrification + efficiency + fairness



First 6 actions will mitigate at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Australia's GHG emissions; last action (in red) is challenging.

- ★ Set targets for 5-year periods 2030–2050
- ★ Rapidly replace fossil fuel (FF) electricity with renewable electricity (RElec)
- ★ Replace petrol/diesel road vehicles with electric
- ★ Replace FF in domestic & industrial heating with electricity
- ★ Greatly increase energy efficiency of buildings, appliances & transport; foster behavior change too
- ★ Social justice: assist disadvantaged workers and countries
- ★ To do: develop industry to produce renewable fuels, 'green' hydrogen and ammonia, for air & sea transport and non-energy industrial use

# 😊 Contributions of Renewable Electricity in Selected Regions, around 2023-24

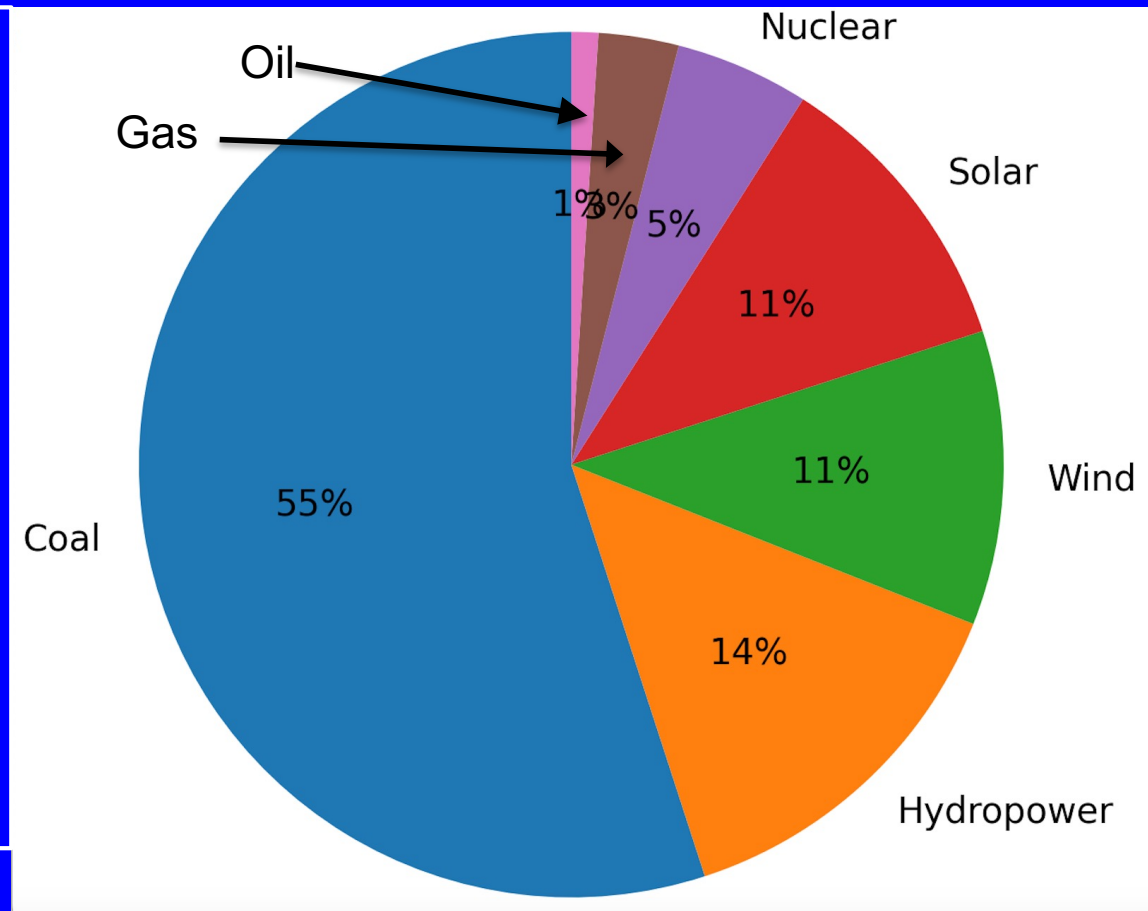
| Region   | % of annual electricity generation                            |
|--|---|
| Regions with large hydro potential, e.g. Norway, Iceland, Bhutan, Tasmania | About 100%  |
| Regions with little hydro potential  |   |
| Denmark  | 88% (100% expected by 2030)                                   |
| South Australia  | 74% (100% expected by 2028)                                   |
| Australia as a whole   | 36%   |
| Scotland   | 62% (113% of electricity consumption; difference is exported) |
| 2 windy North German states  | 100%+ each  |

# 😊 China's Electricity Generation Mix 2025 est.

World's biggest manufacturer of

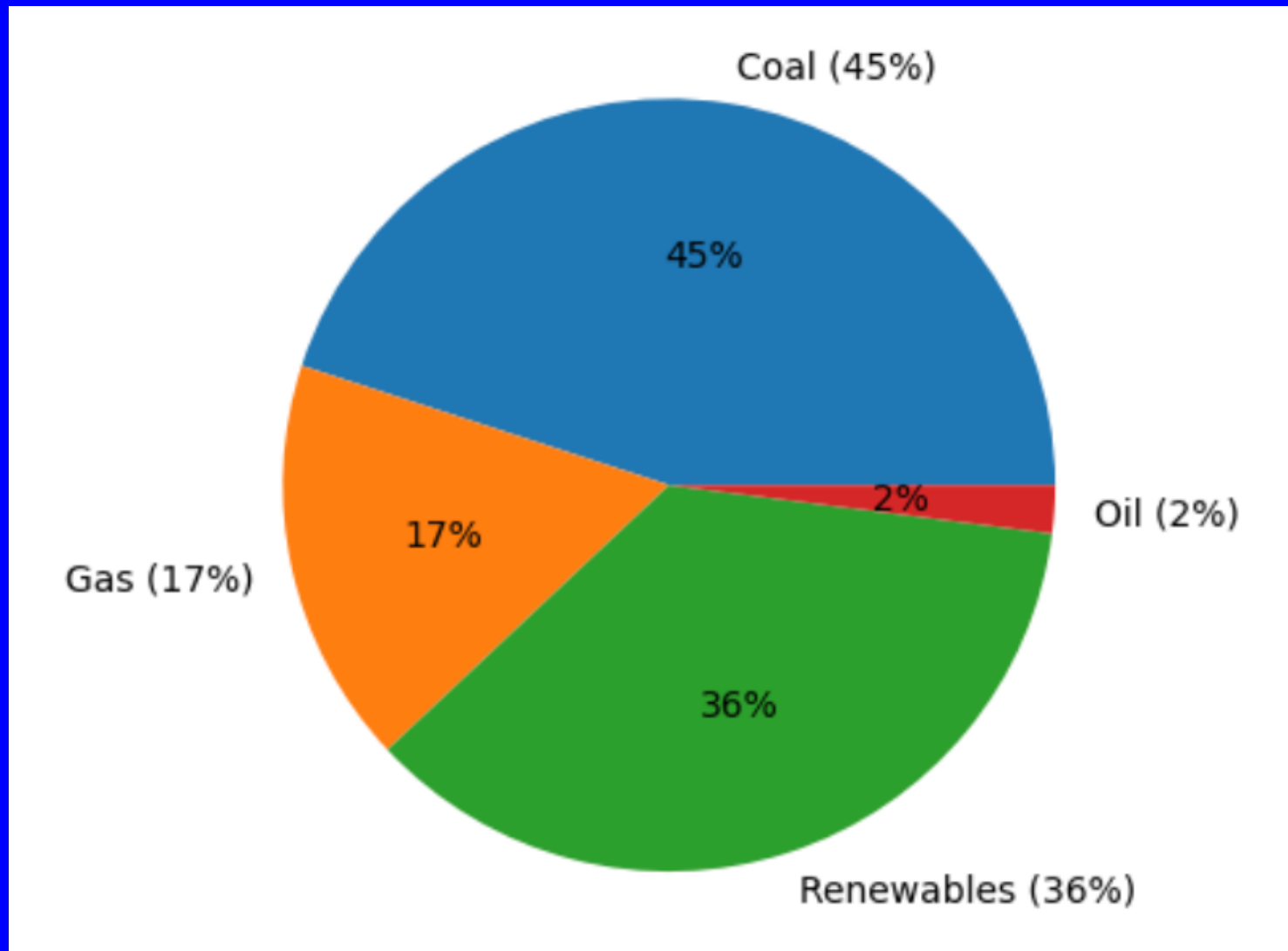
- solar PV panels
- wind turbines
- solar hot water
- EVs

As RE grows, coal power stations are retrofitted to become more flexible in operation; no longer baseload



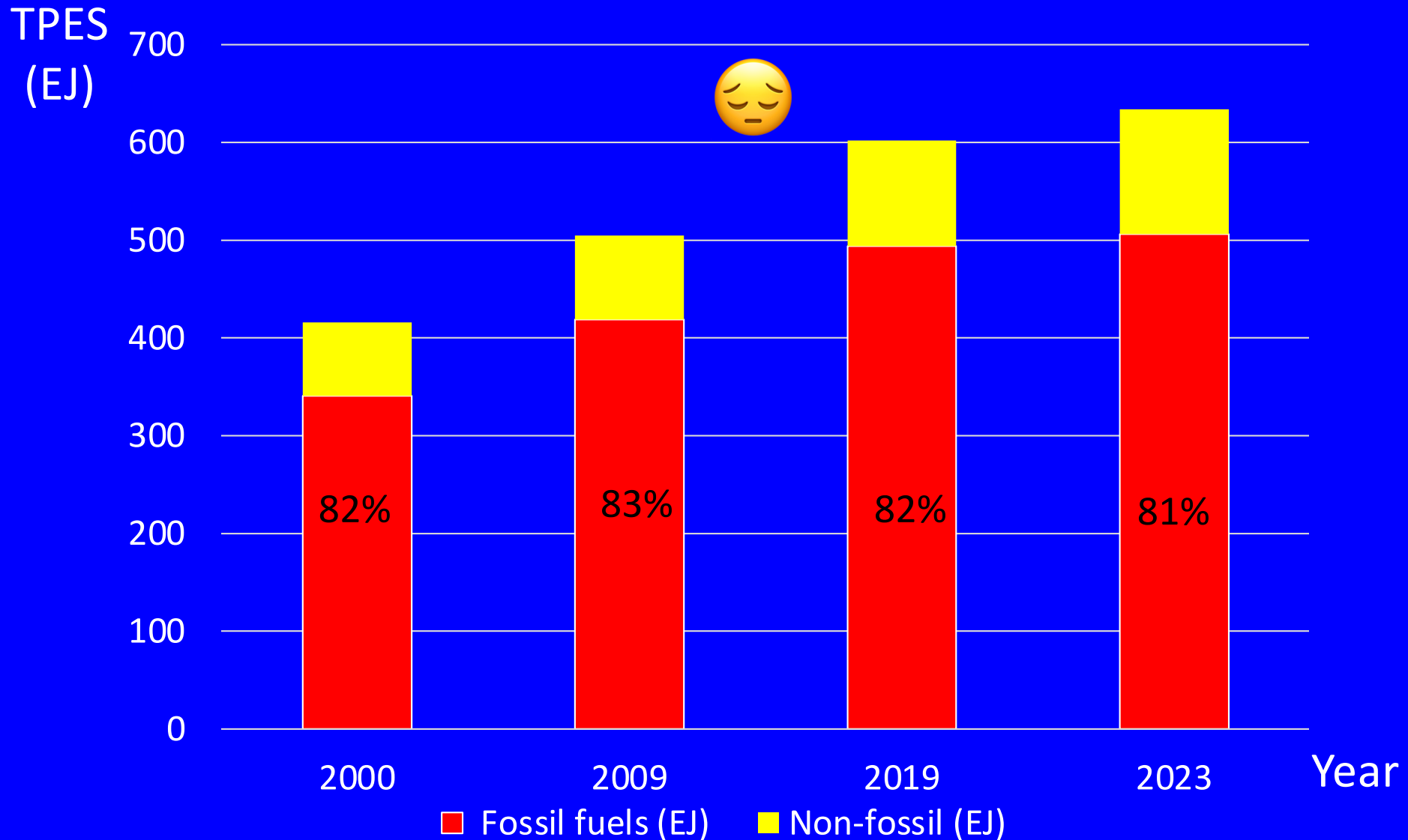
China's total generation 2025 ~10,000 TWh: 36% renewables; coal 55%  
Total GHG emissions are stabilising

# 😊 Australia's Electricity Generation Mix 2024



# Global Total Primary Energy Supply, TPES (EJ) showing share of fossil fuels, 2000–2023

IEA Data



# Renewable Energy Chasing Increasing Energy Consumption



*Photo credit: Free photo by Andreas N on Pixabay.*

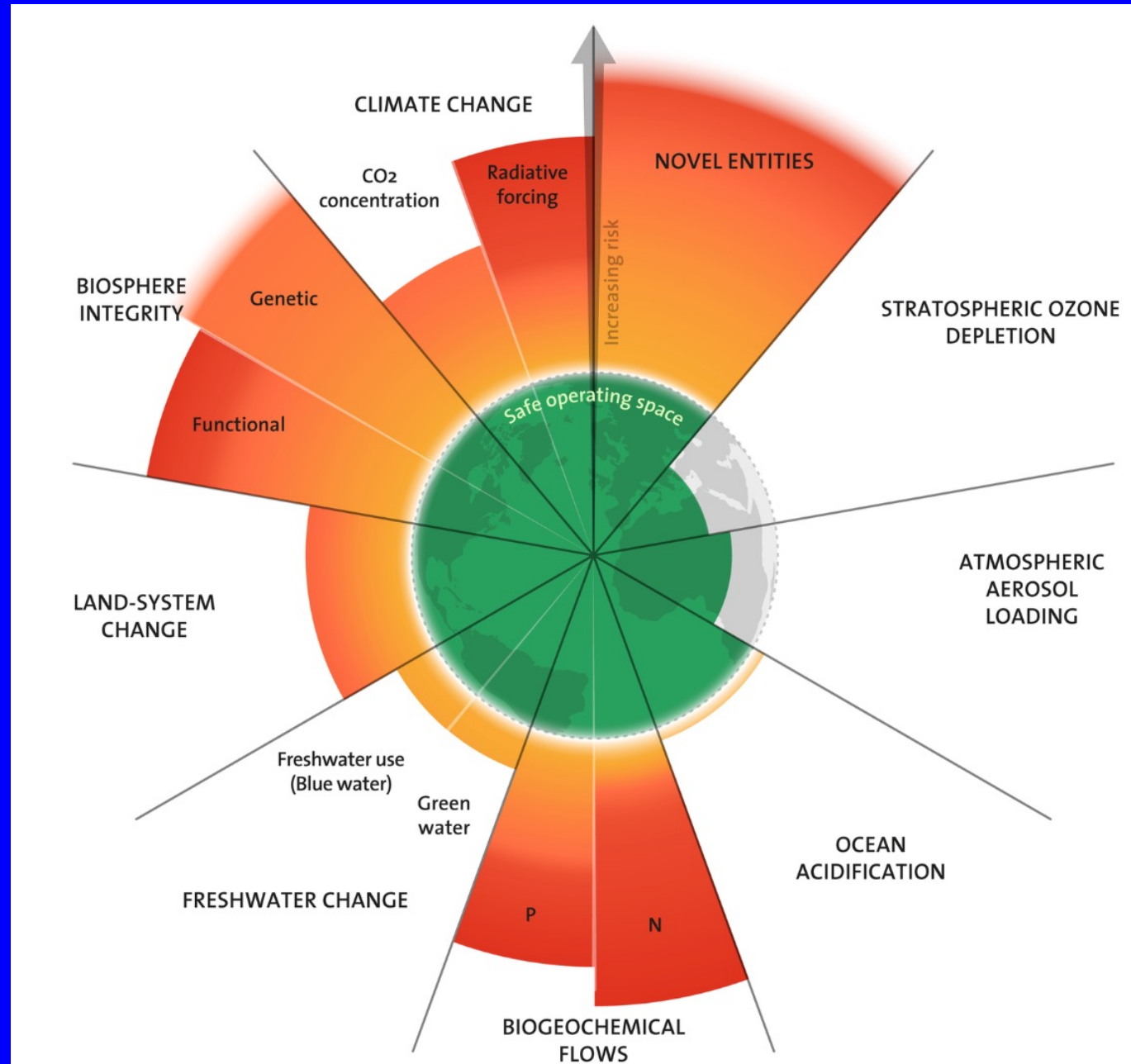
Will renewables will catch up before we cross climate tipping points?

# 😞 Existential Threats to Civilisation: Environmental

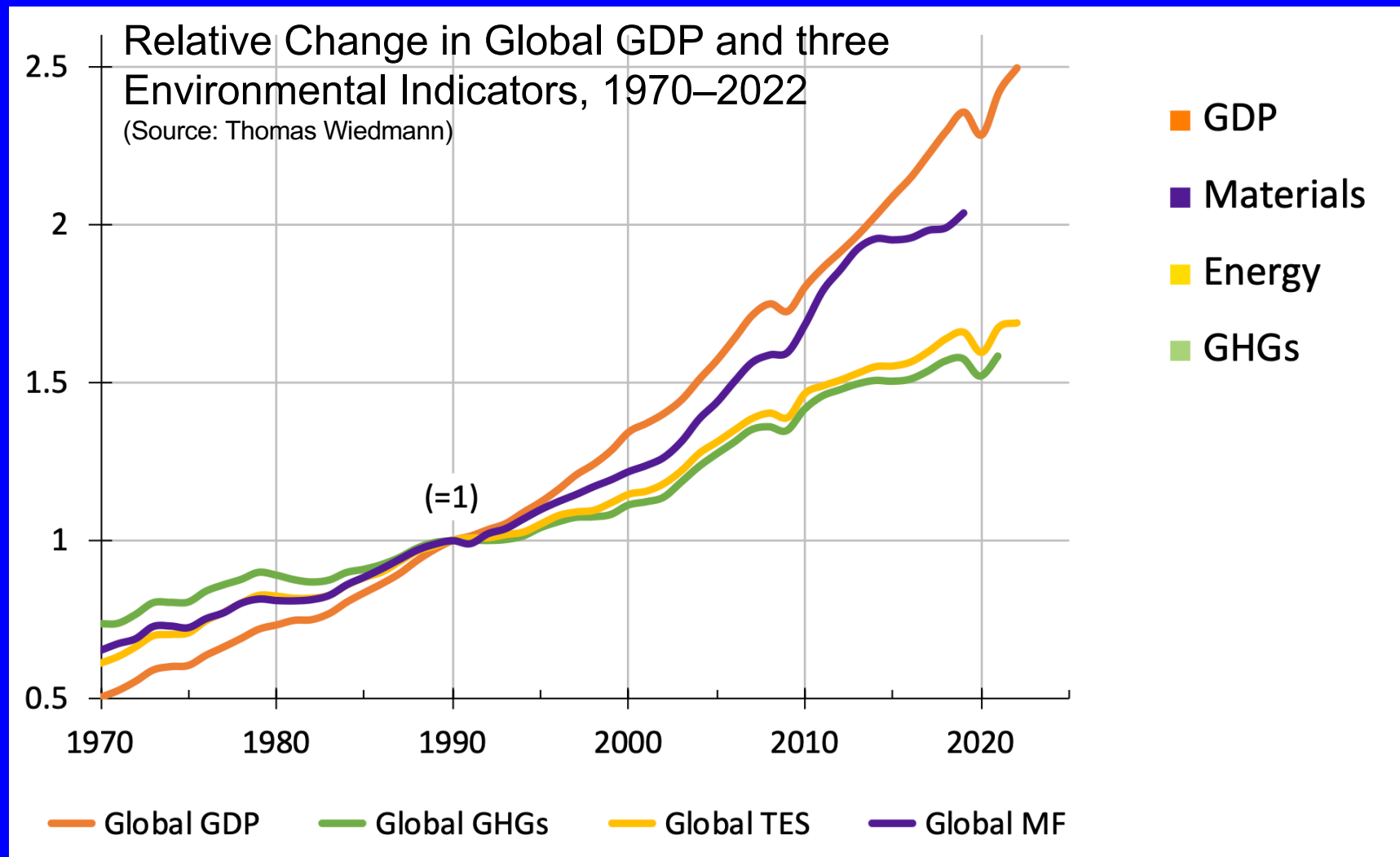
Climate change is linked to several other existential environmental threats

7 out of 9  
planetary  
boundaries  
exceeded in  
2025

Source: Azote for Stockholm  
Resilience Centre, Stockholm  
University



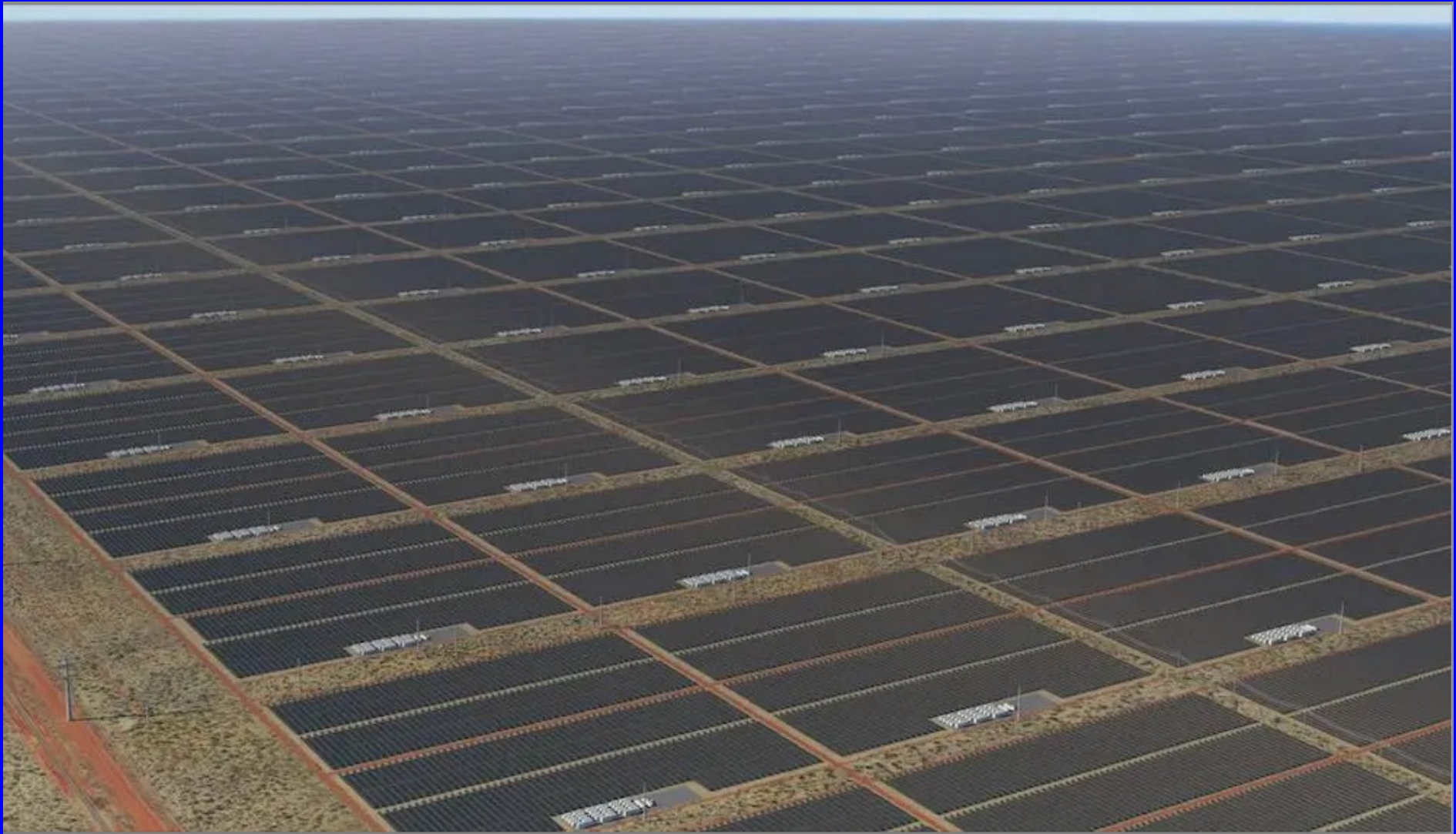
# Growth in GDP is closely correlated with growth in energy & materials consumption



So capitalism is one of the driving forces of environmental destruction

# 😞 Unsustainable Demand for Materials

Transition to a 'circular' economy is essential for industrial society,  
not just for RE



# Technological Change, although necessary, is not sufficient for solving climate emergency. We need economic reform and more!

Sustainability scientists and many ecological economists reject the following economic ideologies/myths:

- ★ “Endless growth on a finite planet is feasible and desirable”
- ★ “GDP is a measure of national wellbeing”
- ★ “Wealth trickles down from the rich to the poor”
- ★ “The market determines the value of all things”
- ★ “Governments with monetary sovereignty (e.g. USA, Australia, China) must balance their budgets”

Refutations: see [markdiesendorf.com/economic-myths](http://markdiesendorf.com/economic-myths)



# 🙄 Growing Threats to Environment, Social Justice, Human Rights, Peace & Democracy

- ★ Climate change; loss of forests, soils & freshwater; pollution of air, water, soil; etc
- ★ Wages stagnating while prices rise
- ★ Increasing gap between rich & poor; housing unaffordable; declining basic public services
- ★ High probability of nuclear war
- ★ Democracy undermined by influence of big business & rich individuals
- ★ The right to peaceful protest undermined

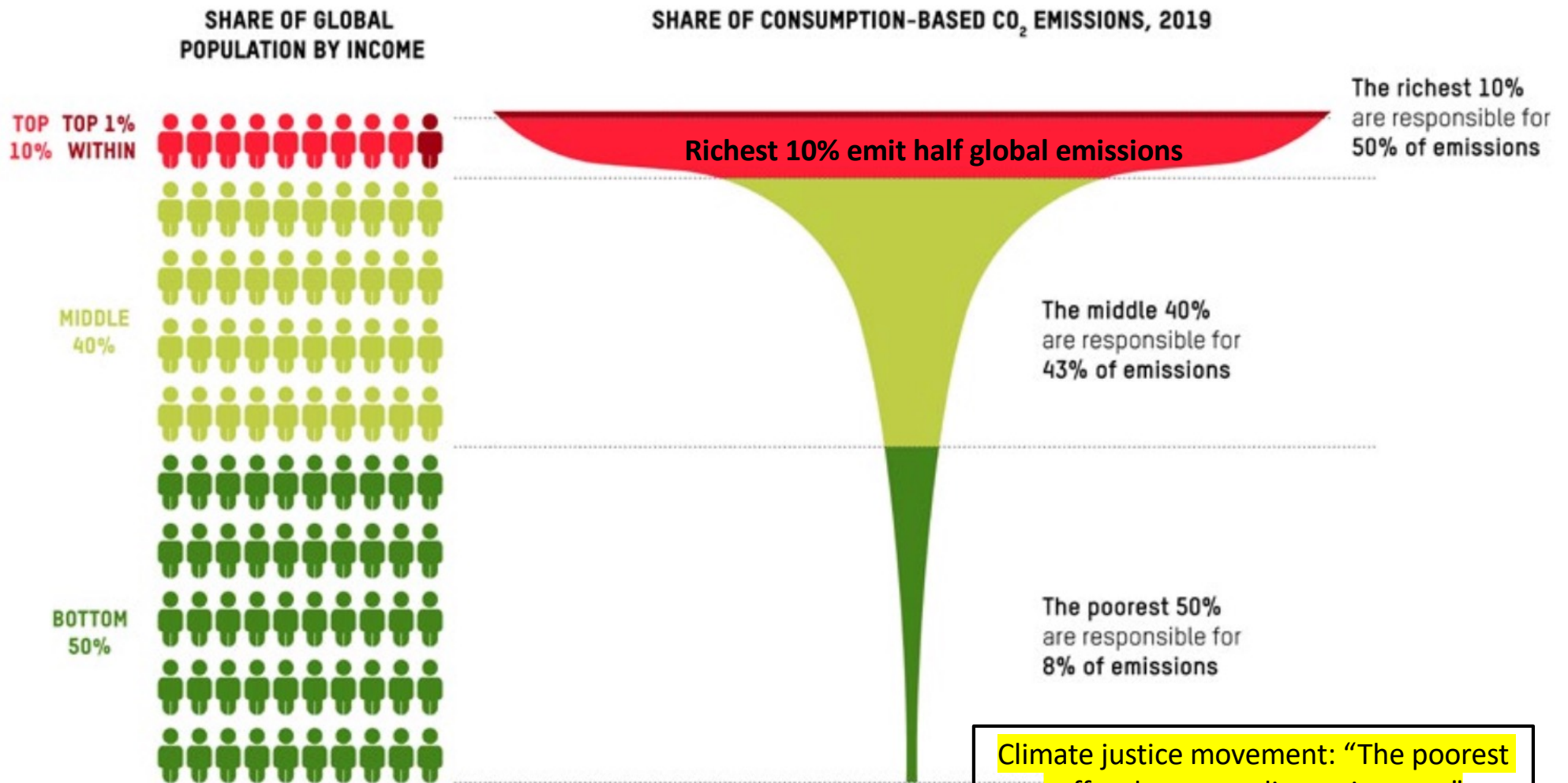


'The Scream' by Edvard Munch

**We are facing a Polycrisis!**

# Climate Change and Social Justice are Linked

## Share of Consumption-Based Global CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions by Income



Source: Oxfam (2023)

# These Threats to Environment, Social Justice, Peace and Democracy are Linked

- ★ Rich people and rich countries have the biggest environmental impacts
- ★ Environmental impacts are worse for the poor (e.g. droughts; floods)
- ★ A common driving force is capitalism, which is based on the exploitation of the planet and most of its people for private profit
- ★ The global economy is undemocratic, ruled by rich people, large corporations & rich countries
- ★ War has huge environmental, social justice and political impacts
- ★ War and subversion are tools of inequality: colonialism & neocolonialism
- ★ Better democracy → less social inequality and injustice and fewer wars

Links → Opportunity  
Could we address all threats simultaneously?

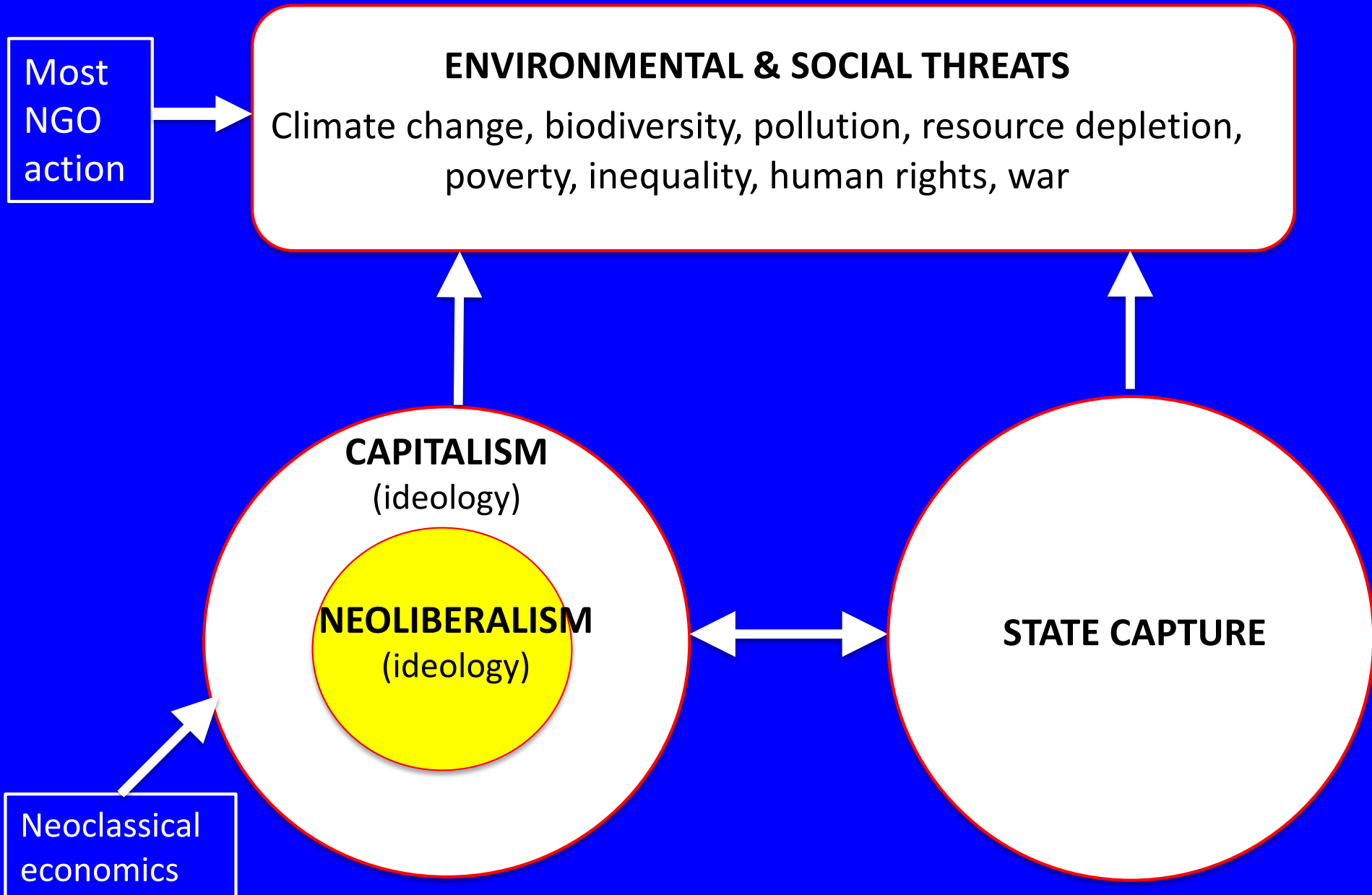
## Frank Summary of Current Situation in Environment, Social Justice, Human Rights and Peace

We are winning a few battles – e.g. renewables growing; reduced tax deductions for the rich – but losing the war

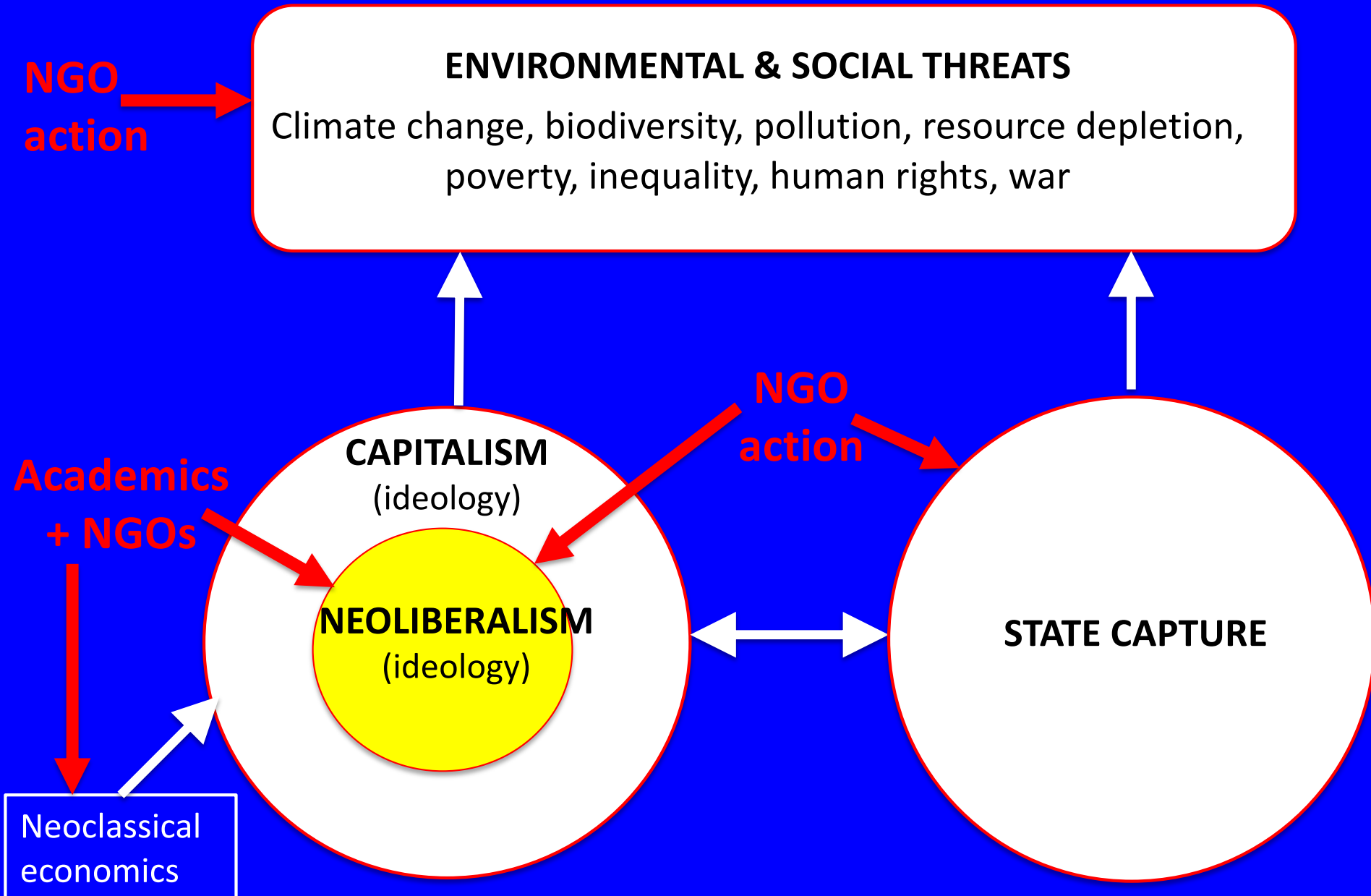
### A good quote attributed (incorrectly) to Einstein

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”.

# Most NGO Action ignores Driving Forces



# Strategy: Combat Driving Forces



# State Capture is responsible for most threats to environment, social justice, human & worker rights, and peace — the polycrisis

- ★ State capture is corruption on a grand scale: capture of the nation-state
- ★ Capture of government, opposition, public service, media, other institutions – by powerful vested interests
- ★ Captors include fossil fuel, finance, property, gambling, weapons and pharmaceutical industries; neoclassical economics profession
- ★ Captors also include foreign governments & institutions: e.g., US military-industrial complex; World Bank & International Monetary Fund



Image by Rod Taylor

# Capture of the Australian Nation-State on Climate/Energy by Fossil Fuel Interests



- ✦ Retiring Ministers for Energy/Resources of both major political parties appointed to highly-paid jobs in fossil fuel industry
- ✦ Both the Chief of Staff and a senior political adviser to previous Prime Minister appointed from Minerals Council of Australia
- ✦ Huge donations to both major parties from fossil fuel industry
- ✦ Campaigns by News Corp against climate science and renewable energy
- ✦ Manipulation of science has failed, except for some people in USA

# State Capture by Global Military-Industrial Complex



Another  
Existential Threat.  
Huge climate  
impacts



- ★ Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is funded by US & Australian governments and weapons industry
- ★ Former Defence Minister appointed president of a major contractor to Defence
- ★ Before Australian government joined AUKUS and announced it would buy nuclear submarines, 5 'retired' US admirals were paid consultants to Defence
- ★ Expansion of US bases under Force Posture Agreement – land, sea and air – including access for nuclear weapons-capable B-52s based in Australia

# State Capture by Property Development Industry threatens Social Justice & Energy Efficiency

## Property Council of Australia

- ✦ Board made up of Australia's largest residential and commercial developers
- ✦ Campaigns for negative gearing & discounted capital gains tax
- ✦ In 2015 PCA's advocacy budget was \$6.4M + \$1M for communications, and \$7.2M for 'networking' (Phibbs & Gurrans 2016)
- ✦ **Results**
  - ✦ Property prices & rents increase
  - ✦ Home ownership declines
  - ✦ State planning in effect by developers
  - ✦ Environmental damaging, energy inefficient developments with little social housing

## From PCA's webpage



### Advocacy

Our powerful advocacy initiatives influence policy outcomes nationally and across jurisdictions. As respected thought leaders in the business community, governments, stakeholders and our members rely on us to lead conversations, undertake research, and solve problems to create a better future.

# Methods of State Capture are essentially the same for all Issues; all anti-democratic

- ★ Political donations & election expenditure
- ★ Revolving door jobs
- ★ Concentrated media ownership & social media campaigns
- ★ Think tanks (e.g. IPA; ASPI)
- ★ Covert lobbying
- ★ Opaque consulting
- ★ Manipulating scientific research
- ★ Capitalism, especially its extreme form, neoliberalism



# How to weaken state capture & capitalism

## Build a Stronger Social Change Movement!

- ★ Form alliances of environmental, public health, social justice, human rights, trade union and peace NGOs to **challenge the driving forces of common to all these issues**



Diagram by  
Rod Taylor

- ★ Driving forces are state capture by vested interests and capitalism, especially its extreme version, neoliberalism
- ★ State capture's **methods** are vulnerable to community exposure and attack

# Neoliberalism ideology – an Extreme Form of Capitalism – is...

- ★ Leaving major socio-political decisions to the market
- ★ Claiming the value of anything is set by the market
- ★ Demanding small government, except for protecting big business, property & 'defence'
- ★ Claiming that wealth trickles down from the rich
- ★ Demanding low taxation for the rich
- ★ Pushing for endless growth on finite planet
- ★ Pretending this ideology is backed up by neoclassical economics theory



# Economics for People and Planet

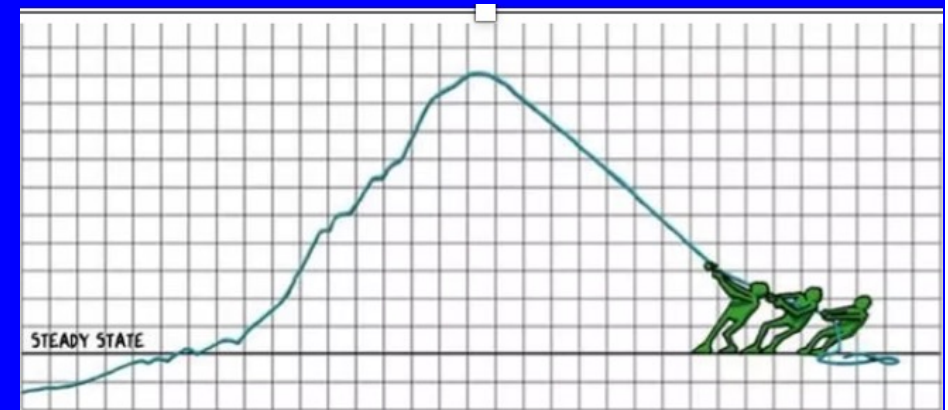
## The First Steps to put Limits on Capitalism

- ★ Recognise that **GDP is NOT** a measure of national wellbeing
- ★ **Wellbeing measures:** environmental, socioeconomic and political
- ★ Socioeconomic wellbeing measures & policies include **Universal Basic/Public Services:** public health, education, transport, housing & parks; low-cost childcare & aged care
- ★ **Political wellbeing** policies include controlling state capture by vested interests and so restoring democratic decision-making
- ★ Introduce a **Job Guarantee**, with jobs provided by local government and registered community organisations, funded by federal government

# Economics for People & Planet, ctd

- ★ Transition to a (leaky) circular economy
- ★ Transition to a steady-state economy with reduced consumption of energy, materials & land, and no population growth
- ★ Priority is for rich and rapidly growing economies to lead the way

Everyone benefits,  
except the very rich



# Policies to Reduce Consumption include:

- ✦ Transition to circular economy (necessary but not sufficient)
- ✦ Wealth & inheritance taxes; progressive income tax; capital gains tax
- ✦ Remove subsidies to destructive industries, tax, then phase them out



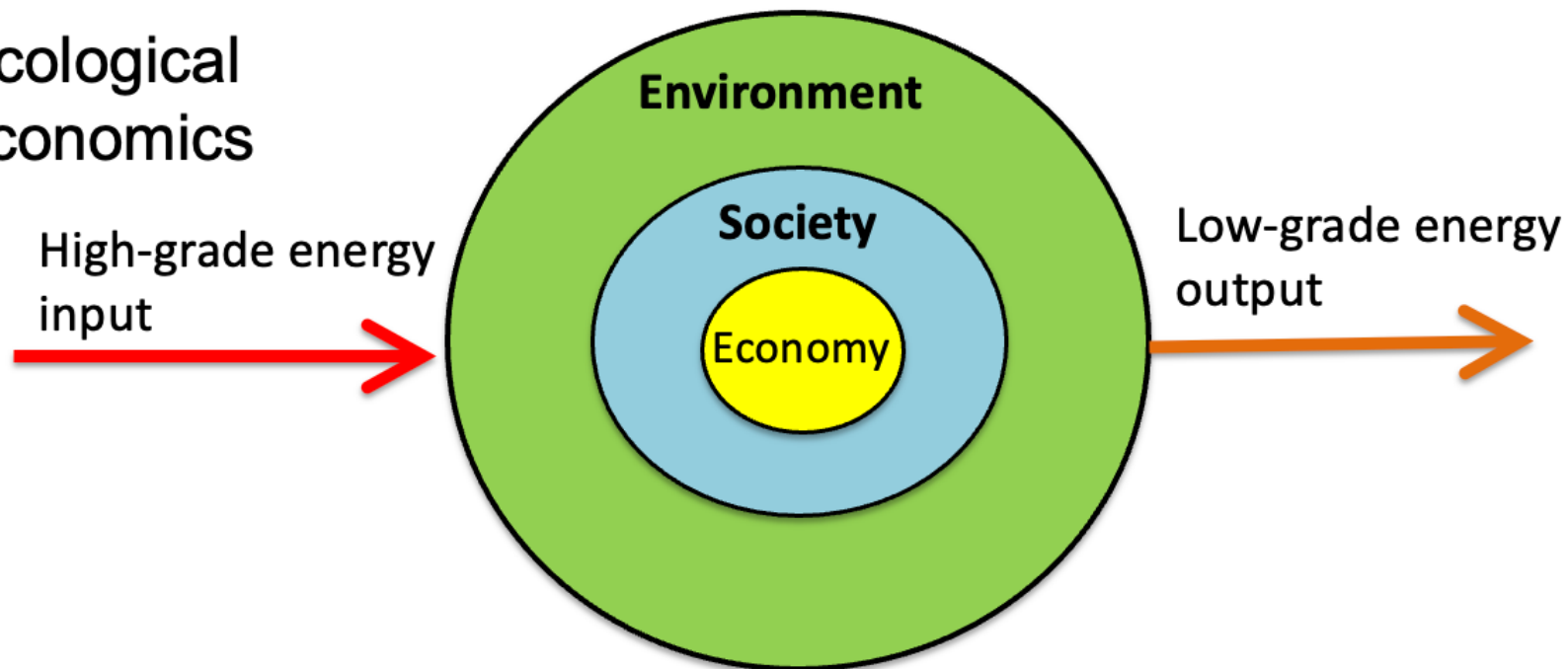
- ✦ Facilitate creation of 'green' industries & businesses



# Economics for People & Planet, ctd

- ★ Existing economic system based on pseudo-science, pretending its physics metaphors (market forces; equilibrium; efficiency) are real
- ★ A more realistic economic system is (Social) Ecological Economics, with goals ecological sustainability & social justice

**Ecological  
economics**



# Successful Social Movements include:



Anti-war



Civil rights

Anti-colonial



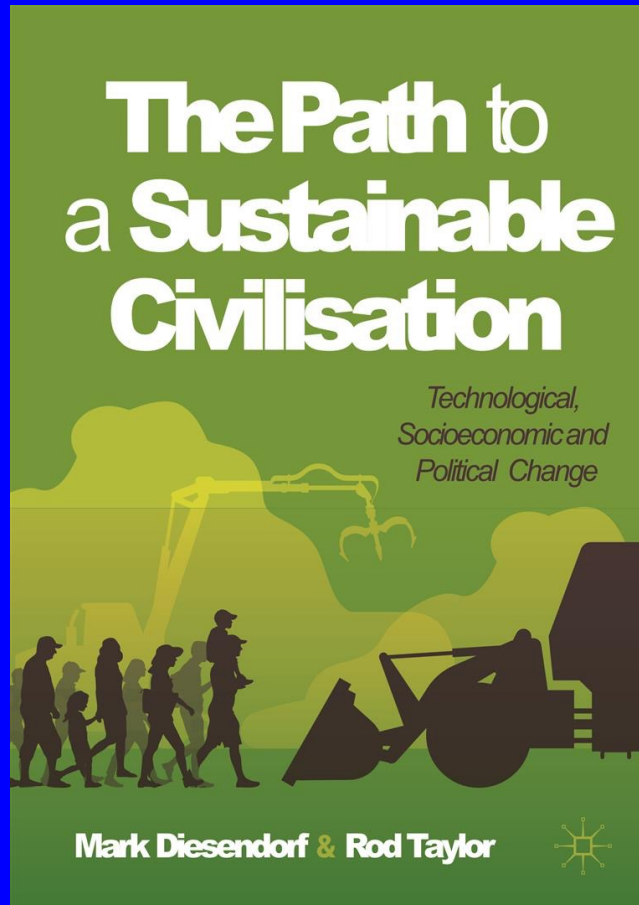
Gender equity



# First Steps towards a Social Movement

- ★ Australian Democracy Network: democracy is key theme
- ★ Sydney Alliance: grassroots but slow processes
- ★ Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25): political
- ★ Critiques of neoclassical economics by sustainability scientists, heterodox economists and economic reform NGOs
- ★ Critiques of neoliberalism by the Australia Institute & George Monbiot
- ★ Community Independent Dr Monique Ryan's private member's bill on revolving door jobs & lobbying transparency
- ★ Articles on state capture in *Quarterly Essay* and *Renew Magazine*
- ★ Open letter to Australian Prime Minister seeking signatures, initially from NGOs

# Further Information



Research papers, popular articles,  
podcasts & videos:  
[www.markdiesendorf.com](http://www.markdiesendorf.com)

Success stories: Right Livelihood Award  
(alternative Nobel Prize)

Book can be ordered from Springer  
Link in [markdiesendorf.com/books](http://markdiesendorf.com/books)