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 1.5ºC above pre-industrial

Time is running out to avoid crossing tipping points

Recommended Energy Transition Strategy

In the nutshell: renewables + electrification + efficiency + fairness

- 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

First 6 actions will mitigate at least ¾ of Australia's GHG emissions; last action (in red) is challenging.

- 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

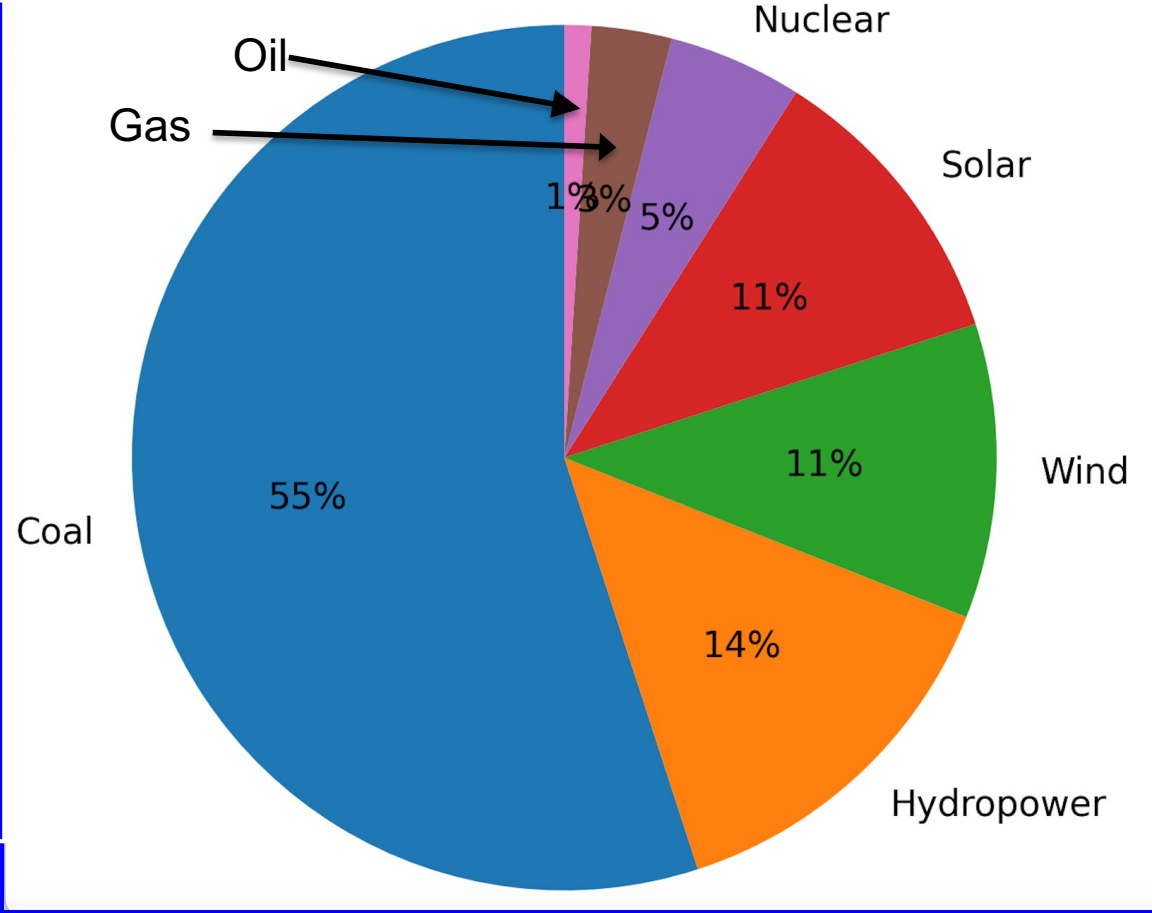
Region	% of annual electricity generation
Regions with large hydro potential, e.g. Norway, Iceland, Bhutan, Tasmania	About 100%
Regions with little hydro potential	
Denmark	88% (100% expected by 2030)
South Australia	74% (100% expected by 2028)
Australia as a whole	36%
Scotland	62% (113% of electricity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

😀 China's Electricity Generation Mix 2025 est.

World's biggest manufacturer of

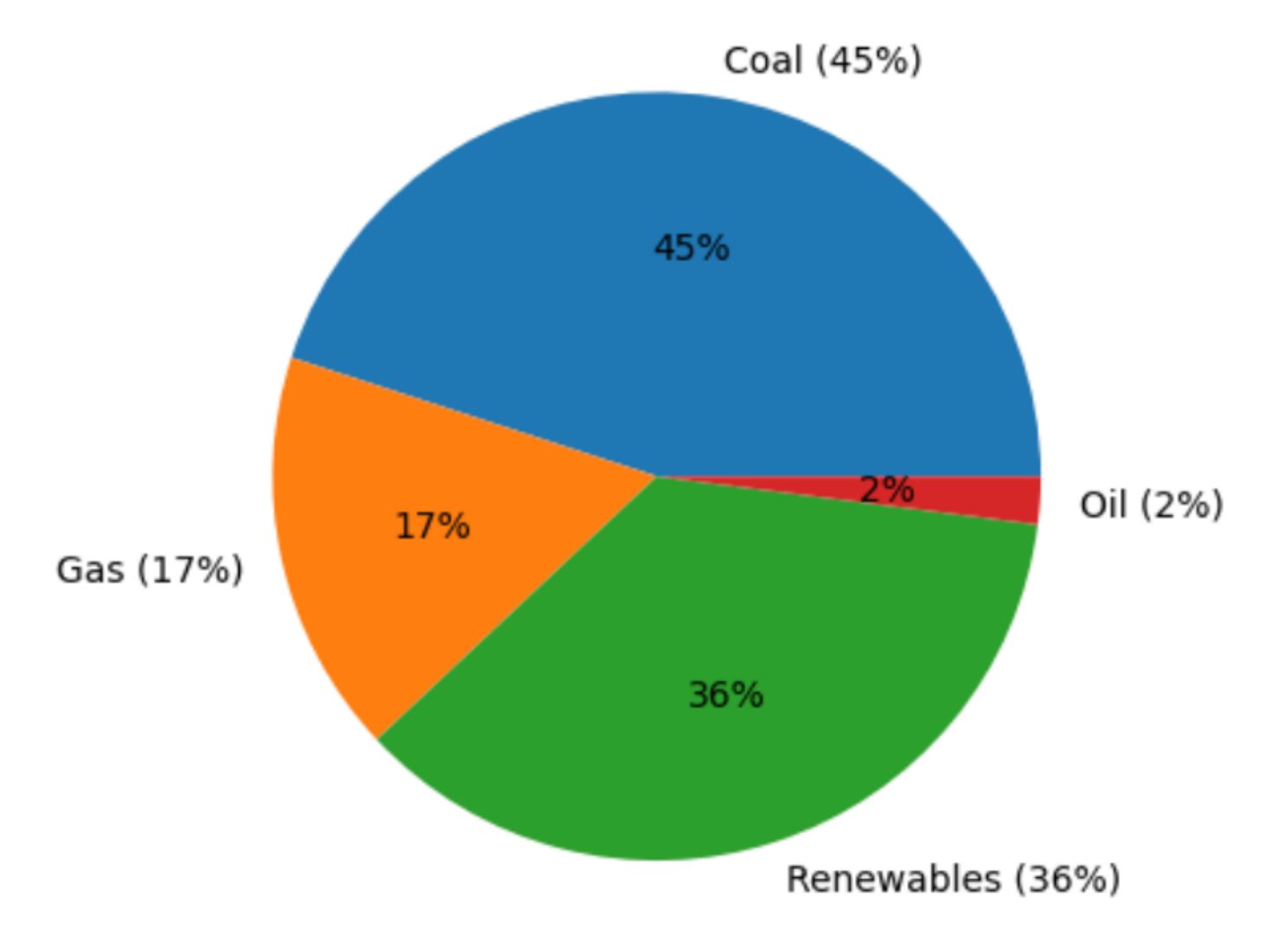
- solar PV panels
- wind turbines
- solar hot water
- EVs

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%

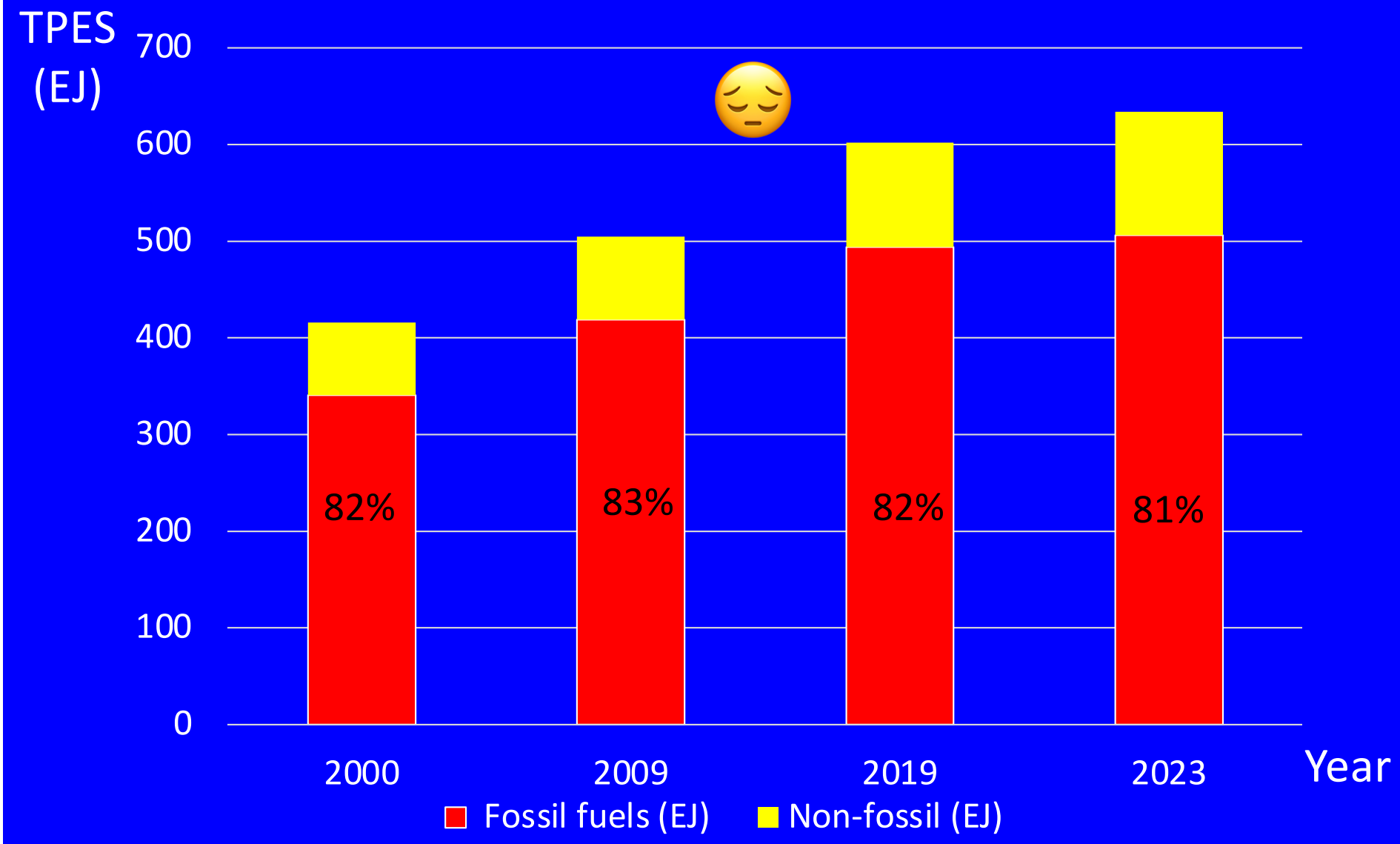
😀 Australia's Electricity Generation Mix 2024



Global Total Primary Energy Supply, TPES (EJ)

showing share of fossil fuels, 2000–2023

IEA Data



😔 Renewable Energy Chasing Increasing Energy Consumption

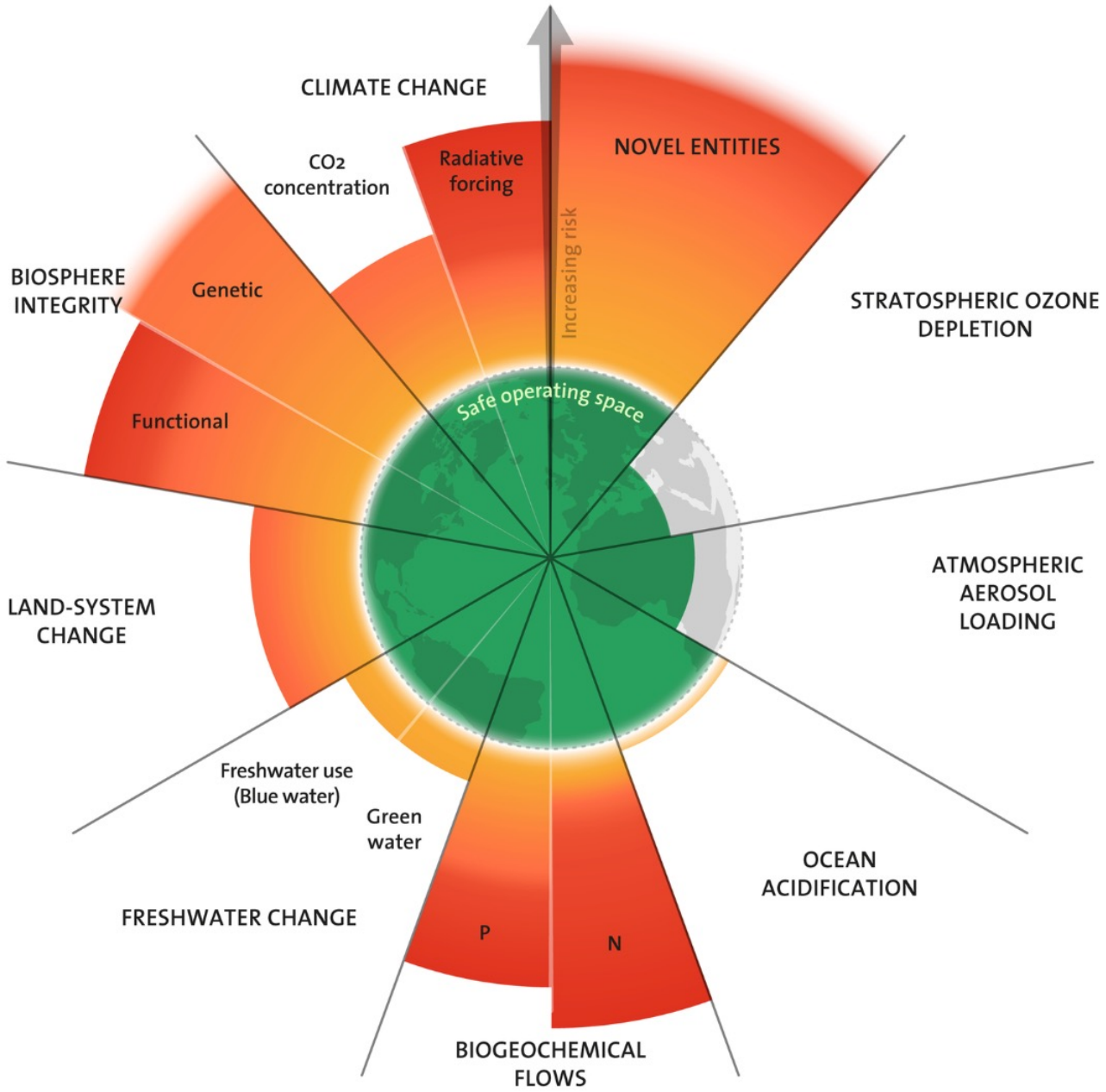
Photo credit: Free photo by Andreas N on Pixabay.

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

😔 Existential Threats to Civilisation: Environmental

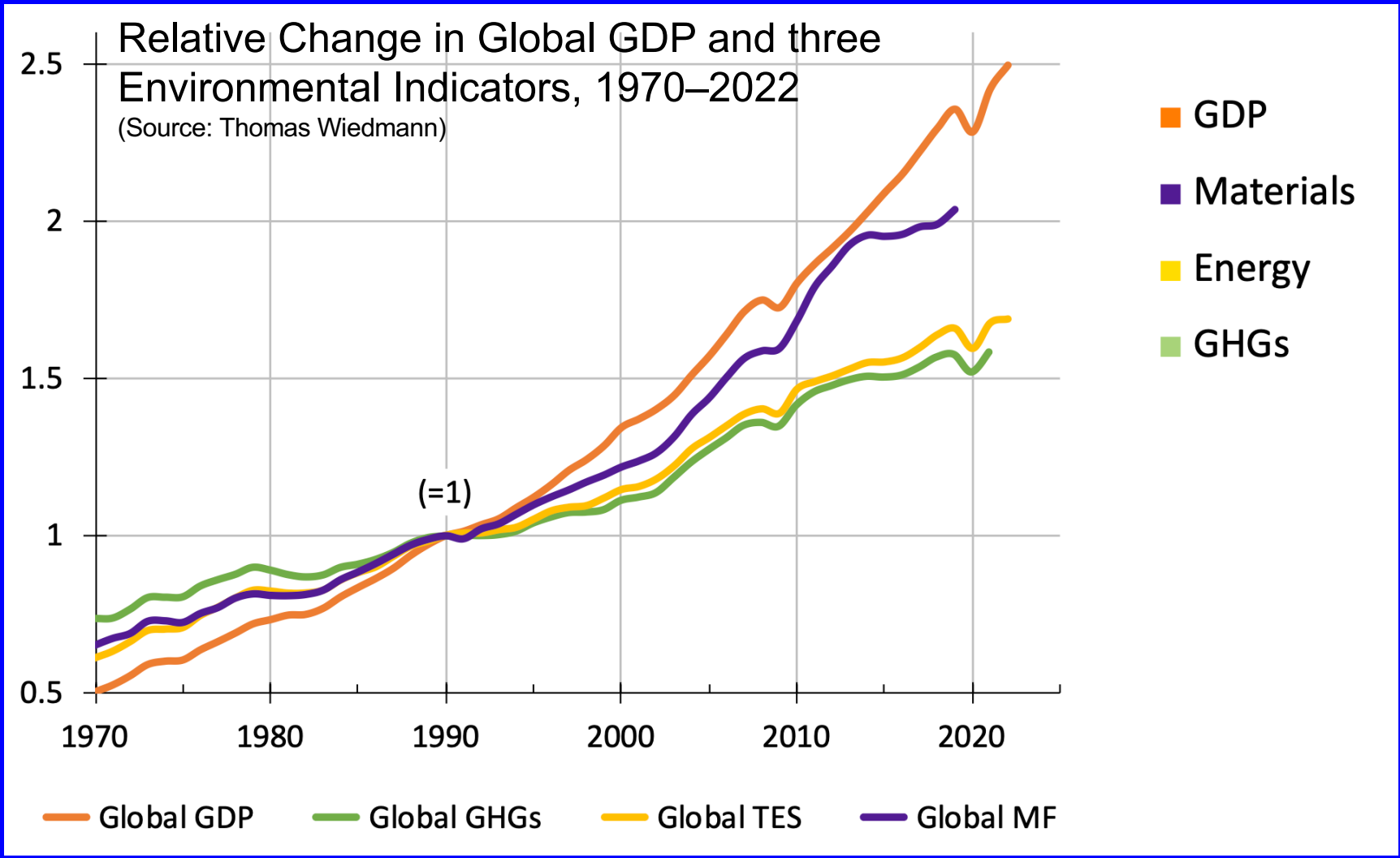
Climate change is linked to several other existential environmental threats

7 out of 9 planetary boundaries exceeded in 2025



Source: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University

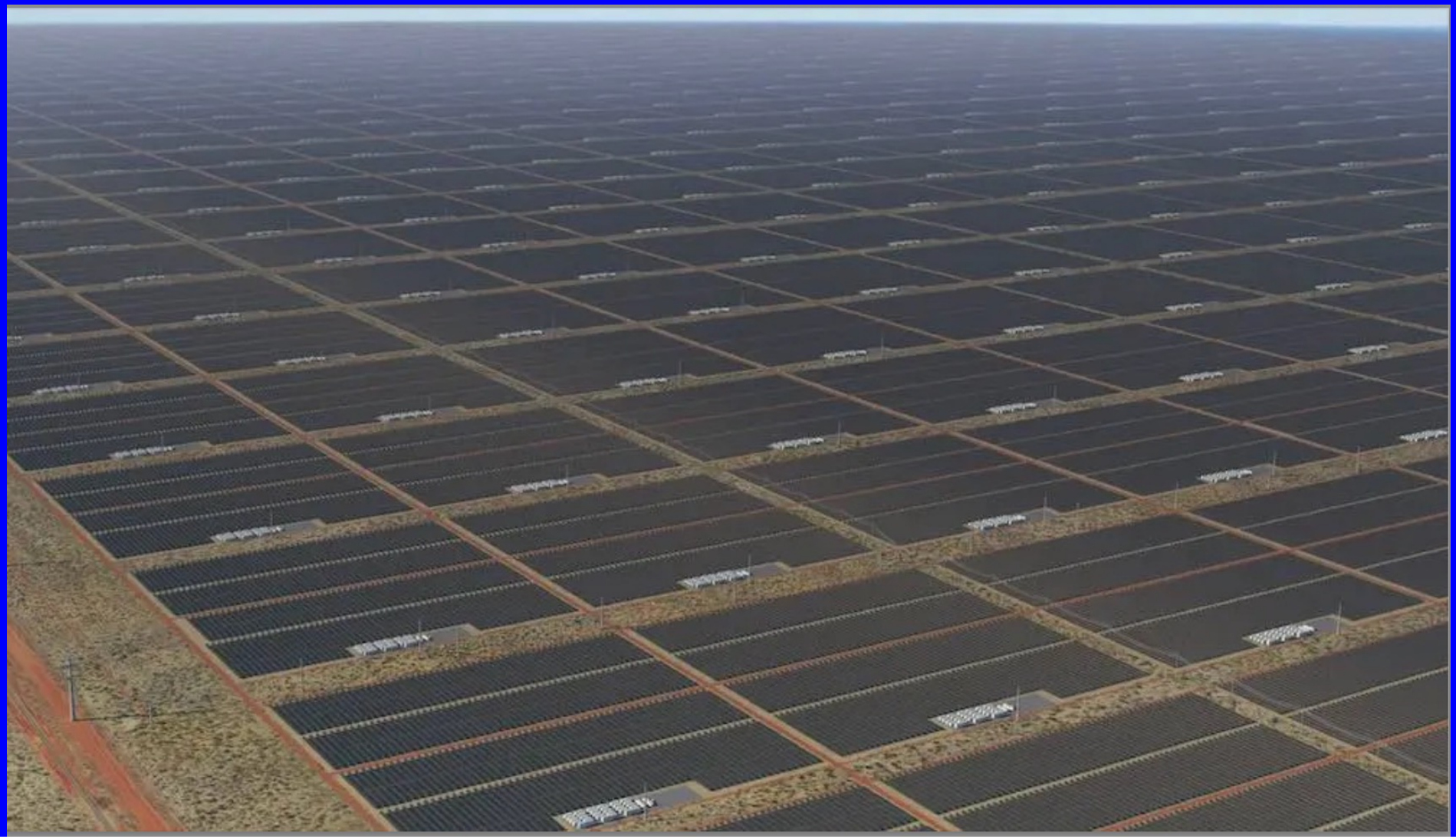
Growth in GDP is closely correlated with growth in energy & materials consumption



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!

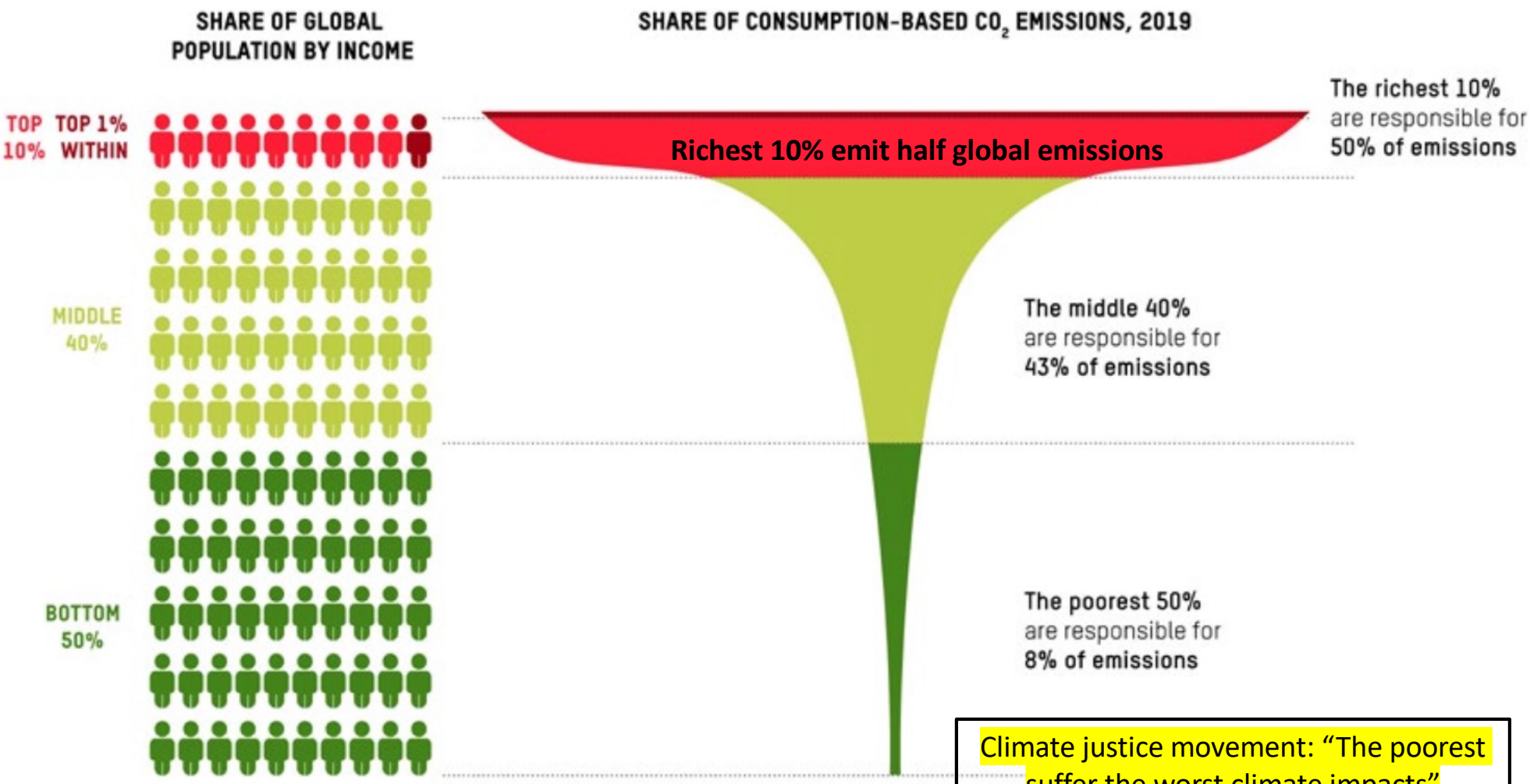
Sustainability scientists and many ecological economists reject the following economic ideologies/myths:

- "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"

Refutatons: see markdiesendorf.com/economic-myths

Climate Change and Social Justice are Linked

Share of Consumption-Based Global CO_2 Emissions by Income



Source: Oxfam (2023)

Climate justice movement: "The poorest suffer the worst climate impacts"

😔 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

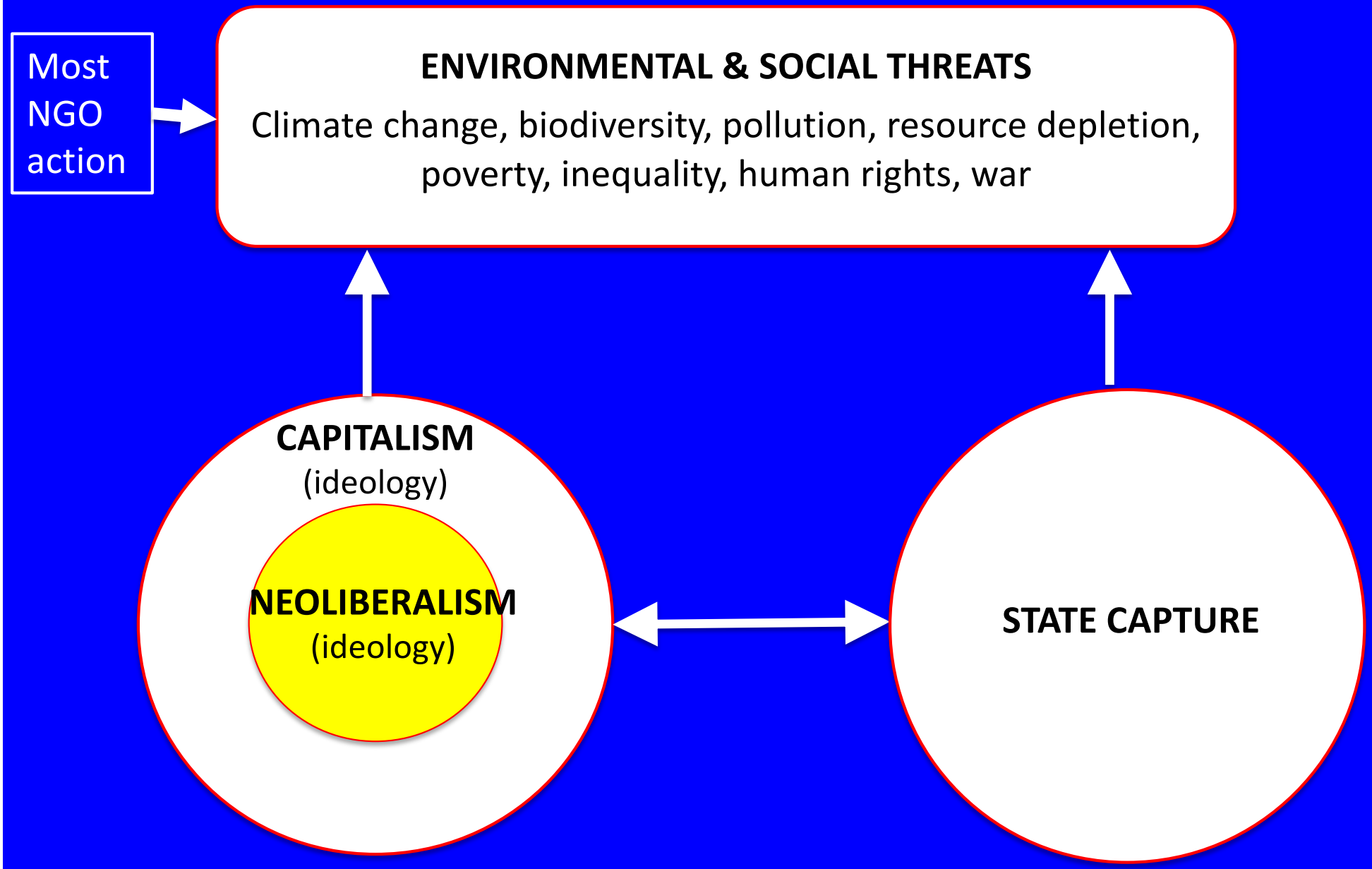
We are facing a Polycrisis!

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 colonialism & neocolonialism
- Better democracy → less social inequality and injustice and fewer wars

Links → Opportunity
What strategy could address all threats simultaneously?

Most NGO Action ignores Driving Forces



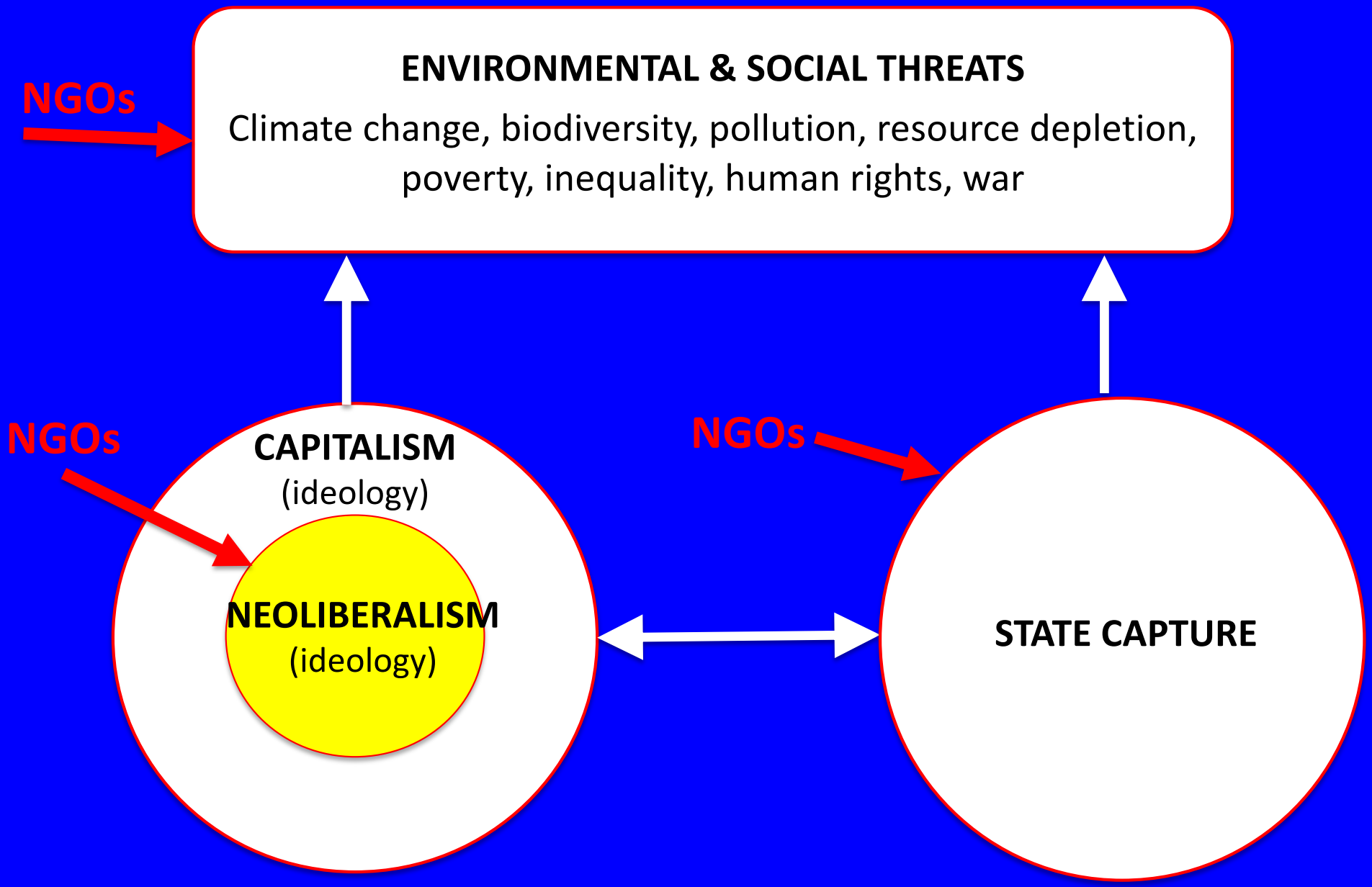
Frank Summary of Current Situation in Environment, Social Justice, Human Rights and Peace

We are winning a few battles – e.g. renewables growing; token policies for economic reform and housing – 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".

Strategy: Weaken Driving Forces of Threats



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

- Capture of the nation-state – 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 & Gurran 2016)

Results

- Property prices & rents increase
- Home ownership declines
- State planning in effect by developers
- Ugly, environmental damaging projects with insufficient 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**

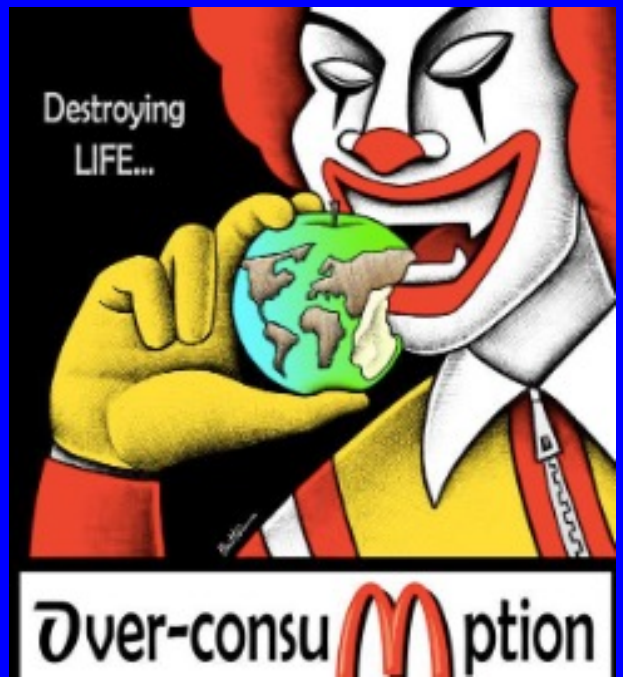
Diagram by Rod Taylor

- Driving forces are state capture by vested interests and capitalism, especially its extreme version, neoliberalism

- State capture's **methods** are vulnerable to community: political donations; revolving door jobs; neoliberalism; etc

Neoliberalism: An Extreme Form of Capitalism

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



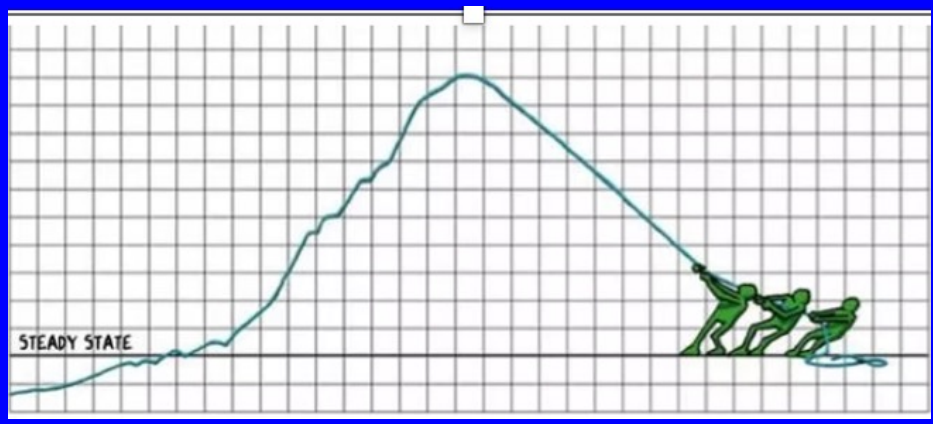
Economics for People and Planet

The First Steps to put Limits on Capitalism

- Recognise that **GDP is NOT** a measure of national wellbeing
- Wellbeing measures: environmental, socioeconomic and political system
- 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



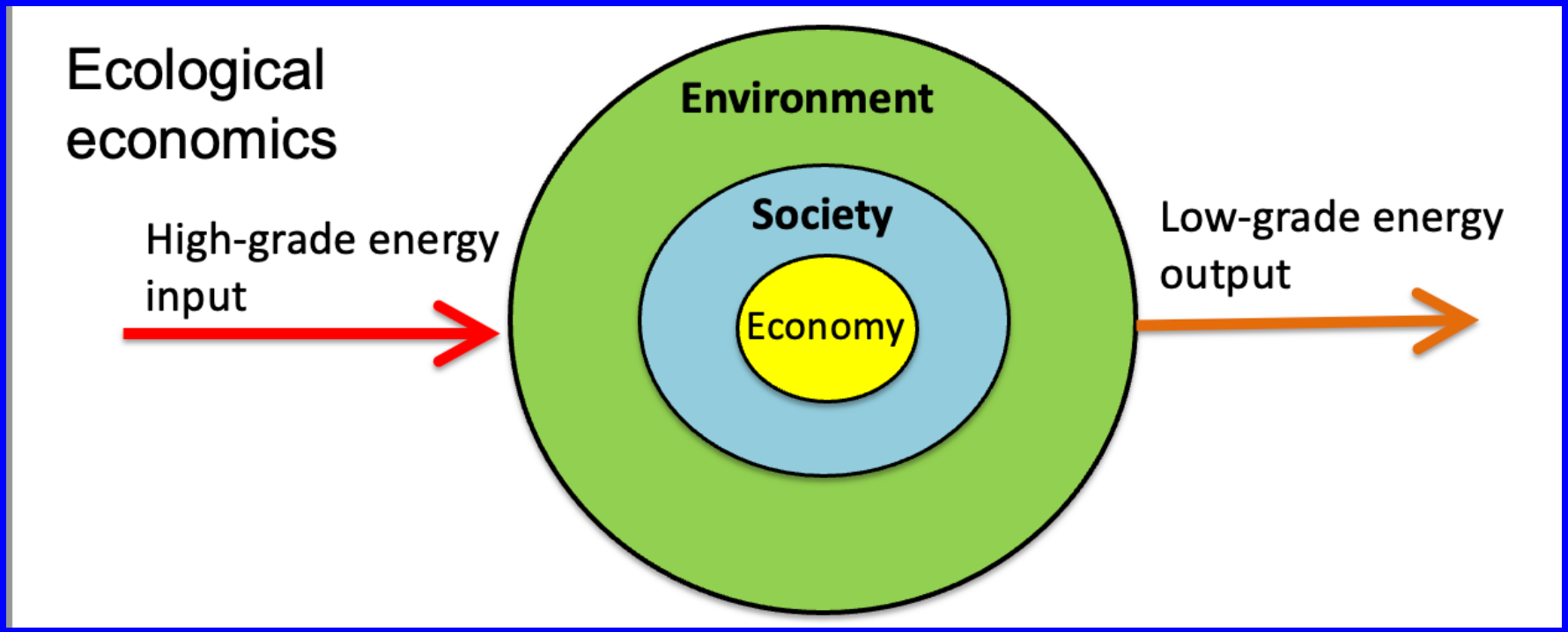
Policies to Reduce Consumption include:

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

- Facilitate creation of ‘green’ industries & businesses

Economics for People & Planet, ctd

- Existing economic system is 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



Successful Social Movements include:

Anti-war

Civil rights

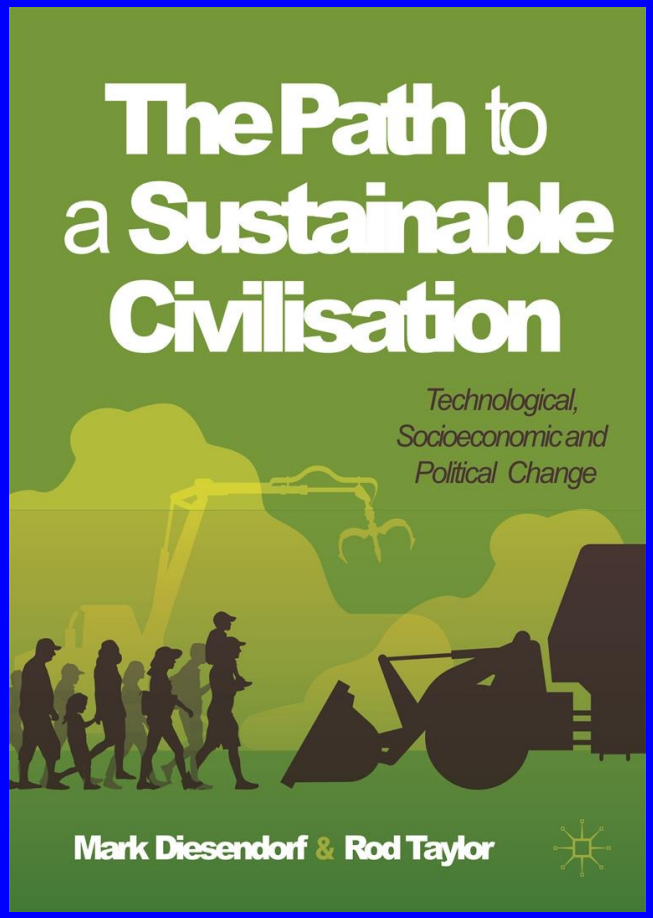
Anti-colonial

Gender equity

First Steps towards a Social Movement

- Australian Democracy Network
- Sydney Alliance
- Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25)
- 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



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