

# Environmental Protection: Short Term Costs, Long Term Benefits



## RESEARCH

*Time perspective and sustainable behavior: Evidence for the distinction between consideration of immediate and future consequences*

By Steven Arnocky, Taciano Milfont and Jeffrey Nicol (2014)

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## Background

Deciding to act in an eco-friendly way requires a person to focus on future welfare at the expense of immediate benefits.

Typically, people who are focused on the future, rather than the present or the past, act in more environmentally sustainable ways.

Professor Taciano Milfont from the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, and collaborators from Canada examined the impact of focusing on the current or future consequences of actions in promoting or preventing environmental concern and motivating eco-friendly behaviours.

## Main research findings

People who are less self-serving and have a lower concern for immediate consequences display more environmental concern and motivation for eco-friendly behaviours.

People who are more concerned about the immediate consequences of their actions are less likely to act in eco-friendly ways.

People can be prompted to think about the future, which reduces concern for current consequences and promotes eco-friendly behaviour.

Reduced immediate concern, not increased future thinking, is important in influencing sustainable behaviours.

## Relevance of findings to New Zealand

New Zealanders who worry about the immediate costs, such as higher prices, of eco-friendly behaviours are less likely to act in sustainable ways.

Campaigns for water conservation, recycling, and other sustainable behaviours should prompt people to think about their ideal future, as this reduces the immediate costs of their current behaviour, promotes environmental concern and motivates eco-friendly action.

Advocates and agencies working to sustain New Zealand's natural habitat need to limit the immediate concern of sustainable actions among New Zealanders to promote eco-friendly behaviours.