



Taraloka declares an ecological emergency

Agreed by Taraloka Community Members and Trustees

In October 2018 the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) report stated that without dramatic action we will not be able to limit global warming to a 1.5C increase. *'Successfully limiting climate change to 1.5C is not just down to cutting emissions or making lifestyle changes or planting trees - it is all of that and then some, acting in concert at the same time.'*

In 2019 the [UN Biodiversity report](#) estimated that around one million species *"already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss"*. It is clear from these reports that planet Earth is at present under severe ecological threat.

The community and trustees at Taraloka have been discussing how best to respond and act under these circumstances. As Buddhists we have a responsibility to meet the situation with love, awareness, creativity and wisdom, and to alleviate suffering where we can. It is an unprecedented situation and no-one has the answer, but we can seek to make our response adequate to the situation and to our practice of the Dharma.

We are all clear that what Taraloka already offers the world is a precious and significant contribution for these times. However we also feel that further action could be taken. We have therefore decided to declare an ecological emergency and to commit to becoming a zero-carbon centre.

What do we mean by declaring an ecological emergency?

We are saying ecological rather than climate emergency because the problem is wider than just the climate and global warming; and emergency because anything else feels like an understatement of the issues. However declaring an emergency isn't synonymous with panic and overwhelm, or a collapse into nihilism. Rather we are simply saying that this issue requires urgent attention, clarity and decisive action.

Action necessarily follows from this declaration. We will endeavour to keep the environment in mind whenever we make decisions that impact upon it, and we aim to become carbon-neutral as soon as we are able. We will begin with a review of our carbon footprint and then will work with Amalaketu and others in Triratna to find ways to reduce it. We would like this work to be helpful to any other centres who wish to do the same, so at the same time we will work out a pathway that other Triratna centres can follow. We hope our actions will encourage retreatants and other sangha members to act themselves wherever they can.

Will it take resources away from the Dharma?

This is not a side-lining of Dharma teaching, or retreats, or meditation practice or Insight. This is about making it clear that the Dharma is relevant to this world and current issues, about explicitly joining up Dharma practice with environmental concerns. If we don't do this it's very possible that in the short term we will lose people and energy. We will risk being seen as irrelevant by young people and idealists of all ages – some of the very people we're trying to attract. In the long-term, this world may lose the freedoms and endowments that make people's Buddhist practice possible.

Surely declaring an ecological emergency is rooted in a Dharmic wrong view of trying to 'fix the world'?

The current existential situation of ecological collapse brings into high relief the Dharmic tension between wisdom and compassion - a tension that is only resolved with deep insight and the arising of the Bodhicitta. Action around the ecological situation *can* be rooted in mental states of fear, anger, blame and horrified anxiety. But it isn't always, and it doesn't need to be.

Focusing solely on teaching and practising the Dharma *can* be rooted in mental states of ignoring - not wanting to be fully aware of world issues and the effects of our own actions and inactions. But it isn't always, and it doesn't need to be. Whatever our response is to the ecological situation, as Dharma practitioners we need a focus on the mind as well as our external acts.

The wisdom aspect of the Dharma has a significant contribution to make to any ecological activism. It brings a sense of spaciousness and perspective, trust in the Dharma beyond space and time, and non-fear. And an increased awareness of the ecological crisis could contribute significantly to our wisdom practice - to our direct realisations of conditionality and impermanence.

The compassion aspect of the Dharma opens our community up out of any narrow self-absorption in 'my practice', 'my centre' or 'my tradition'. And it means that if there are any compassionate actions we can take - any positive impact we could have - then we take those actions. Why would we not?

Those of us forming Taraloka right now feel that declaring an ecological emergency, and taking actions that flow from that, is a response that is embedded in both wisdom and compassion.

A true Dharmic response to the ecological situation could be an intensification of personal practice, just as much as teaching or working in a centre, just as much as overt social activism. We want to articulate that teaching and practising the Dharma is itself a very effective form of activism. We also would like to encourage anyone wanting to deepen their Dharma life to follow through on their own ethical sensitivities in response to injustices of any kind - whether in relation to the environment, poverty or discrimination.

The Dharma is for everyone - will this alienate climate sceptics from Centres?

We will alienate people from Centres if we *don't* engage with the ecological emergency. We need to have a discussion about appropriate Dharmic responses, and perhaps this will initiate one. Disagreement isn't the same as disharmony; we don't all need to agree. Conversely avoiding having the discussion is not harmony - and is perhaps the worst thing we could do. We need to encourage individuals to act based on their ethical sensibilities and not be directive or prescriptive.

Doesn't our constitution as a registered UK charity prevent us from taking part in political activities?

We understand this to mean involvement in political parties and party campaigning. As Vishvapani said at the 'Time is Now' demonstration in London; the air that we breathe, the food that we eat, the ecosystems that support us and the planet that we live on are not political issues, they are existential matters.

In 2025 – looking back – would we regret not doing anything?

This situation is unprecedented; there is no worked-out way to respond. We need to figure it out as we go along and we can modify what we're doing as we learn. The stakes are very high however. Throughout its history Buddhists have been concerned with spreading and maintaining the Dharma in this world, but right now it is becoming clear that the continuation of humanity and many other species is now a genuine issue. We need to attend to both Dharma and the world – at root they are not separate.

**- Taraloka Community Members and Trustees
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