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Introduction:

The objective of this policy is to detail Burnet’s commitment and practical steps to be taken to ensure environmental protection in the development work which it undertakes. This applies to the range of countries and contexts in which Burnet operates.

Burnet acknowledges that development activities have the potential to have a negative effect on the environment if they are not designed, managed and evaluated with consideration of environmental dimensions. Negative environmental consequences not only harm the physical environment, but have deleterious consequences for people who are dependent on and interact with the environment. These consequences apply to living standards and poverty levels. In addition, we recognise the potential environmental hazards associated with the inappropriate disposal of medical waste, in particular sharps such as needles and disposable surgical instruments.

Health outcomes, which are of vital concern to Burnet Institute are strongly related to environmental factors. These in turn impact on living standards and poverty levels. Factors such as hygiene, vermin control, sanitation, clean air and safe food and water have traditionally been monitored and addressed to minimise harm for people. Today, attention is provided to a much broader range of environmental factors as determinants of health such as chemical hazards, biotoxins, noise, heat and cold, overcrowding and radiation. The list of considerations includes many factors of the social environment such as the quality of social capital, including relationships and networks, and levels of social support. The nexus between health and environment is therefore complex, and multidimensional. Many environmental health factors no longer have a single cause, and require detailed analysis and strategies to address them.

We have a special interest in the nutrition security of communities and recognise the importance of a multisectoral approach, which includes micro-initiatives such as home gardens. The promotion of nutrition security requires local understanding of the environmental consequences of poor soil management, misuse of pesticides, fertilisers, and herbicides, poorly planned drainage and irrigation, slash-and-burn field preparation, certain cash crops such as sugar cane, and indiscriminate hunting of endangered animals.

Burnet’s policy and actions in relation to the environment are aligned to the standards and procedures identified in Australia’s Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). AusAID applies this Act to the Australian government aid program. Burnet similarly uses the Act as a standard to guide its activities, including those implemented with Australian government support. In this context, Burnet assesses, monitors, manages and reports on its projects/programs in relation to potential impact on the environment.

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Definition of Environment:

Burnet utilises the following definition of 'environment' which emphasises a holistic orientation and a dynamic inter-relationship between physical and human aspects:

- "eco systems and their constituent parts, including people and communities
- natural and physical resources
- the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas, and
- the social, economic and cultural aspects of a thing mentioned in a,b or c"
(Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999)

Burnet promotes environmentally sustainable development which it defines as: "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Promoting Practical Sustainability 2000:8)

Burnet's Policy Objectives on Environment and Development

- **To promote environmentally sustainable development**

Burnet supports activities that use sound environmental and ecological practices. Specifically, these are activities that do not produce any adverse environmental impacts and present opportunities for reversing existing environmental damage. Burnet also supports activities that aim to regenerate degraded environments so that positive environmental outcomes can be achieved by communities.

Burnet recognises that sustainable development relies on the participation and commitment of resources users. In this regard, emphasis is placed on awareness raising and involvement of concerned populations in decision making including on damage prevention and mitigation measures. The participation of women, marginalised groups and community leaders is critical to this end.

- **To promote understanding of the relationship between health, nutrition, and the environment, and the means to address related problems.**

Burnet recognises that there is a critical inter-relationship between health, nutrition, and the environment that requires specific analysis, tools and expertise to recognise and address. Burnet will promote such analysis, and build capacity for this area to be addressed within its program interventions.

- **To promote equality and social justice as a means to environmentally sustainable development**

Potential for sustainable development is dependent on patterns of resource ownership and usage. Genuine stewardship of nature relies on all sections of the community having rights and access to resource use.

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Development organisations can play a positive facilitating role aiding empowerment of marginalised groups to assert their rights in this regard

Ensuring Burnet’s Commitment to Environment Protection:

In responding to development needs, Burnet works with a range of partners from government through to community levels, both in Australia and overseas. Within its partnerships, Burnet will ensure environmentally sustainable practice through the following means:

- Assess environmental issues in determining the overall strategy of its work in particular countries and contexts
- Conduct environmental assessments as part of the design of particular projects that are seen to have potential environmental impact. Such assessments may be called for if activities are located in an environmentally sensitive area or if the activity itself could result in negative impacts without proper environmental planning
- Monitor and evaluate the environmental dimensions of projects, and particularly those identified at the outset as having potential environmental impact
- Advocate for improved environmental policies and practices in the contexts where it works with the relevant agencies and authorities.
- Ensure environmentally friendly practices with individual programs/projects. This may include, for example, measures related to waste disposal such as use of clay incinerators for ensuring the safe disposal of sharps and clinical waste.
- Emphasise the important contribution to good health of access to adequate clean water and sanitation and incorporate knowledge about safe excreta disposal and drinking water with hygiene promotion and enteric disease prevention.
- Integrate environmental management into all nutrition security training.
- Increase the capacity of Burnet staff in Australia and overseas to undertake environmental assessment, monitoring and reporting including that related to health factors, and promote advocacy with groups affected by inappropriate environmental practice.

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References:

AusAID's Environmental Management Guide for Australia's Aid Program 2003

Promoting Practical Sustainability Quality Assurance Group, PIA/OPRE 2000

Health and Environment, Australian Conservation Foundation 1999.