



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

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ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

Preamble

Against the background of the vision to discover new frontiers and opportunities that benefit society, advancing our relevance and impact, the council of the North-West University (“NWU”, “university”) in terms of paragraph 8(1)(c) of the Statute, adopted the Environmental Sustainability policy on 18 September 2025.

1 Interpretation and application

This policy must be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with –

- 1.1 the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996;
- 1.2 the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997;
- 1.3 the Statute of the North-West University;
- 1.4 the regulatory framework set out in paragraph 4, and
- 1.5 all related policies of the NWU.

2 Definitions

In this policy –

“**biodiversity**” refers to the variability among living organisms from all sources including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part, as well as diversity within species, between species, and of the ecosystem;

“**carbon footprint**” means a measure of all greenhouse gases produced as a result of the activities of the university and is expressed as tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per annum (abbreviated as CO₂-e);

“**compliance**” means the process of measuring adherence to laws, regulations, policies, standards and procedures imposed on the operations of the university;

“**ecological footprint**” refers to a measure of operational demand and impact measured in relation to the capacity of the environment to supply natural capital, without causing environmental degradation, and it represents the amount of biologically productive land and water necessary to supply the resources the university consumes, and to assimilate associated waste produced by the university.

“**environment**” refers to the surroundings (natural and built) within which the university exists and comprises –

- i. the land, water and atmosphere of the earth;
- ii. micro-organisms, plant and animal life;
- iii. any part or combination of (i) and (ii) and the inter-relationships among and between them, and
- iv. the physical, chemical, aesthetic and cultural properties and conditions of the foregoing that influence human health and wellbeing;

“**environmental justice**” means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies;

“**environmentally sound technologies (EST)**” refers to technologies that are considered to be environmentally sound and which protect the environment, are less polluting, use all resources in a more sustainable manner, recycle more of their wastes and products, and handle residual wastes in a more

acceptable manner than the technologies for which they are substitutes, and does not refer only to individual technologies, but also to total systems involving know-how, procedures, goods and services and equipment as well as organisational and managerial processes;

“environmental sustainability” - As a subset of sustainable development, environmental sustainability refers to the ability of the biophysical environment to maintain its functioning within natural parameters and cycles over time, in order to supply environmental goods and services to the economic and social spheres.

“hazardous” refers to anything, regardless of its concentration, that poses a potential or substantial threat to human health or the environment;

“pollution” means any change in the environment caused by –

- substances;
- radioactive or other emissions
- or noise, odours, dust or heat,

emitted from any activity, including the storage or treatment of waste or substances, construction and the provision of services, whether engaged in by any person or an organ of state, where that change has an adverse effect on human health or wellbeing or on the composition, resilience and productivity of natural or managed ecosystems, or on materials useful to people, or may have such an effect in the future;

- **“stakeholders”** refers to any group or individual who may affect or be affected by the university’s activities, decisions, changes or improvements;

3 Policy statement and goals

- 3.1 This policy embraces a social-ecological interpretation of environmental sustainability where practices and actions are viewed in terms of their benefit with regard to protecting and improving the wellbeing of interacting social elements, including quality of life, cultural, economic and political concerns, and biophysical elements in both natural and built environments.
- 3.2 The NWU is committed to enhancing the focus of its teaching and research, reducing its ecological footprint in terms of infrastructural development and use of goods and services, facilitating a more sustainable carbon footprint, energy, waste and water management and usage strategies, and actively engaging with its constituency in order to promote environmental sustainability.
- 3.3 This policy is intended to provide principles for coordinated decision-making and the implementation of guideline programmes, including the projects linked to each programme across the university, focusing on continual transformation of the NWU to be an environmentally sustainable university as required to contribute to environmental sustainability best practice, in order to –
 - 3.3.1 comply with all relevant environmental legislation as set out in the regulatory framework set out in paragraph 4;
 - 3.3.2 foster a culture and understanding of environmental sustainability among employees, students and other stakeholders;
 - 3.3.3 infuse identified risks and opportunities into teaching, learning, research and community engagement activities of the NWU;
 - 3.3.4 ensure the alignment, integration and promotion of the principles and practices of environmental sustainability, with all institutional policies, procedures, processes, systems, technology requirements and platforms and the provision of facilities, and to
 - 3.3.5 promote sensitivity and responsiveness among students, employees and community partners through constructive communication and dedicated institutional environmental sustainability initiatives.
- 3.4 Being risk averse, the NWU has a precautionary approach towards environmental sustainability and takes the limits of current knowledge about consequences of decisions and actions into account.
- 3.5 Lack of full scientific certainty does not justify the postponement or avoidance of cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

4 Regulatory framework

The following list of statutes and guidelines form the regulatory framework for environmental sustainability compliance at the NWU:

Carbon Tax Act 15 of 2019
Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 43 of 1983 (CARA)
Fertilizers, Farm Seed, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act 36 of 1947
National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act 103 of 1977
National Energy Act 34 of 1998
National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA)
National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act 39 of 2004 (NEMAQA)
National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA)
National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 (NEMPAA)
National Environmental Management: Waste Act 59 of 2008 (NEMWA)
National Forests Act 84 of 1998
National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999
National Nuclear Regulator Act 47 of 1999
National Radioactive Waste Disposal Institute Act 53 of 2008
National Road Traffic Act 93 of 1996
National Veld and Forest Fire Act 101 of 1998
National Water Act 36 of 1998 (NWA)
Nuclear Energy Act 46 of 1999
Occupational Health and Safety Act No. 85 of 1993, as amended
Relevant Municipal Bylaws
Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013
The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (with special reference to sections 24 and 27)
The Hazardous Substances Act 15 of 1973
King IV Report on Corporate Governance in South Africa, 2016 (King IV)

5 Scope of application of the Policy

5.1 This policy applies to all activities of the NWU, specifically to:

- all faculties and academic structures
- all support departments
- the student representative bodies and all students.

5.2 The following policies must be read in conjunction with this policy:

- NWU Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- NWU Infrastructure Management Policy
- NWU Policy on the Animal Care and Use Programme
- NWU Research Ethics Policy

- NWU Risk and Compliance Policy
- NWU Community Engagement Policy

6 Principles governing this policy

6.1 Environmental precautionary approach

The NWU adopts a precautionary approach to environmental sustainability by striving to avoid, reduce, manage, and remedy the following:

- the disturbance of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity;
- pollution and degradation of the environment;
- the disturbance of landscapes and sites that constitute the nation's cultural heritage;
- the generation of waste, or – where it cannot be altogether avoided or minimised – to reuse or recycle where possible or otherwise dispose of in a responsible manner, and
- the use of water by implementing sustainable water management practices

6.2 Environmental responsibility

The NWU must undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility through identified focus areas, including –

- environmental sustainability education and research
- water sustainability
- energy sustainability
- sustainable waste management
- biodiversity
- sustainable travel
- organisational sustainability
- sustainable procurement
- estates and development
- pollution
- oversight over university-related business entities, and
- communication and stakeholder involvement.

6.3 Environmental legislative compliance

The NWU must implement an environmental management system to manage, assess, monitor and improve its compliance with relevant and applicable environmental legislation.

6.4 Environmentally sound technologies (EST)

- 6.4.1 NWU must encourage the development, implementation of, and reporting on environmentally sound technologies.
- 6.4.2 The NWU must assess and plan initiatives and programmes to promote the use of environmentally sound technologies at the NWU.
- 6.4.3 Techniques and technologies, including the use of cleaner and cleaning technologies, must be assessed to reduce their environmental impact at the NWU.

7 Environmental sustainability focus areas

The following programmes / initiatives for environmental sustainability must be implemented:

- 7.1 Programme 1: Ensuring environmental compliance at the NWU
- 7.2 Programme 2: Reducing the NWU's carbon footprint
- 7.3 Programme 3: Educating and raising awareness among students and staff about environmental sustainability
- 7.4 Programme 4: Addressing transportation (commuting) needs
- 7.5 Programme 5: Conserving water
- 7.6 Programme 6: Turning recycling and re-using into a habit
- 7.7 Programme 7: Constructing buildings and infrastructure that are environmentally sustainable
- 7.8 Programme 8: Procuring from those who follow suit
- 7.9 Programme 9: Conserving indigenous biodiversity
- 7.10 Programme 10: Reporting on environmental sustainability

Actions and processes specific to each focus area are contained in the NWU Environmental Sustainability Guidelines.

8 Roles, responsibility and accountability

8.1 Implementation, monitoring and review of the policy

- 8.1.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Community Engagement, in collaboration with the Executive Director: Finance and Facilities, is responsible for the implementation of this policy.
- 8.1.2 Each faculty board – chaired by the executive deans of all faculties, executive directors and managers of the NWU – are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.

8.2 Council

The Council accepts accountability and takes overall responsibility for the monitoring of the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental sustainability compliance at the NWU.

- 8.2.1 In governing sustainability compliance, the Council may, when delegating its authority, set limits of acceptable behaviour through relevant codes of conduct and determine the university's appetite and tolerance for sustainability risk.
- 8.2.2 In the execution of its function to advise the Council on risk and compliance matters, the Safety, Health and Environmental Committee (SHE committee) must report to the University Management Committee (UMC).

8.3 University Management Committee

- 8.3.1 The UMC is responsible for the management of environmental sustainability and for achieving the objectives set by the Council and for managing uncertainty in relation to those objectives.
- 8.3.2 The UMC must uphold the university's environmental responsibilities in its vision and mission statement.
- 8.3.3 The UMC must uphold the university's responsibilities as a signatory of the Talloires Declaration.
- 8.3.4 The UMC must promote an environment that is healthy, safe and conducive to excellent scholarship and that provides good working conditions.
- 8.3.5 In relation to sustainability, the UMC must –
 - 8.3.5.1 promote a performance culture, embedding risk management in decision-making and business processes;
 - 8.3.5.2 establish procedures and standards to ensure compliance to NWU policies and rules; and
 - 8.3.5.3 create awareness of and ensure compliance with legal, regulatory and other obligations.

8.4 Safety, Health and Environmental (SHE committee)

The SHE committee oversees the relevant risks that line managers who own and manage environmental sustainability risks:

- 8.4.1 Specialist functions that facilitate and oversee environmental sustainability risk management and compliance
- 8.4.2 Regular audits of environmental sustainability.
- 8.4.3 The SHE committee must –
 - 8.4.3.1 consider the reports of all the relevant stakeholders regarding environmental sustainability management and risk control;
 - 8.4.3.2 report to the UMC on the relevant lines of defence regarding –
 - (i) the effectiveness of the control environment;
 - 8.4.3.3 the integrity of the data used for internal decision-making, and
 - 8.4.3.4 the credibility of the information contained in the reports submitted to it.
 - 8.4.3.5 In the execution of its function to advise the UMC on risk and compliance matters, the SHE committee must –
 - (i) consider the likely consequences of existing or impending litigation against the NWU;
 - (ii) determine whether mechanisms are in place to enable the university to comply with all relevant legal and statutory requirements;
 - (iii) submit regular reports to UMC on environmental sustainability matters;
 - (iv) advise the UMC on the performance of its oversight functions regarding the university's financial reporting process, the system of internal control, the risk and compliance management process, the audit process, and the monitoring of the risk and compliance function, and
 - (v) provide assurance to the council that the university's operations with regard to risk and compliance management, control and governance processes are adequately addressed.
 - 8.4.3.6 The SHE committee must provide a forum for review of this policy, the initiation of liaison and coordination of input by –
 - (i) drawing on assistance from expert individuals or units within the university, and by consulting key stakeholders;
 - (ii) actively seeking out and learning from the best sustainability practices of other Higher Education Institutions, and
 - (iii) receiving input and recommendations and reaching consensus on key concerns, thereby assisting in creating a strong unity of purpose.

8.5 Facilities Department and Campus Chief Directors

NWU Facilities Department develops, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the principles governing this policy as applicable to NWU operations, infrastructure and budgeting. The Campus Chief Directors will manage and execute environmental sustainability initiatives on the assigned campus, with a focus on ensuring compliance with legal standards, managing risks, and promoting reductions in carbon footprint and water usage.

8.6 Faculties and Support Departments

- 8.6.1 All faculties and support departments must manage their sustainability operations and activities in terms of this policy and the NWU safety, health and environment system.
- 8.6.2 All faculties must initiate and develop, where appropriate, the sustainability focus and content in teaching and research.

8.7 Employees

All employees must –

- 8.7.1 actively seek to understand the objectives, risks, controls and obligations that relate to sustainable activities relevant to the work environment;
- 8.7.2 support and participate in establishing a culture of sustainable risk and compliance management;
- 8.7.3 identify and report risk events and instances of non-compliance, and
- 8.7.4 report new risks, risks exceeding tolerance, breaches and weaknesses of controls to the relevant line manager.

9 Procedure and guidelines

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation, Community Engagement must compile, in collaboration with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Operations, Digital and AI Systems must compile the environmental sustainability procedures and guidelines consistent with this policy.

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