

ASSC Environment Policy

ASSC Executive Director and Board

July 11, 2019

1 Introduction

Organisations are increasingly judged on their efforts to limit their environmental impact. The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services¹ found that approximately 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades. It is now also universally accepted by scientists that anthropogenic climate change is a major challenge facing the world in the 21st century. The UN Paris Climate Change Conference in 2015 sought to limit global warming to 2°C, with a preferred goal of 1.5°C. The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change² Report made clear that we are not on track for either, and that the consequences of 2 degrees of warming is much worse than 1.5 degrees.³

These Reports also make clear that it is not too late to make a difference, but only if we start now at every level, from local to global. Combined with policy changes and technological development, it is now clear that individuals and organizations can impact this trajectory through lifestyle changes. Given the larger-than-average carbon footprint of professional scientists, this should encompass the planning and hosting of scientific conferences (1).

In this document we outline an ASSC Environment Policy that was approved by the ASSC Board in June 2019, at ASSC23 in London, Ontario.

2 Background and aims

The ASSC recognizes that our conferences play a crucial and important role in consciousness science, providing a unique venue for interdisciplinary discussion and dissemination of the latest findings. The benefits of conferences include creation of long-term collaborations and friendships, their role in career-building and promotion of consciousness as a topic of study, and their impact on continued efforts to raise the profile of consciousness science worldwide. We do not wish ASSC conferences to stop. Indeed, we want them to flourish. At the same time, we recognize that as a scientific association, we have a responsibility

¹<https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-preview>

²<https://www.ipcc.ch/>

³<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/07/climate/ipcc-report-half-degree.html>

towards climate science and the environment, and acknowledge the urgency of action required. We believe that leadership on reducing the impact of ASSC on the environment is compatible with the flourishing of consciousness science, and our ambition is to put the ASSC at the forefront of these initiatives.

3 Short-term goals

The changes to ASSC conference policy we consider in this document are informed by research on the impact of lifestyle changes on global warming (2; 3) and by similar policies enacted by other academic societies.

The ASSC resolves to (1) communicate to potential local organizers that a plan for environmental sustainability should be a key element of future bids and (2) consider periodic increases to membership fees in order to invest additional revenue into yearly carbon offsets.

Potential actions encouraged under (1) include but are not limited to:

1. Conference catering
 - Ensuring water fountains are provided
 - Providing plastic-free catering
 - Seeking to reduce meat consumption (eg. making vegetarian meals and snacks the default option, with meat requiring an opt-in)
2. Waste management
 - Seeking to use sustainable (eg. recycled and biodegradable) materials throughout the conference
 - Ensuring recycling facilities are available and encouraging their use among conference attendees
3. Travel
 - Seeking to minimize air travel (eg. identifying conference locations with good train links or near hub airports)
 - Consider coordinating the conference timing with other local meetings or academic events
 - Providing guidance to attendees about options for low-impact travel to the conference
4. Digital
 - Reducing printing of conference programs and in favour of apps/websites
 - Providing broadcasting facilities for keynotes and symposia to enable remote participation

4 Long-term goals

We recognize that the above short-term actions are relatively small, albeit concrete, steps towards implementing more sustainable conferences. Over the longer term, the ASSC Board also resolves to canvass ASSC members (eg. via surveys and polls) and listen carefully to feedback in order to ensure the ASSC balances the interests of its members while shifting towards an environmentally sustainable model.

Acknowledgements

This document was drafted by Stephen Fleming with input from Lucie Charles, Helen Walker-Fleming and the ASSC Board.

References

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- [3] Marco Springmann, Michael Clark, Daniel Mason-D’Croz, Keith Wiebe, Benjamin Leon Bodirsky, Luis Lassaletta, Wim de Vries, Sonja J Vermeulen, Mario Herrero, Kimberly M Carlson, et al. Options for keeping the food system within environmental limits. *Nature*, 562(7728):519, 2018.