

# **The Wilderness Society: Peaceful Protest Code of Conduct**

*"Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. Criminal disobedience can lead to violence and anarchy but civil disobedience never will. Every state puts down criminal disobedience by force. It perishes if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is an attempt to imprison conscience."*

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## **Introduction**

The Wilderness Society follows a worldwide tradition of peaceful protest as a means of bringing about positive social and environmental change.

In taking this stance, the Wilderness Society joins with millions of people from around the world who have taken a strong and principled stand against many forms of injustice and exploitation through peaceful protest.

Peaceful protest provides a mechanism for social change based on the theory that gives every individual the ability, the right and the responsibility to act for social and political change. It provides us with a framework for thinking about the world differently, seeing the humanity in everyone we encounter and looking for solutions that enable us to resolve conflict creatively and positively.

Peaceful protest is active. We live the change we seek and are pro-active in seeking opportunities for positive environmental change. Our campaigns are in the context of a deeper consideration of why all these issues of environmental destruction are happening in the first place.

## **Dealing with Confrontation**

The potential for violence and aggression exists within any confrontation. Peaceful protest aims to eliminate the potential for violence for the purpose of everyone's safety and for the success of the action. The best way to diffuse aggressive behavior is to refuse to become a part of it. If we advocate or tolerate violence, the community will not support, relate to or become part of the campaign.

## **Standing Firm**

Nonviolence is about living differently because we recognize the effects of violence on earth and also how a violent response alienates us from the very people we need to reach for the campaign to succeed. Peaceful protest is a strategy that allows us to gather public support for the issue we stand for. If response to increasing sanctions (e.g. arrests, fines, marginalisation etc.) is one of composed integrity and positivity, the public may eventually appreciate our position and move away from the opponent groups who may act in undemocratic, violent or unjust ways.

The Wilderness Society is committed to the principled use of peaceful protest for a range of reasons:

- 1) The basis of peaceful protest theory is that ordinary people have the power to change their situation and create a better society. As a strategic and grassroots approach to social and environmental change, nonviolent campaigns apply a huge array of creative protest actions and peaceful protest interventions. As a community based and grassroots organisation, The Wilderness Society is committed to involving people actively in campaigns to save the environment;
- 2) Peaceful protest is an active, positive and powerful way to protest and be heard that will allow us to build upon our public support. Over many years, we have generated considerable public awareness and support. We have established an image that we are proud of, and that is, that we are reasonable and determined whilst adopting a no-compromise stance. This has given us credibility and respect in the community;
- 3) It is effective and works. Grassroots people's movements have brought down dictators, stopped armies, changed corporate behavior and halted entire industries with nonviolent resistance. Nonviolent campaigns, from small community efforts to resist environmental destruction to large international campaigns have achieved positive outcomes for the environment as well as social and economic well-being for regional communities and Australia as a whole.

### **Code of Conduct for Peaceful Protest**

The success of The Wilderness Society's campaigns in gathering public support is largely due to our adherence to nonviolence principles.

Peaceful protest plays an important role in defending our unique and irreplaceable environment. It allows us to intervene at the point of environmental destruction in an empowered and respectful way.

**WHERE** The Wilderness Society believes that destructive operations should not take place in certain areas; that protest action may be necessary to preserve these areas for future generations; and that should such action be taken, in the interests of the safety of all concerned, the following agreements regarding conduct should be concluded.

### **IT IS AGREED THAT:**

Wilderness Society representatives will:

1. be respectful toward all people and toward the environment;
2. not engage in physical or verbal aggression;
3. endeavour to ensure the safety of all people in the vicinity of the action;

4. not sabotage equipment, products or property;
5. avoid physical contact with equipment being operated by, or under the control of, workers;
6. respect the personal property of all;
7. not use or return violence, verbal or physical, toward any person or other creature;
8. not incite others to violence.

In pursuance of these objectives, The Wilderness Society will strongly advise and counsel all environmentalists to follow these guidelines and publicly advocate that they be followed.

The Wilderness Society undertakes to ensure that the organisers of any protest advise relevant police authorities of the details of protest action as soon as possible.

For the purpose of this Agreement:

“sabotage” means deliberate interference with the intention of endangering the safety, health and welfare of any person or of causing damage to property;

“equipment” means any machinery, plant or equipment used in destructive activities such as logging, road construction, or trawling;

“workers” includes the employees or contractors of any company or organisation involved in disputed activities.