

# **TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE - HAVE A LOW CONSUMPTION CHRISTMAS**

**Earth First**

**Neil Jones, ECCO**

Christmas is traditionally a time of huge spending, on presents, food, alcohol, parties, and holidays. Figures from the Australian Retailers Association show that Australian adults spend between \$500 and \$1000 on Christmas presents alone.

All of this festive consumption results in significant environmental damage. The Australian Conservation Foundation produced a report in 2005, *The Hidden Cost of Christmas*, which outlined the impact of Christmas spending in terms of greenhouse pollution, water use, land disturbance and materials used.

ACF's Consumption Atlas has shown that it is through the products and services bought each year that Australian households make our greatest contribution to climate change, due to the embodied energy and water in these manufactured items. In addition to excess consumption, the festive season is also traditionally a time of wastage, with food uneaten and unwanted gifts unused.

We hear much talk of financial hangovers in January when we realise how much money has been spent over Christmas, but all this festive spending and wastage means a big hangover for the planet, and that's nothing to celebrate.

Let's lighten the impact of this year's festive season and make New Year's resolutions to always shop with an eco-conscience.

## **Top GreenHome festive season tips**

- 1.** Buy a service, not a product - to reduce embodied greenhouse emissions and water. Buy someone a voucher for a massage for example, rather than a massaging appliance. Tips: vouchers for services, film tickets, theatre tickets.
- 2.** Buy gifts that give twice. Give your friends and family membership to charities, overseas aid groups or environment groups. Tips: membership to ACF, Oxfam, Unwrapped Christmas gifts.
- 3.** Buy carbon offsetting - you can choose the amount you want to spend, and offset someone's car travel, household energy use or airline travel, one-off or for a year. Make sure you encourage the recipient to reduce their energy use too! Read tips and advice about carbon offsetting schemes.
- 4.** Think 'green' when you buy - look for recycled and recyclable content, minimal packaging, certified organic chemical-free contents and buy products that are made to last.

**5.** Think 'local' - buy food that is grown close to home to reduce food miles, with the exception of items which are FairTrade accredited - sometimes it's better to buy things like coffee, chocolate and rice which are produced overseas under FairTrade conditions. The same applies for gifts - support local industries and artists.

**6.** Use recycled wrapping paper, or re-use paper from gifts that friends have given you. Make cards yourself, from recycled paper and re-used magazine images. Alternatively, e-cards are a great way to cut down on your eco-impact.

**7.** Reduce the amount of gifts you need to buy by organising a Kris Kringle with family and friends, and buy good quality items even if they cost more (rather than buying lots of cheaper items).

**8.** Get a really green Christmas tree: go for an Australian native tree in a pot which you can use year after year, or can plant in the garden after Christmas. Tips: support the campaign to revive the native Wollemi Pine, an endangered Australian native which makes a great Christmas tree!

**9.** Eco-decorate your house for the festive season with sprigs of native plants, wreaths made from fresh herbs and flowers, FairTrade decorations bought from charity shops - avoid buying single-use decorations which will only end up in landfill.

**10.** If you're going away on holiday, try to reduce the distance travelled - go for a location closer to home and take the train rather than flying.

Spread the climate change message with a great Christmas gift idea!