



**Environment
Australia**

Department of the Environment and Heritage

Environmental Education for a Sustainable Future

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN





Through support for events like Adelaide's Environment Expo, Environment Australia helps raise awareness about how people can adopt a more ecologically sustainable lifestyle.



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Foreword



In 1997 I commissioned the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) to prepare a paper for me on environmental education needs in Australia and to formulate a set of proposals for national action. I was, and still am, convinced that environmental education

must be an integral and important element of government policies and programs on the environment.

Environmental education develops skills, knowledge and values that promote sustainable environmental management. It is not confined to formal schooling but occurs also in a wide range of non-formal education settings.

We should be proud of our achievements in environmental education to date. There is a tremendous wealth of talent, experience and commitment in the community to be drawn upon in developing solutions to local environmental problems. The Natural Heritage Trust has been an outstanding success in this regard.

The values and ethics surrounding environmental protection must continue to be addressed through education, so that environmental understanding and participation becomes automatic in our lives. Without this, the focus of environmental management will tend to be on repairs and temporary fixes, rather than longer term solutions.

What we have been developing is a package of measures that complement our initiatives in policy and legislation, in particular the Natural Heritage Trust and the passage of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Commonwealth Government wants to encourage a coherent national approach to environmental education, and to ensure that our efforts and investment are as effective as they can be.

This National Action Plan is the culmination of a lengthy process of consultations and deliberations concerning the needs of environmental education in Australia. The Plan aims to provide a national framework for better coordination of environmental education activities to promote best practice and professional development in the field and to enhance existing efforts by environmental education providers.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution to this process of the Reference Group that was assembled to oversee the development of the discussion paper *Today Shapes Tomorrow - Environmental Education for a Sustainable Future*. I would also like to thank the many organisations and individuals who contributed submissions and comments during the public consultation phase in response to the discussion paper.

This is the first time that any federal government has made a serious attempt to develop a national approach to environmental education.

This Government accepts its share of the responsibility for encouraging environmental education in Australian society and offers this National Action Plan as an effective way forward.

Robert Hill
Minister for the Environment and Heritage
July 2000



Volunteers of the Waterwatch Program monitor water quality of Melbourne's waterways.



Environmental education will help build a sustainable future for coming generations.



Greenhouse Challenge encourages industry to reduce greenhouse emissions.



Environmental Education for a Sustainable Future

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Purpose

The purpose of this National Action Plan is to address in a substantive and effective way the current needs of environmental education in Australia. These needs have been identified in the community consultative process associated with the discussion paper *Today Shapes Tomorrow — Environmental Education for a Sustainable Future*, issued by the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage in January 1999, and other review processes.

The Plan is intended to provide leadership to the many different sectors involved in environmental education activities and, importantly, promote better coordination of these activities.

It is also intended to be a starting point for an enhanced national effort in support of Australia's ecologically sustainable development (ESD).

Environmental Education — What is it?

'Environmental education' is defined in its broadest sense to encompass raising awareness, acquiring new perspectives, values, knowledge and skills, and formal and informal processes leading to changed behaviour in support of an ecologically sustainable environment.

Principles of Environmental Education

1. Environmental Education must involve everyone.

Because of its very nature and importance, environmental education cannot be confined to any one group in our society. It is a responsibility for everyone — government, industry, the media, educational institutions, community groups — as well as individuals.

2. Environmental Education must be lifelong.

Information about environmental problems is always improving, as we learn from our past experiences and mistakes. As we develop and apply better environmental technologies, the ability of society and individuals to respond effectively also improves.

In order to move closer to achieving ecologically sustainable development as a nation, all Australians need to continually refresh the knowledge and skills which they apply to the environmental challenges we face.

Just as workplace learning and retraining are essential to continued productivity, the same is true of education for sustainability, whether in formal or non-formal settings.



3. Environmental Education must be holistic and about connections.

In order to address environmental challenges, people need to think broadly and understand systems, connections, patterns and causes. The challenges themselves frequently have social, scientific, cultural, economic and ethical aspects, all of which must be considered for their effective management. Specialist discipline-based knowledge, while contributing critically, is no longer adequate by itself — an holistic appreciation of the context of environmental problems is essential.

Meeting this need presents a dilemma to the formal education systems between whether environmental education should be taught as a separate subject or incorporated into one or more particular subject areas. The right answer may vary from situation to situation, depending on what is most practical — suffice to say, a much stronger re-orientation of all relevant areas of formal education toward issues of sustainability is required.

Equally important is the need to establish better communication between those people working on, or learning about, similar or related environmental issues, but who come from different professional or disciplinary backgrounds. Better grounds for communication and partnerships are also required between formal and non-formal education settings, and between various groups with competing interests on environmental issues.

In Australia the quality of our environmental education is enhanced by the opportunity to appreciate and learn from our indigenous peoples' experience, particularly their affinity with the environment in which they lived and continue to live.



The Commonwealth Government is funding a number of initiatives to educate the building industry in sustainable energy principles.

4. Environmental Education must be practical.

One of the most fundamental defining characteristics of effective environmental education is that it must lead to actions which result in better environmental outcomes, not simply the accumulation of inert knowledge or impractical skills.

This is ultimately the yardstick by which the effectiveness of our efforts in environmental education is measured.

5. Environmental Education must be in harmony with social and economic goals and accorded equal priority.

Effective environmental education must also encourage the pursuit of environmental goals in a way that acknowledges other powerful and legitimate social and economic goals — it should not be taught in a vacuum, or simply equip people to pursue an agenda on the margins of society.

Environmental education needs to incorporate this reality by providing people with the knowledge, understanding and capacity to influence mainstream society in a way which progresses environmental objectives along with other legitimate social and economic objectives.

Similarly, one of the objectives of environmental education is to develop a fundamental acceptance in the community that the nation's environmental objectives should be accorded the same priority as its social and economic objectives.



The Way Forward – Proposed Strategies

The community consultative process associated with *Today Shapes Tomorrow* generated a large number of proposals for future actions. Contained within these proposals, and in proposals put forward in other reviews of environmental education in Australia, were a number of recurring themes. These themes were that the key areas of need are:

- 1) development of a national framework for environmental education activities;
- 2) raising the profile of environmental education in Australia;
- 3) better coordination of environmental education activities;
- 4) greater access to quality materials;
- 5) more professional development opportunities for teachers in the formal education sector;
- 6) more integration of environmental education principles into mainstream education (including tertiary level education) and vocational training activities;
- 7) better resourcing of community organisations involved in environmental education.

Respondents have indicated that it is appropriate that the Commonwealth, and in particular the Environment and Heritage Portfolio, show leadership in environmental education. Its responsibilities should include:

- development of a national environmental education strategy, which seeks to better coordinate current environmental education activities;
- provision of high quality, accessible and relevant support services for environmental education;

- provision of funding to support contributions already being made by State and Territory Governments, industry and the community.

IMPLEMENTING A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

National Action Plan

This National Action Plan is intended to provide a framework for environmental education activities in Australia. It does not purport to meet all needs nor replace the activities of the many government and non-government organisations currently engaged in educating the community about environmental issues. It is intended however to include some key initiatives to progress the objectives of environmental education on a national scale, in particular the achievement of a community committed to ecologically sustainable development.

Changes in popular perspectives, values, knowledge and skills to achieve changed behaviour in support of a sustainable environment will not occur overnight. The promulgation of this National Action Plan is therefore a starting point, not an end.

A key element in the National Action Plan is a move from an emphasis on awareness raising to an emphasis on providing people with the knowledge, values and skills to actually make a difference to the protection and conservation of Australia's environment.



The Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage will seek the support of State and Territory Environment and Education Ministers in the implementation of this National Action Plan.

The support of State and Territory Education Ministers is particularly important in the area of school education. These Ministers have already indicated their commitment to education in support of ecologically sustainable development by endorsing *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (the Adelaide Declaration, April 1999) which include the goal that:

‘1. Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular, when students leave school, they should...

1.7 have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development.’

Environment Australia will seek to work in partnership with formal education authorities to achieve this goal through the mechanisms to be established as part of the National Action Plan. These are detailed below.



Ranger educating a group of students about river health (Rapid Creek NT).

RAISING THE PROFILE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

National Environmental Education Council

Environmental education deserves to have a profile in the community which accords it the same priority as other fundamentally important social and economic issues.

One way to raise its profile is to involve eminent and expert Australians in advising the Commonwealth Government on the appropriateness of current approaches and future directions. A National Environmental Education Council comprising experts in environmental education in different sectors as well as eminent community leaders will therefore be established to provide advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage.

The Council will maintain an overview of Australia’s environmental education programs with a view to identifying priority environmental education issues and research needs. It will work to promote a coordinated national approach.

The Council will provide advice on the environmental education activities of the Federal Environment and Heritage Portfolio and, in particular, recommendations to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage on the further implementation of the National Action Plan.

In addition to a coordinating and advisory role, the Council will be a catalyst for raising the profile of environmental issues in all sectors of the community.

The Terms of Reference of the Council are at Appendix A.



Australian Environmental Education Foundation

The Commonwealth Government will establish an independent Australian Environmental Education Foundation in an Australian university. The Foundation will advance scientific knowledge and capability in relation to the Australian environment to ensure that knowledge and understanding informs the decisions of communities, corporations and governments. Such knowledge, capability and understanding is essential if we are to ensure the sustainable use of the planet's resources.

The Foundation will mobilise and focus the nation's intellectual resources to position Australia as an international leader and newsmaker in environmental issues. Its focus will be global and strategic and its character Australian.

The Foundation's Mission will be to ensure sustainable stewardship of the Australian environment as a precious national and human inheritance and to enhance the capacity of Australians to contribute to enlightened global environmental consciousness and management.

The Australian Environmental Education Foundation will develop strategic alliances with educational, business, community and government organisations to ensure that its Charter is fully realised. Eminent Australians and leading organisations, along with the Chair of the National Environmental Education Council, will be represented on the Foundation's Board of Management.

Through the creation and sharing of knowledge, the Foundation will seek to secure:

- an informed Australian electorate that empowers governments to develop appropriate and effective policies in relation to the environment;



Partners in the WasteWise Construction Program manage waste at the Sydney Olympics Site.

- community and consumer support for, and participation in, practices that deliver a sustainable future for the Australian environment;
- development of resources for scholarship, research, teaching and learning for environmental education and management at all levels in Australia and the world;
- a strategic focus for Australian environmental research and development within the broad context of world science;
- a culture of environmental best practice and innovation in Australian institutions and professions and their associates around the world;
- understanding among other peoples and governments of the Australian environment and Australian positions on environmental issues; and
- international cooperation in creating a sustainable future for humanity.

The Charter of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation is at Appendix B.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/education>

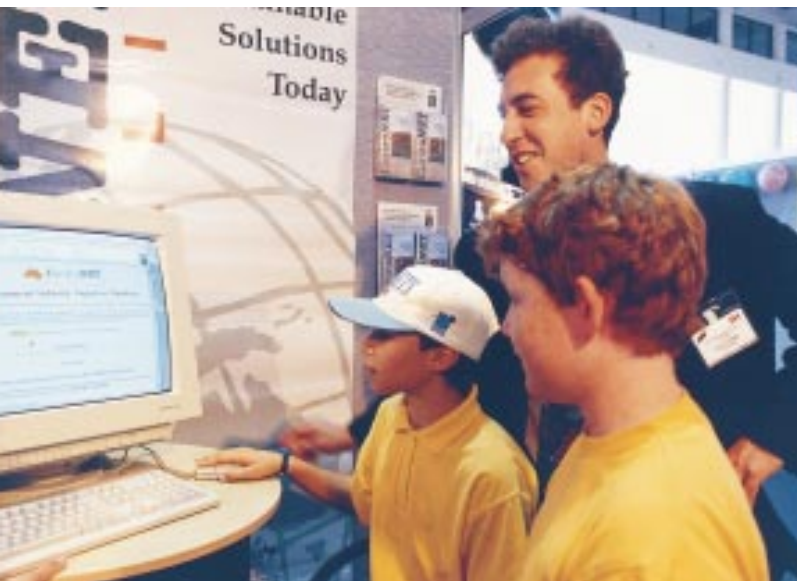


Communicating the Importance of Environmental Education

Environment Australia will continue to promote the importance of environmental education in ensuring that Australia has a sustainable future. Its communications activities will focus in particular on the popular media, given its impact on community attitudes, specific sectors such as business and industry, and other Commonwealth agencies.

IMPROVING THE COORDINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

Both the National Environmental Education Council and Australian Environmental Education Foundation will help to improve the current level of coordination of environmental education in Australia. Other initiatives are set out below.



The internet provides access to a range of environmental education resources.



Traditional Indigenous practices provide important lessons for current natural resource management.

Australian Environmental Education Web Site

Environment Australia will upgrade its existing environmental education web site to provide greater access to a range of environmental education material. The web site will be promoted more to ensure it operates effectively as a resource for locating quality environmental education materials.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Environmental Education Network

The Commonwealth will promote the establishment of an effective Commonwealth, State and Territory inter-governmental environmental education network, drawn from representatives of environment and education departments.

Environment Australia Environmental Education Working Group

An Environmental Education Working Group will be established within Environment Australia to better coordinate environmental education across the Portfolio, develop an Environment Australia environmental education policy and identify priorities. Market research and evaluation of Environment Australia's environmental education initiatives will also be coordinated through the Working Group.



IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION RESOURCE MATERIALS

The Commonwealth intends to achieve this by:

- the establishment of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation;
- upgrading Environment Australia's environmental education web site;
- undertaking more market research and evaluation of Environment Australia's own environmental education products;
- encouraging more collaboration between the Commonwealth, State and Territories on environmental education programs and products.

MORE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS IN THE FORMAL EDUCATION SECTOR

Professional development opportunities for teachers are fundamental to improving the quality of environmental education in the formal education sector. To be confident in their skills as environmental educators, teachers need adequate training, a wide range of quality resources and materials and effective leadership and support from schools and school systems.

The Charter of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation includes the provision of professional development and a program of Environmental Education Fellowships for teachers in the formal education sector and others involved in environmental education.

MORE INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PRINCIPLES INTO MAINSTREAM EDUCATION (INCLUDING TERTIARY LEVEL EDUCATION) AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING ACTIVITIES

There is a clear mandate for environmental education within Australian schools.

In April 1999 Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to the Adelaide Declaration on *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*. The Declaration states that, by the time they leave school, all students should 'have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development.'

The Commonwealth will pursue further integration of environmental education into mainstream curricula through the activities of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation and the National Environmental Education Council, and by developing partnerships with tertiary bodies including bodies involved in vocational training.

With respect to vocational training, Environment Australia will seek to establish a partnership with the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to develop generic environmental competency standards and National Training Protocols.



INCREASING THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environment Australia Grants Programs

The guidelines of all funding programs administered by Environment Australia will include provision for the funding of environmental education projects.

Natural Heritage Trust Training Program

A training program for coordinators and others involved in Natural Heritage Trust programs will be implemented to enhance the skill levels of those involved in the biggest environmental rescue effort ever implemented in Australia.



Natural Heritage Trust

Helping Communities Helping Australia



Coastcare volunteers learn about coastal revegetation.



Tree Cloning for minesite rehabilitation at the ALCOA Marinup Nursery

LONGER TERM PRIORITIES

As already stated, the promulgation of this National Action Plan is a starting point, not an end. Achieving changed behaviour in support of an ecologically sustainable environment will not occur overnight.

The strategies outlined in this Plan will be implemented as soon as possible. They will be supported by a continuing and longer term process which will involve the ongoing environmental education activities of the individual programs administered by Environment Australia and initiatives forthcoming from the National Environmental Education Council and the Australian Environmental Education Foundation.

The Commonwealth will also give priority to the following areas.

Local Government

- Local Government Authorities will be encouraged and supported to adopt their own Local Agenda 21 and local ESD programs.

Business and industry

- An education program concerned with ecologically sustainable development, eco-efficiency within industry and the application of best practice environmental management principles across all parts of the Australian economy will be implemented.



Providing people with the capacity to be environmentally responsible is essential.

Environmental education resource centres

- In recognition of the environmental education role of museums, zoos, aquariums, protected areas, community and school environmental education resource centres, a network of such centres designed to share and promote best practice and to coordinate activities — including the recognition of national priorities — will be promoted.

Partnerships with Specific Sectors

- Environment Australia will work to establish partnerships with relevant bodies in other key sectors.

International Partnerships

- In accordance with its international responsibilities, Environment Australia will support exchanges of information and experience with other countries, particularly with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. By way of example, Environment Australia has agreed to provide information on its environmental education activities to the Environment Protection Department of Hong Kong and to host a visit by staff from the Department. In addition, a sister school arrangement has been organised between Fushan Primary School in Shanghai and Mawson Primary School in Canberra involving an exchange of information on the Schools' environmental activities. Such arrangements will be further developed by Environment Australia.



Appendix A

The National Environmental Education Council Terms of Reference

The National Environmental Education Council will be a non-statutory body providing expert advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and Environment Australia on the effectiveness and profile of the Commonwealth's environmental education activities and environmental education issues generally.

The Council will be responsible for:

- maintaining an overview of national environmental education programs and materials;
- identifying priority environmental education issues for national action;
- identifying priority environmental education research needs in Australia;
- providing strategic advice on the environmental education activities of the Environment and Heritage Portfolio;

- providing advice on the forward work plans of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation;
- advocating practical environmental education in all spheres of education and formal training in vocational, business and industry and community education sectors; and
- providing annual reports to the Minister with recommendations for further implementation of the National Action Plan.

The Council will meet at least twice each year. Council members will be appointed for a term of two years and be remunerated in accordance with appropriate determinations of the Remuneration Tribunal.



Greening Australia provides revegetation training under the Bushcare Support Program.



Appendix B

The Australian Environmental Education Foundation Charter

The aim of the Australian Environmental Education Foundation will be to achieve the status of an institution of excellence, perceived by others to be the pre-eminent national research body in environmental education in Australia. In addition to research it will also have a practical service delivery role.

Its role will be to:

- provide a focal point for advocacy of environmental education in Australia;
- undertake research into environmental education and evaluate existing approaches, particularly with respect to the integration of ecologically sustainable development principles across all educational sectors and in all subject areas;
- develop quality environmental education products for use in different sectors,
- collaborate with the Curriculum Corporation in the development of curriculum materials for use in schools;
- provide consultancy services to all sectors pursuant to the Foundation's functions;
- provide professional development for teachers in the formal education sector and people working in other fields of environmental education; and
- work collaboratively with other key players in environmental education in Australia, including the Curriculum Corporation and Commonwealth, State and Territory environment and education agencies.

The Foundation will offer a number of Fellowships to provide professional development opportunities for teachers in the formal education sector and people working in other fields of environmental education.

Structure and Board of Management

The Foundation will be formed under the auspices of an agreement between the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage and a university or consortium of universities hosting the Foundation.

The work of the Foundation will be directed by a Board of Management consisting of *ex officio* representatives of the parties to the agreement and expert representatives of key education, business, industry and community sectors. The Board will report annually to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage.

World-leading Australian solar energy technology, developed by the UNSW.





Department of the Environment and Heritage