

ELIANZ (SEQ) Forum 15/6/2011

Ethics in Environmental Decision-Making

Ethics in Practice

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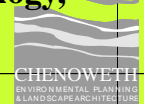
- Environmental vs Professional Ethics
- Institutionalised vs Personalised Ethics
- Perspectives of various disciplines
- Cases & challenges
- Accountability & Ethics
- Certification



Ethics in Environmental Practice

Environmental Ethics

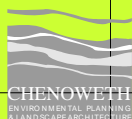
- **General community & media acceptance of 'living green' and conservation (= anti-development ?)**
 - **Some aspects of 'conservation' (wise use of resources) and environmental quality are based on enlightened self-interest - is this 'moral' or ethical?**
 - **Our relationship with the environment also has a moral dimension which 'should' affect behaviour and judgments**
- eg. stewardship, sustainability & future generations, deep ecology, social justice, non-cruelty to animals



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Professions & Ethics

- **Professions possess knowledge not available to the lay public, and are trusted and granted 'licence' to apply their skills; so they 'should' use this knowledge to benefit the community ?**
- **Professions also belong to 'colleges' which share values, ethics, control behaviour and protect each other ?**
- **Do 'environmental ethics' and 'professional ethics' conflict?**
- **Eg. Acting in the best interests of the (human) community -vs- the long term interests of the natural environment**



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Perspectives on Ethics from and for various Disciplines
Science, planning and law have different perspectives on truth, due process and ethics.

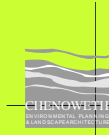
- **Science – investigate thoroughly and report the truth**
- **Law & Accountancy – tell the truth, provide advice consistent with current laws, present the best possible case for the client**



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Perspectives (contd)

- Expert witness - acts for the Court, honest opinions, tell the truth, do not withhold relevant matters, acknowledge limitations
- Academic – report the truth and acknowledge sources
- Engineering – act in the best interests of the client, consistent with 'good practice' and public safety



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Perspectives (contd)

- Medicine and Social Work – heal the sick, help the weak and act in the best interests of the client, irrespective of all other considerations
- Planning & Economics – help the community realise its long term goals for economic and social progress, consistent with other community objectives



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Institutional Ethics

- Public policy – act in the best interests of the community (the greatest good for the greatest number ?)
- Westminster principles of civil service and other institutionalised codes conflict with managerialism, corporatisation, politicisation and 'spin' ?
- In resource management, conservation and exploitation, the public interest conflicts with that of private sector development.



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Perspectives (contd)

- Business – service clients and act in their interests, and shareholders
- Marketing and Public Relations – act in the best interests of clients
- Art, Architecture & Design – also aesthetic standards ?
- Religion and Culture – old codes of behaviour (includes stewardship ?)
- Pop – be true to yourself ?

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Perspectives (contd)

- The media present simplified and sometimes contradictory community standards of ethics, and public responses may be hard to predict
- But the 'newspaper test' is still a useful indicator – if your actions were to be published on the front page, could you explain them in a way the public would understand ?



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Environmental Perspective

- Environmental Practice:
= combination of ethical principles of science, expert witness & planning

But also with obligation to represent

- long term sustainability
- generational equity
- 'deep ecology' ?



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Cases & Challenges

- Coming in late
- Client loyalty, team approach & 'group think'
- Collaborating in coverups & deceptions
- Verbal advice & avoiding issues
- Legal 'rights' and equity vs. environmental responsibility
- 'Greenwash' spin
- False & misleading information
- Being compromised



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Lessons from Consultancy

- **Words are important and last a long time. Everything written must be capable of withstanding scrutiny.**
- BUT ... with enough polishing, weasel words and spin, anything can be twisted around to appear what it is not.
- **Environmental consultants are highly valued by clients when their investigations, opinions & personal reputation facilitate profitable development but not so much when they identify additional constraints.**



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Accountability, Risk & Ethics

Who are we accountable to ?

- Client
- Employer / Agency
- Community
- Truth
- The environment

Is accountability the same as ethics ?

How about corporate risk management ?



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Personalised Ethics

- **Some aspects of ethics are timeless and universal, others are personal and vary with time and place.**
- **Ethical ‘antennae’ help avoid conflicts eg. identify constraints and bad news early & clearly**
- **Science, law, the Church, community opinion and the media, Institute codes etc are guideposts**
- **Personal reputation is a highly valued asset, transcending each project, agency, employer & client ... and the ‘market’ will put a price on it !**

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Certification

- **What is the Certified Environmental Practitioner Scheme ?**
- **Why does it place so much emphasis on issues of ethical practice ?**
- **Does certification make practitioners more accountable ?**
- **Would certification make environmental practitioners more ethical ?**

