

EIANZ (SEQ) Forum

Ethics in Environmental Practice

Stories from the Front Line: 31 years of practice

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- Lessons learned
- Institutionalised vs Personalised Ethics
- Perspectives of various disciplines
- Cases & challenges
- Accountability & Ethics
- Certification

Ethics in Environmental Practice

Lessons learned by a young practitioner at the feet of a mentor

- **Words are important and last a long time. Everything written must be capable of withstanding scrutiny.**
- **Environmental consultants are highly valued by clients when their investigations, opinions & personal reputation facilitate profitable development, not when they identify additional constraints.**



Ethics in Environmental Practice

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

Perspectives (contd)

- Expert witness - tell the truth, do not withhold relevant matters or opinions, 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

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

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. personal realisation and spin.
- In resource management, conservation and exploitation, the public interest conflicts with that of private sector development.

Institutional Ethics (contd)

- The media presents simplified and sometimes contradictory community standards of ethics.
- With enough polishing, weasel words and spin, anything can be twisted around to appear what it is not.

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 – aesthetic standards ?
- Religion and Culture – old codes of behaviour (includes stewardship ?)
- Pop – be true to yourself ?

Perspectives (contd)

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

But also with obligation to represent

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

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

Accountability & Ethics

Who are we accountable to ?

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

Is accountability the same as ethics ?

Personalised Ethics

- **Some aspects of ethics are timeless and universal, others are personal and vary with time and place.**
- **Ethics are personal, but science, law, the Church, community opinion and the media, Institute codes etc are guideposts**
- **Personal reputation is a highly valued asset ... but the more it is earned and valued, the more money will be offered to buy it**

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 ?**