

POLICY STATEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

This is a policy statement on Environmental Education adopted by the Council of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand on 26 May 2004

Background

Environmental education has been introduced at all levels throughout Australia over the past 30 years. Whilst much of it is excellent, especially in our schools, it is not always as effective as it might be. Some clarification concerning the desirable content of an environmental education for various levels of professionals is considered desirable in relation to the membership of the Institute. This policy sets out to clarify the Institute's position in this most important but highly complex area.

It is widely recognised that the world is experiencing massive and growing environmental problems (Tolba *et al.* 1992). Australia is no exception (State of the Environment Advisory Council 1996). Environmental education is an essential prerequisite for dealing with the problems effectively.

We need an educated population, which appreciates the environmental consequences of much of our everyday activities, which comprises an environmentally informed electorate, and which understands issues and participates as a community in environmental management.

Environmental education for this general purpose needs to focus on how people interact with their environments.

Additionally, qualified people in a wide range of occupations are needed to deal with environmental problems – in government agencies, as private consultants, in commerce, trade and industry, in various decision-making positions, as technicians and contractors, and as skilled intermediaries between researchers and community groups.

Environmental education therefore needs to start early – as it already does in our primary schools – and progress through secondary, technical and diploma levels to fully professional qualifications in our tertiary education institutions.

There is also a nexus between education and research. It is not always the case that enough is already known about environmental dynamics for problems to be solved simply by providing adequate funds and advisers to land managers or communities. There are fundamental questions for which research is required to provide new knowledge and understanding, and there is always a need to develop new or improved technologies.

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Policy of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ)

The EIANZ considers that environmental education is an essential component of Australians' education at all levels.

The EIANZ recognises that 'environmental' problems and issues are not restricted to the biophysical environment but involve all aspects of the surroundings of people, including social, economic, cultural and health aspects (ANZECC 1997).

The EIANZ considers that the focus of environmental education, at progressively increasing levels of sophistication, should be on the numerous ways in which people interact with their environments and the complex implications of those interactions.

The EIANZ considers that a broad environmental education should provide a good understanding of biophysical environmental process and dynamics *and* a broad range of land use and management practices and processes, human attitudes towards and perceptions of the environment, environmental economics, environmental legislation, environmental ethics and an understanding of political processes. An example of an excellent student text, which covers much of this ground, is that by McKinney and Schoch (1998): a partially comparable but much more limited Australian text was produced by the Australian Academy of Science in 1994.

The EIANZ strongly supports the preparation of an up to date comprehensive text for Australian students.

The EIANZ considers that environmental education in primary and secondary schools can be carried out effectively by teachers with broad qualifications in areas such as the natural sciences, geography and environmental science. But at tertiary level more specialist teaching is required, with the student becoming the synthesiser (with guidance).

The EIANZ considers that a range of environmental management techniques for professionals need to be taught at diploma or postgraduate levels. These techniques include (but are not restricted to): environmental assessment (including toxicological and bioassay approaches; physical, chemical and biological monitoring; ecological monitoring and assessment; environmental audits; environmental management systems; environmental quality indicators; state of the environment reporting); land evaluation (including land systems techniques, carrying capacity, landscape aesthetics, land capability assessment and land suitability assessment); environmental impact assessment; risk analysis; cost/benefit analysis; decision making; methods for achieving public participation; environmental law; environmental ethics; environmental and spatial statistics; geographic information systems and remote sensing, and environmental modelling.

However, the EIANZ notes that such professional courses are fully effective only if the students already have sound environmental educational credentials.

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The EIANZ also supports specifically designed extension courses, for example, for Landcare officers or integrated catchment management coordinators, designed to train people to deal with community groups, farmers, local, State and Federal government agency personnel, and professionals in commerce, trade and mining. People skills, as well as environmental expertise, are crucial.

The EIANZ also recognises that there is a need for courses in particular skills for environmental technicians (for example, in pollution abatement) and contractors (for example in techniques for controlling weeds).

The EIANZ recognises that there is a nexus between research and teaching at the tertiary level and strongly supports the need for a significantly increased research effort in all areas of environmental knowledge.

References

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