



# THE NEW ZEALAND CHAPTER OF EIANZ: HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

BY EMERITUS PROFESSOR IAN SPELLERBERG HFEIANZ

Ian Spellerberg is Emeritus Professor of Nature Conservation at Lincoln University, an Honorary Fellow of the EIANZ and founding member of the New Zealand Chapter. Ian provides an account of the 10-year journey to establish a professional association for environmental practitioners in New Zealand

## PRELUDE

In 1994, when Ian Spellerberg moved from the University of Southampton (where he was Director of Environmental Sciences) to take up the position of the Director for the Centre for Resource Management (CRM) at Lincoln University, he found a problem for graduates that he had already dealt with in the UK. There was no professional institute for graduates in Resource Management nor in Ecology and thus no pathway for professional development and support.

In the late 1980s, Ian Spellerberg was the Secretary of the Ecological Affairs Committee (EAC) of the British Ecological Society. That Committee was well aware that there were increasing numbers of students graduating as ecologists from UK Universities. Many were going on to be practising ecologists. However, at that time there was no professional institute to provide those students with professional development, nor was there an institute to develop and uphold standards of good environmental practice.

The EAC initiated discussions with several other organisations (including the Institute of Biology and the Royal Geographical Society) with the aim of resolving these issues. In brief, a major milestone was achieved when the Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) was formally established in the early 1990s. Ian was one of the founding members.

## RECOGNISING THE 'GAP'

In New Zealand, Ian was no stranger to the CRM having been a visitor on two previous occasions. The previous Director, the late John Hayward, had already raised the possibility of a new professional institute to meet the needs of MSc Resource Management graduates. The CRM 'flagship' course was the Master of Science in Resource Management. This was a highly respected degree and today many of the graduates hold senior positions in government and in private organisations.

It was perceived at that time that there was a 'gap' amongst the existing professional institutes in that none catered for environmental practitioners, resource management practitioners, and ecology practitioners. At that time there was also a period of change in the structure and environmental responsibilities of many central and local government organisations.

In the mid to late 1990s, Ian took it upon himself to promote widespread discussion about how the 'gap' could be addressed. At his own expense he conducted informal meetings throughout the country. He met with senior people who represented other relevant organisations including The New Zealand Planning Institute, The Resource Management Law Association, The New Zealand Water and Waste Association, The Royal Society, The Institute of Professional Engineers, and The New Zealand Association for Impact Assessment. He also met with senior officials within some government departments.

Ian is an ecologist and for a while was a member of the Council for the New Zealand Ecological Society. In 1998 he and Judith Roper-Lindsay made some attempts to promote discussion amongst the New Zealand Ecological Society for the establishment of a professional organisation for ecologists. They were not successful in persuading the Society that a professional institute (as opposed to an academic society) would be of benefit and indeed was necessary, given the growing number of practising ecologists. The Council of the NZ Ecological Society at that time was not feeling the pressure for a professional body. In March 1999, a meeting about professional bodies was held with the Ecological Society in which benefits, options and other issues were discussed. Those attending were Caroline Mason, Janet Wilmshurst and Ian Spellerberg.

The New Zealand Planning Institute had by this time looked at several options to try and accommodate resource management graduates but nothing became of that. Other organisations tentatively offered a 'home' but overall there was some opposition at that time to the establishment of what many individuals saw as 'yet another environmental organization' and one that a small population could ill afford".

In 1999, Ian approached the IEEM to enquire if a New Zealand Chapter could be established and whether or not IEEM would accept resource management graduates. He met with the then Executive Director of IEEM in 2001, in Winchester, England.

By 2000, Ian had started a database of individuals and organisations that agreed in principle to identify how 'the gap' could be filled for those environmental practitioners who did not qualify for membership of existing professional institutes (defined as those institutes that offered continuing and structured ongoing professional development and certification).

Progress was slow and in the following year, Ian and Ton Bührs joined forces with the aim of establishing a 'committee for a new national organisation of environmental professionals' in New Zealand. A formal written proposal was prepared with the purpose: 'To establish a process to address the professional needs of environmental practitioners in New Zealand'. Meetings with various groups followed and subsequently the discussion started to attract the attention of staff in some government agencies, private environmental agencies and some NGOs.

## THE KEY MILESTONES

A major step followed when, in January 2002, a three-page position paper was prepared 'Towards the Establishment of an Organisation of Environmental (Management) Professionals in New Zealand. Those present and in agreement were Ton Bührs (Lincoln University), Leo Fietje (Environment Canterbury), Alisdair Hutchison (Ministry for the Environment), Laurie Jackson (Victoria University), Zefanja Potgieter (Christchurch City Council), Margaret Kilvington (Landcare Research), Peter Skelton (Lincoln University) and Ian Spellerberg (Lincoln University). That position paper was distributed to 177 environmental people. There were 26 replies and most were positive and supportive.

Meanwhile all avenues were being explored with regard to how best to 'fill the gap'. In February 2002, Ton Bührs was in correspondence with Simon Molesworth Q.C., the then National President of the Environment Institute of Australia (EIA). In an email, Simon's response was exceedingly positive with the suggestion that "one of the very best ways to proceed might be for our EIA to change its name to the Environment Institute of Australasia and then actively support the establishment of a new Division in New Zealand" (email from Simon Molesworth to Tom Bührs). Later that month, Simon reported that the EIA's National executive firmly endorsed the concept of an EIA Division in New Zealand.

On 1 March 2002, a meeting Initiating Group towards a New Zealand association for environmental professionals was held at Environment Canterbury. Present were Tom Bührs (convenor), Zefanja Potgieter, Laurie Jackson, Peter Skelton, Alisdair Hutchison, Ian Spellerberg, Dave Clendon, Leo Fietje, Warwick Pascoe and the Executive Director of the Environment Institute of Australia (Slawka Bell). It was agreed to establish a steering group to explore how a New Zealand Division of the EIA could be established. A meeting of the steering group followed on 15 March in Christchurch.

Meanwhile and on behalf of the steering group, Ian wrote to 13 environmental organisations informing them of the progress that was taking place in pursuit of an organisation of environmental professionals. Much discussion followed over the next several months between members of the steering group and the environmental organisations. Although there seemed to be overall support for a new organisation there was also the view that "we see little merit in the initiative."

On 13 March 2002, Peter Skelton wrote that he had completed some research into the constitutional arrangements of the EIA, RMLA and the NZPI. He also reported that he had had some very useful email discussions with Simon Molesworth Q.C. In conclusion, Peter Skelton said "We all accept that there is a gap and there is a need to fill it. A merger with EIA to become EIANZ is the way to fill this gap and give the NZ members the benefit of 12 years of development at the same time." This was followed by an email from Simon Molesworth Q.C. (14 March) to say that "The EIA National Council met yesterday morning and unanimously resolved to welcome the New Zealand colleagues into the fold." The favoured option was to set up a single New Zealand Division and so create the EIANZ.

In April 2002, a questionnaire was prepared, Towards the establishment of a new, inter-disciplinary organisation of environmental professionals – a survey. The main aims were to see if there was support for a new organisation and if there was support for a formal alliance with the EIA. There were 68 respondents of which 68 agreed that there was a need for a new organisation. The majority preferred a formal alliance with the EIA.

Meanwhile in Australia, at the AGM of the EIA held in Melbourne in November 2002, attended by Peter Skelton on behalf of the New Zealand Steering Group, the following was approved:

- To change the name of the Institute to that of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ)
- To establish an Australian and a New Zealand Chapter
- To create two Vice-president positions;
- To establish an office of the Institute in New Zealand

In the months that followed, many meetings took place at which inter alia there were discussions about the goals of such a Chapter and discussions about a corporate plan and strategic direction for the Chapter.

The inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Chapter of the EIANZ was held in Christchurch on 28 February 2003. This was followed by a formal launch of the Chapter in Wellington on 9 May 2003 (about ten years after Ian commenced discussions (initially within the CRM) about a 'new environment organisation' to meet the needs of professional Resource Managers).

The New Zealand Chapter of the EIANZ 'came of age' (quote by Simon Molesworth Q.C.) when the annual conference of the EIANZ was held in Christchurch, New Zealand for the first time in 2005 (29 March – 1 April).

## CERTIFIED ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTITIONER SCHEME (CENVP) - HOW DID THIS COMMENCE IN NEW ZEALAND

The functions of professional institutes include support for continuing professional development, and also accreditation of certificate and degree program. Another function has been the certification of individual's professional integrity and competent professional practice.

Very relevant to the discussions about proposed certification for ecologists was a letter sent to the New Zealand Ecological Society (published in their Newsletter) in March 2002. The letter was from the planning department of a District Council asking "how to determine who can be called an expert ecologist". The Editor of the Newsletter referred to the Ecological Society of America Certification Programme that had been in existence since 1981.

In Australia in 2002, the EIA established a Certification Working group. Ian discussed this initiative with Simon Molesworth Q.C. during the formal launch of the New Zealand Chapter in May 2003. Subsequently Ian was invited to be the New Zealand representative on the Certification Working Group. The CEnvP (Certified Environmental Practitioner) was established in 2004 as an initiative of the EIANZ.

In New Zealand, Ian commenced discussions with Barry Carbon (CEO of the Ministry for the Environment) about certification for environmental practitioners. In June 2004, a letter about the proposed certification was sent to all CRI's, government departments and regional and district councils. With help from the late Nick Early, media releases were prepared about the certification.

With the CEnvP having been launched, it was expected that environmental practitioners in New Zealand would start to apply for certification. However there was no review panel within New Zealand. In consultation with Peter Skelton, Ian identified and then wrote in confidence to 15 'persons of status' within New Zealand to request their interest in being a member of the inaugural certification panel. Subsequently, three people agreed to review the first applications within New Zealand. They worked independently and liaised only with the CEnvP secretariat in Melbourne.

In 2005, the first applications from within New Zealand were being processed and by March 2006, seven people were the first in New Zealand to gain this new qualification. These were Pene Burns, Bill Chisolm, Rochelle Hardy, Shaun Lewis, Bob Penter, Rebecca Roper-Gee and Ian Spellerberg.

Despite the small number of first successful applicants and the geographical difficulties of arranging panellists to meet applicants, the CEnvP was very soon an aspiration of a growing number of environmental practitioners. As we now know, the CEnvP was (by design) a generic qualification and was soon to be followed by certification in specialist areas.

## PERSONAL COMMENTARY

*The foregoing commentary prompts me to reflect on lessons learnt. Firstly, my commentary does no justice to the enormous amount of time taken up by informal discussions, meetings and workshops. Many people were involved and the total person-hours must have been in the many hundreds. At the 'core' of these events was a small group of highly dedicated and enthusiastic people.*

*Key to the eventual success was the openness of the discussions and the amount of consultation that took place. Also key to the success was the interdisciplinary mix of the 'core group' of people involved. As a group there was much diverse expertise including in Resource Management Law, Ecology, Geology, Environmental Policy, Water and Waste Management, Environmental Planning, and Public Relations.*

*The most important step was the very exciting time when the EIA welcomed the formation of the New Zealand Chapter. The launch of the New Zealand Chapter of the EIANZ and the launch of the CEnvP were very significant milestones in the history of the environment profession in New Zealand. Despite occasional reservations and failures to convince many individuals, there was always general agreement that, for many environmental practitioners (including ecologists, environmental scientists, resource managers), there was no professional home. Throughout the ten years of discussion there was also much misunderstanding about the different roles played by academic societies, environmental associations and environmental institutes.*

*On a longer time span, I remain astonished why it has taken so long to have professional institutes for environmental practitioners for those individuals who were not qualified to be members of any existing institutes (such as in engineering, agriculture, landscape architecture, and planning). Despite the recognition of 'ecology' as being a science back in the early 1900's, and despite the fact that human existence and welfare depends on sustainable and equitable use of the environment, it has taken almost 100 years to get this far.*

*I have been much encouraged by the growth in the New Zealand Chapter's membership and in particular the growth in the number of certified practitioners. On the other hand I have been appalled by such comments as "what's in it for me" and "what do I get out of it?". Environmental practitioners who make such remarks should instead be saying "what can I do to help improve the environment profession" and "what can I do for the environment?"*

*In my opinion, all environmental graduates should be persuaded to apply for membership of an 'environment' institute and all should aspire the certification. Furthermore I would expect any ecologist working as a consultant or working in the government sector must be a certified ecologist. Not having that expectation amounts to saying that we don't require accountants, lawyers, engineers, etc. do be appropriately qualified.*

*I am hopeful that in the not too distant future, there will be a requirement for all practising environmental practitioners to be a paid up member of a professional institute. For the sake of the environment, for the sake of the profession and for the wellbeing of the individual, this must soon come about. The respective governments of Australia and New Zealand need to be persuaded of the immense value of this happening. ♦*