



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Water Resources



A NATIONAL REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

Community Education Open Session

**Thursday 12th April 2007
Alice Springs Desert Park, Alice Springs NT**

Report

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| AAEE | Australian Association of Environmental Education |
| ARAZPA | Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria |
| ARIES | Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability |
| BGANZ | Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand |
| CERES | Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies |
| DEET | Department of Employment, Education and Training |
| DETA | Department of Education, Training and the Arts |
| DEW | Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources |
| EE | Environmental Education |
| EEC | Environmental Education Centre |
| EfS | Education for Sustainability |
| ESD | Education for Sustainable Development |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NRETA | Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts |
| NT | Northern Territory |

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability (ARIES) recently completed a study entitled '*A National Review of Environmental Education and its Contribution to Sustainability in Australia: Community Education*' undertaken for the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW) and funded through the Natural Heritage Trust. The research was conducted to inform the Australian Government's strategy which seeks to mainstream sustainability approaches within education, training and capacity building.

The first of its kind undertaken in Australia, the research provides a snapshot of the current context across the community sector and identifies a number of key themes to construct a picture of Environmental Education (EE) experiences. The report also makes a number of key policy, practice and research recommendations that could strengthen the contribution of EE towards sustainability within the community sector.

Key stakeholders from government and educators specialising in place-based learning gathered in Alice Springs between 10th-12th April 2007 for the Environmental Education National Network Summit. The purpose of this event was to discuss the proposed Australian Network of Places for Sustainability. As part of the agenda, ARIES held a one hour open session which provided an opportunity to engage these key decision-makers in exploring ways forward in the area of education and learning for sustainability.

This report is a synopsis of the findings from the open session dialogue. It summarises the input of the participants who were asked to identify priority actions for government, researchers and community educators.

Priorities identified for government predominantly related to the need for additional funding for the community education sector. In particular, participants saw a need to re-allocate some of government's current funding to provide greater support for sustainability learning at all levels. A national place-based education strategy was called for.

Participants saw a need for research into current 'blockages' that prevent sustainable practices across the sector. There was also a need for case studies of best practice specifically within interpretation. In addition, participants considered increased opportunities for self-evaluation mechanisms to be important. The need for an Education for Sustainability (EfS) evaluation toolkit was also raised.

Priorities for the sector included reaching out to educators who could not see the relevance of or are struggling with sustainability education. Discussions revolved around the need to move the sector from traditional and transmissive approaches to transformative education approaches. Those present reiterated some of the key messages in the National Review document, supported the notion that learners should be involved in education programs as participants rather than as an audience to be targeted.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Community Education Open Session was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW) and facilitated by the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability (ARIES).

The session was held on Thursday 12th April 2007 in Alice Springs and was hosted by the Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources at the Alice Springs Desert Park. It provided an opportunity to engage with key decision-makers from the community education sector to explore ways forward in the area of education and learning for sustainability. Representatives from government and educators specialising in place-based learning were present and involved in these discussions.

The **objectives** of the session were:

- To inform the identification of Australian Government priorities. The session can assist to ensure that future policy is relevant and reflects the requirements of the community education sector;
- To contribute to the Australian Government's review of the National Action Plan in EE; and
- To assist in identifying future research priorities for ARIES that are relevant and represent stakeholder concerns.

The session sought a number of **key outcomes**:

- Engagement of the community sector in matters of EfS;
- Establishment of relevant and informed strategic policy, practice and research priorities; and
- Shared ownership in the output of the session organisation and outputs.

In addition, the session becomes a means of achieving sustainability outcomes through dialogue, collaborative learning, participation and partnership building.

EVENT FORMAT

The open session was facilitated by ARIES in such a way as to encourage dialogue and the active involvement of all attendees. The facilitation also sought to ensure that its output was relevant to the requirements of DEW and ARIES.

The one hour session was largely devoted to one task. Due to limited time, participants were not able to engage fully with the recommendations made within the '*A National Review of Environmental Education and its Contribution to Sustainability in Australia: Community Education*' research report. As a result, participants were asked to identify priority recommendations for government, community and researchers. Dialogue followed this activity and led to the identification of priority actions for policy, practice and research.

PARTICIPANTS

Forty-two stakeholders attended the open session from a variety of sectors. This included representatives from government, community education and school education. The participants were selected by DEW and the NT government.

List of Participants

| Name | Title | Organisation |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Andy Baird | Education Officer, Antarctic & Community Programs | Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery |
| Michael Barritt | | Parks and Wildlife, NT |
| Lyn Beasley | | National Museum |
| Graham Blinksell | | ACT Parks |
| Emma Bliss | | NT DEET, Desert Park |
| Eric Bottomley | | CERES |
| Angela Colliver | | Dept. of Environment and Water Resources |
| Kylie Cowan | | Parks and Wildlife, NT |
| Renaë Crosthwaite | Waste Management | EnviroCom Australia |
| David Doherty | | Arbury Park Outdoor School, SA |
| Jan Ellis | | QLD BGANZ, BCC |
| Kevin Evans | | ARAZPA, Adelaide Zoo |
| Laura Evanson | | Australian Water Association |
| Yvette Finlay | ARAZPA Education Convenor | Melbourne Zoo |
| Bruce Foott | Teacher-in-Charge | Gibberagong Environmental Education Centre, Ku-Ring- Gai Chase National Park NSW |
| Gary Fry | | NT Desert Park |
| Jim Grant | | NRETA - Biological Parks |
| Pat Hall | Manager Education/InformationTourism | South Coast Region Department of Environment and Conservation |
| Tim Hoile | | Marine Discovery Centre, Henley Beach SA |
| Adell Hyslop | | NSW Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council |
| Tony Kendle | | Eden Project |
| Jacqui Kennedy | | WA, Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority |
| Graham Kenyon | | Windows on the Wetlands |
| Lynette Kenyon | | Windows on the Wetlands |

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| David Kopelke | | Borne Island EEC |
| Liz Liebing | Principal | Arbury Park Outdoor School, SA |
| Robin Macgillivray | | Parks and Wildlife, NT |
| Cam Mackenzie | Strategy and Performance | QLD DETA |
| Steve Meredith | | Botanic Gardens, SA DEH |
| Ken Pullen | | Christian Camping International; Outdoor Council |
| Anna Rebus | | SA DEH |
| Jenny Robb | | Sapphire Coast, Marine Discovery Centre, NSW |
| Andy Robinson | | P&W NSW |
| Jen Sage | | Australian Water Association |
| Anne Scherer | | Parks and Wildlife, NT |
| Syd Smith | | AAEE |
| Jane Stoneham | Director | Sensory Trust |
| Jeff Su B | Business Development Manager | Gould Group |
| Stuart Traynor | | Territory Wildlife Park |
| Derek Williamson | Science & Sustainability Education | Powerhouse Museum |
| Sharon Willoughby | Manager Public Programs | Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne |

Session Facilitator, Associate Professor Daniella Tilbury - ARIES Director

Researcher, Rebecca Pearson - ARIES Researcher and Scribe

DEW Representative, Angela Colliver, Sustainability Education Section

KEY OUTCOMES FROM SESSION DIALOGUE

The following section is a summary of the key findings from the open session. These findings are based upon the dialogue of participants. This information was collected through the notes of the scribe taken during group discussions and from the notes collected made by participants during the task.

5.1 Priority policy, practice and research recommendations

In light of the discussion surrounding needs in learning for sustainability and research recommendations made by the '*A National Review of Environmental Education and its Contribution to Sustainability in Australia: Community Education*' report, the following have been identified by attendees as priority actions.

5.1.1. Priority actions **for government:**

The National Review research identified the community sector as making the most effective contribution to sustainability in Australia through education. In light of this, participants felt that the following recommendations were a priority:

Government should:

- Provide additional funding to the community education sector. In addition there should be more transparent intellectual property, more streamlined processes and incentives offered to community groups;
- Allocate an additional 10% of current funding to sustainability learning to, as an example, develop and deliver programs for environmental programs and interpreters; and
- Develop a national places/centres education strategy that strongly promotes a sustainable society and is appropriately supported.

In addition to these recommendations, participants identified a number of mid-term priorities:

- A need exists to fund a NAP for ESD at the same level as the federal government water quality and salinity action plan. Linked to this, federal government programs should have a proportion of their funds allocated to EfS; and
- Resources need to be re-focused from transmissive education to EfS and deep learning/thinking.

5.1.2. Priority actions **for researchers:**

- Research where 'blockages' currently exist preventing sustainable practice across community as well as business and industry, government and other key sectors;
- Engage community groups in more action research;
- Develop a (free) evaluation toolkit for EfS for those working in place based education. Such a toolkit could be adapted accordingly and would allow educators to evaluate their own practice; and

- Provide case studies of best practice in interpretation and longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of EfS;

In addition, participants also felt that the following recommendation was important but only as a mid-term priority:

- Monitor the NAP and conduct research into who is implementing it, what the results are and what is working/not working.

5.1.3. Priority actions **for community educators**:

- Community groups would like to be seen as participants by educators rather than as an audience to be targeted. Education should come as a consequence of community engagement, partnerships and action rather than the other way around.
- Examine ways in which those not currently engaged in EfS can be engaged (the ‘non converted’); and
- There is a need to make sense of sustainability issues for ‘normal’ people and to interpret them in a way whereby people have a clear understanding of what they can do;

Participants also felt there was a need, as a mid-term priority, to:

- Develop a core set of principles in plain language that ‘de-mystifies’ EfS for educators at all levels.

Summary of Outcomes

The Community Education Open Session helped to identify critical policy, practice and research priorities in the sector and will contribute to the advancement of EfS in this sector. The forum’s outcomes included:

- A review the ‘*A National Review of Environmental Education and its Contribution in Australia: Community Education*’ research report recommendations to assess next steps;
- An opportunity to input into the Australian Government’s review of the National Action Plan in Environmental Education
- An informed dialogue amongst participants advancing the EfS debate in the community education sector;
- Increased understanding of the status, barriers and needs relating to EfS in the community education sector as shared among stakeholders;
- Encouraged a cross-sectoral network and potential partnerships to pursue EfS in the community education sector; and
- Developing a sense of shared ownership in the output of the open session.

NEXT STAGE

This report will be used to provide input into the Australian Government's review of the National Action Plan in Environmental Education. The report will be forwarded to Urbis JHD for consideration. The engagement with stakeholders face to face assists ARIES to better understand research and training needs in this area. It will help ensure that future ARIES research is relevant, reflects the requirements of the community education sector and represents the concerns of sector stakeholders.