

Dr Ronnie Harding
Chair, NSW Council on Environmental Education
C/- Secretariat
NSW Department of Environment and Conservation
PO Box 644
Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Ronnie

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the government's *Learning for Sustainability* Plan 2006-09. As Chair of NSW AAEE, I invited members to attend the CEE workshops and to provide me with their thoughts on the new Plan. My executive team and I have discussed the Plan; we have also collected and considered the views of members. Below, I offer the NSW AAEE response to this second three-year plan for environmental education in NSW.

That such a plan exists is a wonderful thing. Our interest – like that of the CEE – is to ensure that the advice to government and the shape and direction of the plan are clear, firm, achievable and inspiring. This new Plan is, after all, a document that must guide, support and lead innovative work in the field of environmental education. Education can play a significant role in achieving sustainable communities. Quality education needs quality support at a whole-of-government level. This *Learning for Sustainability* Plan 2006-09 must provide that support.

I appreciate the hour of this consultation and, for that reason, make these comments brief. I would, however, welcome an opportunity at the right time for longer discussion on each point.

1. Time

The time permitted for consultation and careful deliberation on the issues and necessary actions has been too short. The very principles espoused in the document itself argue for more in-depth consultation. This aspect of the development of this Plan has been disappointing. I would like to remind the Council that participation in a rushed process can hardly equate to imprimatur and that consultation does not automatically mean concurrence. With more time for the consultation process, differences of views can be addressed.

2. Integration

AAEE has worked assiduously to promote the idea of integrating education into the policies and planning processes of organisations. I believe the CEE must give strong advice to the State Government that *all* its agencies demonstrate how and where they are integrating environmental education into their policies. This Plan must also carry that message.

3. EE/EFS

It is not news that there is some debate in the field about the terms *environmental education* and *education for sustainability*. The Plan appears somewhat confused in its use of the terms and, sadly, seems to ignore the historical foundation – energy, innovation, creativity, focus, emphasis and holistic nature – of the thinking and practice in environmental education. AAEE members are concerned that their earlier efforts are being dismissed and discounted. I believe there are real benefits in having the Council lead the discussion about how we talk and think about who we are and what we do as a community of educators. Here, I would like to offer the services of AAEE in managing this necessary debate.

4. Accessibility

Let me reiterate the comments submitted to the CEE about 6 weeks ago on the pre-consultation draft: the Plan is very long and not very accessible; the text is dense in places and uninspiring; it does not very well engage or motivate the reader. It must speak to all environmental educators. A shorter, sharper, snappier document is required.

5. Reporting

Some questions on this: To what extent has the new Plan been shaped by the reporting and reports of agencies over the past three years? To what extent was the Council satisfied with the quality and quantity of the mandatory agency reports? Will the reporting requirements and processes be changed, strengthened, improved?

6. Resourcing

I understand that the CEE cannot resource the implementation of this Plan; and that is not its role. I would, however, strongly urge Council to put pressure on the relevant Ministers to ensure their agencies are adequately equipped to undertake the actions identified for them in the Plan. Here, I must also acknowledge the good work of the CEE in regard to its recent communication with the Minister for Education.

7. Evaluation

I applaud the emphasis over recent years that DEC and other government agencies have given to evaluation. I ask that this new Plan be independently evaluated using the outcomes hierarchy approach articulated in section 2.6. In this way, we will be in a better position to answer the question, *To what extent did the Plan effect changes in practice, policy and performance?*

8. Champion

Several NSW AAEE members observed how quietly the period of the first LFS Plan slipped by without its receiving much public attention or profile. A number suggested that this new document would benefit from having a public champion – someone who speaks it up, who takes it to all and sundry, who broadcasts its existence and use right across the state; someone who provides advice and promotes environmental education achievements and the initiatives spawned by the Plan.

Finally, I thank you for your work on the CEE and wish you well over this next phase. AAEE and a raft of other NGOs have amongst their members the skills, knowledge and commitment that can give quality expression to the ideas, principles and actions in this Plan. I invite you to contact me to discuss how the NSW AAEE might play a leading role in ensuring the success of *our new Learning for Sustainability* plan.

Yours sincerely

Chris Prietto
Chair NSW AAEE