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Response to the discussion paper *Excellence and Innovation – A consultation with the community of NSW and public education and training*

From: Australian Association for Environmental Education, NSW Chapter

Dear Dr Laughlin

This submission is written on behalf of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE), the peak professional body for environmental education in Australia. AAEE has been in existence for over 20 years and aims to promote co-ordination among bodies engaged in environmental education and training and co-operate and/or affiliate with any other bodies with similar aims for the more effective furtherance of these aims.

AAEE operates through a council, a national executive and state chapters. At the state level a Committee is set up to provide input into the directions of the AAEE and to facilitate activity in the state. I write to you as the convener of the NSW Chapter on behalf of the organization.

AAEE believes that environmental education and education for sustainability has a significant role to play in school education in NSW. There is growing worldwide awareness and recognition of the significant environmental issues that we will face in the not so distant future. It is important that the current discussion on the future of education in NSW recognizes the role that environmental education for sustainability can play

Over the past decade the NSW Government has shown strong commitment to the environment and environmental education across all sectors. More importantly, NSW DET has shown great leadership in its delivery of environmental education in schools for 30 years. DET supports a valuable cohort of Environmental Education Centres staffed by specialists that provide environmental education services to thousands of students annually. The Environmental Education Policy for Schools (2001) is a landmark document. NSW was the first state to release such a policy. A partnership between DET and DEC funded the Sustainable Schools Pilot program for 200 schools in NSW. This program was well received by schools and has produced results that can guide work in other schools.

Thus it is with great disappointment that we reviewed *Excellence and Innovation* and failed to find a relevant section or questions that emphasized the issues of sustainability and environmental education. Although there are a few mentions in the paper, which provide an entry point for environmental interests, such as question 14a, there is no actual reference to environmental education and the role it might play in preparing students for the responsibilities of civics and citizenship and the problem solving skills needed to face a challenging future.

There is not doubt that worldwide, education for sustainability is an emerging educational theme. The UN Decade of Sustainability, an international initiative approved at The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, commenced in January, 2005. This international initiative will fuel the momentum that is producing sustainable schools programs in all Australian states and in other countries around the world. The Futures Project provides an excellent opportunity for NSW to build education for sustainability into this discussion on the future of education in NSW, thereby supporting the development of learning environments needed for a sustainable future, as mentioned briefly in Section 14.

In closing AAEE would like to commend DET for opening up this discussion and would strongly encourage DET to build on its past performance in the delivery of environmental education and make education for sustainability a key platform for education over the coming decade.

Sincerely,

Christine Prietto, Convener
AAEE, NSW Chapter

28 February, 2002