

AAEE Response to the National Biodiversity Strategy, May 09

General intro from AAEE

AAEE has a role in promoting the most extensive and effective use of education to help people live more sustainably.

AAEE is in a position to provide a general comment from an education and communications perspective with specific comment only on Priority for Change 2: Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

The Strategy does not place enough emphasis on the role of community education involving the broad community i.e all of us. There is a good emphasis on indigenous peoples however very little about the new ethnic communities or even the average Australian. The document reads as though biodiversity is 'out there somewhere' and disconnected from all of us rather than all around us and something that we are all a part of.

The Strategy states that building awareness is the first step to achieving biodiversity conservation and goes on to say that to conserve biodiversity, all Australians must understand and appreciate that biodiversity is vital to their wellbeing. Having deeply engrained values for the environment does not mean that one has the competence to be engaged in effectively contributing to the preservation and protection of Australia's biodiversity. Whilst information and campaigns to raise awareness are important, building individual and organisational capacity, empowering and resourcing communities to take action and implement solutions is what will ultimately ensure the preservation of Australia's biodiversity. Greater opportunities for involvement and action are needed to preserve and protect Australia's biodiversity.

Community education must be more than just awareness raising and must embrace the principles of education for sustainability and be well resourced and supported. Education in the context of sustainability is understood as a change process rather than a message or level which must be achieved. An education for sustainability approach moves away from the 'doom and gloom' approaches towards futures oriented thinking and action. This involves questioning and reflecting upon our actions and decisions, so we can re-think and re-design our activities. This involves the formal and non formal education sectors.

The formal education sector (Primary and Secondary schools, Vocational Education and Training and Universities) and the non formal education sector (community educators, environmental interpreters, museums education, wildlife parks, and environment centres) needs to integrate biodiversity conservation into curricula, interpretation, community programs and operations and provide opportunities for action and involvement.

AAEE would like to comment more specifically on Priority for change 2: Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

Priority for Change 2: Mainstreaming Biodiversity

There are some positive actions listed under this priority and generally they are headed in the right direction however AAEE believes that some actions need to be clearer, bolder, more inclusive, across all sectors of education and aim for delivering better results where education and communication is concerned.

Objective 2.1 Australians understand the importance of biodiversity to their wellbeing and recognise the urgent need for action

2.1.1 and 2.1.2

- Should include actions across the formal and non formal education sector, not just Primary Schools. Teaching (implying curriculum focus only) is not enough.
- Simply understanding the importance of Biodiversity is not enough to ensure that it will be protected or lead to action or behaviour change.
- Australians generally recognise the need for action however there needs to be more opportunity for action.
- *Australia's biodiversity conservation in the Community:* Programs are established or enhanced that encourage more of our community to be involved in the research, management and conservation of biodiversity; with training and volunteer programs more widely available and accessible. These programs should be well resourced and supported through funding or otherwise.
- *Australia's biodiversity conservation in the Vocational Education and Training sector (VET) and Universities:* Australia's biodiversity conservation issues are integrated into Universities and VET sector programs. Professional development opportunities need to be developed to build the capacity of those delivering these programs.
- *Australia's biodiversity conservation and Partnerships:* Strong working partnerships need to be established and supported between Government, business and community that recognise the interconnectedness and political nature of Australia's biodiversity. Partnerships are important in addressing imbalances in program content and methodology.

Effective communication and education has a key role to play in the successful implementation of any strategy and will ultimately determine to success of this Strategy.

The IUCN has developed a Communication Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) toolkit. The toolkit is about communication, education and public awareness for biological diversity. It is meant to serve as both a resource for training and workshops for those responsible for the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plans as well as for use in the daily workplace when dealing with general CEPA issues around biological diversity. The toolkit should have a profile in the Strategy as an important and useful tool to assist with the implementation of the Strategy.