

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority  
Ms Deborah Palmer  
Senior Project Officer, Cross Curriculum  
Level 10, 255 Pitt Street,  
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

25th February 2012

Dear Ms Palmer,

Thank you for providing the Australian Association for Environmental Education with the opportunity to comment on the Australian Curriculum draft Geography curriculum.

While our comments are specifically related to sustainability as a concept, a cross curriculum priority and education for sustainability we are very much aware that the geography curriculum is more than simply describing geography teaching and learning as purely education for sustainability.

On behalf of the association I commend the Geography writers and the ACARA curriculum managers for the inclusion of the concept of sustainability, sustainability as a cross curriculum priority and the philosophy of education for sustainability as important components of the draft curriculum.

We believe that with the refinement during the next stages of the development of the Geography curriculum geography will provide strong guidance for teachers and schools and other Australian curriculum areas in how to see and include Sustainability as a cross curriculum priority in their curriculum documentation, particularly in geography.

AAEE is providing two forms of feedback

Attachment A - A consolidated consultation survey form based on a Victorian Association for Environmental Education workshop for F – 6 teachers with additional comments from Western Australian primary school teachers.

Attachment B - Additional comments and suggested content descriptions, to support the geography writers in their task of redrafting the Geography curriculum document.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jennifer Pearson  
On behalf of the 2011-12 National Executive Committee

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# AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## Attachment B

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS RE SUSTAINABILITY IN GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM

In writing the following comments and suggested content description AEEE appreciates that the geography writers' task was difficult as they were writing as the sustainability cross curriculum priority statement was being substantially rewritten.

The comments and suggested content descriptions are provided to support the geography writers in their task of redrafting the Geography curriculum document. The comments and descriptions relate to how sustainability

1. as a geographic concept and a cross curriculum priority are connected
2. links in with and informs the rationale
3. and aims
4. Curriculum focus and topics

#### **Sustainability as a geographic concept and a cross curriculum priority.**

It is confusing to have two related, though separated, statements on sustainability in the geography curriculum statement.

The current description of the sustainability as a significant geography concept provides important contexts for exploring and applying sustainability thinking to learning and action.

However, there is strong feedback from AEEE members that sustainability as a geographic concept needs to have a stronger systems thinking focus. Such thinking provides a framework for seeing the interdependence of social, environmental and economic systems leading to more sustainable futures.

The Cross Curriculum Priority Sustainability description provides systems and futures thinking approaches to sustainability learning and emphasizes the significance of world views in influencing taking action for connecting with more sustainable futures.

**It is recommended that the two statements be clearly connected in the document through the Sustainability as a concept description being rewritten to clearly link with the Sustainability as a cross curriculum priority description.**

The following provides examples of what this might look like.

The concept of sustainability in geography engages with the ability of interdependent environmental, social and economic systems, at local to global scales, to operate within Earth's capacity to maintain living systems over both short and long time.

For example what structures and processes influence the ongoing economic, social and environmental health of a river catchment; how to establish and maintain a sustainable school garden; how to live safely in a bushfire hazard area; establishing and maintaining a sustainable urban water supply.

As a concept in the curriculum, it is used to identify the big ideas, frame questions, evaluate the findings of investigations, guide decisions and plan actions about environments, places and communities which link short and long term decision making. In the *Australian Curriculum: geography* students develop an understanding of the concept of sustainability by:

- Researching how environmental systems sustain life on Earth
- Investigating how the interaction of ecological and human systems' patterns and processes influences the capacity of Earth's ecology to sustain life on Earth
- Exploring how the ways communities see, understand and interact within the relationship between environmental, social and economic systems influences the short and long time likelihood for achieving more sustainable ecological and human futures
- Participating in informed and active inquiry that engages in growing their capacity to include the short and long time impact on environmental, social and economic wellbeing of their decisions and actions in and for a more socially just and sustainable world.

It is suggested that the revised Sustainability concept description is used as part of the review of the other 6 concept statements.

## Rationale

The rationale provides a static view of geography through traditional western perspectives of place, space and environment.

The concluding sentence '*They also [reads as an add on] gain the understanding and ability to question why the world is the way it is, to reflect on their relationships with and responsibilities to that world, and to actively participate in shaping [socially just and] sustainable futures.*' seriously under sells the important role of geography learning in informing and supporting active and informed citizenship.

The last sentence should be rewritten and included as the lead sentence in paragraph two. It is of a much higher order of thinking, learning and participation than the current lead sentence in paragraph two.

The rationale does not engage with how applying system thinking in geography learning provides opportunities for students to explore the nature and consequences of the interdependence of environmental, social and economic systems.

We believe that a sentence relating to the nature and significance of systems thinking in geography learning should be a key sentence in the second paragraph. Such a sentence could address the perception that human and non-human environments are separate and can be taught as such.

## Aims

While we realise that there is not necessary an ordering of the 5 key aims **it is recommended that the current 5<sup>th</sup> aim become the 1<sup>st</sup> aim with the inclusion of ‘a socially just and’ immediately before sustainable.**

As this aim is placed now, following on from the wording of the last sentence of the Rationale, it reads as if it comes after, in importance, all the other 4 aims.

We believe changing the order will connect more with Foundation to Year 6 teachers and students and better emphasise the significance of geography learning for students and their communities.

## Curriculum focus and topics

There is little, if any, reference to interdependent systems thinking and active and informed participation for socially just and sustainable futures in any of the year level curriculum foci.

There is a presumption that students in Foundation to Year 6 years are not capable of understanding interdependent environmental, social and economic systems thinking within primary curriculum contexts and participating as informed and active citizens in geography related local and wider learning environments.

This is a serious flaw of the draft geography curriculum as it ignores what is happening in many primary schools classrooms and therefore misses the opportunity to connect with and support Primary school teachers and their students with learning through geography.

The statement *‘While Years 7–10 are organised around sequences of units that start with environmental or human topics, they should not be seen as separate streams of physical and human geography, as each unit integrates ideas from the two branches of geography.’* is confusing and would not be needed if the old physical and human geography paradigm was not used as a basis for describing the curriculum focus and topic selection.

**It is recommended that all topics and their description provide clear opportunities for teachers and students to develop integrated human/environment approaches in their learning units.**

**Other related comments are proved in the AAEE Consolidated Feedback Form.**

# AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## Attachment A

### CONSOLIDATED FEEDBACK FORM

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#### FOUNDATION TO YEAR 12 DRAFT AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: GEOGRAPHY CONSULTATION SURVEY

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In which state or territory are you based?

1. Which CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT best describes your perspective?

Primary teacher

Secondary teacher

School leader

Academic

Parent

Student

Employer

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

2. I have participated in consultation as part of the intensive engagement program (trial) during Term 4, 2011?

3. If you are providing a group response (eg school, professional association, university faculty, education authority) which CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT best describes the group's perspective?

School

Professional association

University faculty

Education authority

If other, please specify

4. Please indicate the NAME of the group below.

Group name: Victorian Association for Environmental Education in collaboration with Australian Association for Environmental Education

5. If group response, how many people have contributed DIRECTLY to this response? 5

6. My/our feedback relates primarily to: (check as appropriate) \*Note for ESA: please make this a mandatory question

Foundation Year 6

- Years 7-10
- Foundation-Year 10
- Senior secondary

## CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS

### The draft content descriptions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. are clear and unambiguous, i.e. explaining in understandable language what is to be taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. are coherent, i.e. clearly articulated across strands and year levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. are sequenced appropriately, i.e. in an order consistent with your experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. are pitched appropriately, i.e. realistic yet sufficiently challenging for students at each year level	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. cover the important content for this learning area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. encourage the pursuit of in-depth teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Please identify any content that you believe should be included in the draft curriculum that is not currently, and give reasons for your selection:  
**A greater emphasis is needed to highlight the interrelationship between humans and the environment, as it appears to be very one-sided in the content descriptions. Sustainability should be addressed in terms of the three interrelating pillars (social, economic and environmental), with a better link between systems thinking. Systems plays such a pivotal role in the 'big ideas' yet it is not ever noted as being an area of importance.**

8. Please identify any content that you believe should not be included in the draft curriculum that is currently included, and give reasons for your selection:

9. Comments (please indicate specific strengths and/or areas for improvement with particular reference to specific year levels):  
**For teachers that have limited exposure to the area of geography a clearer and more consistent matrix is needed to highlight the teaching and learning opportunities related to the cross-curriculum priorities. Icons highlighting where these opportunities can be explored would benefit teachers in their understanding of the content. Primary Connections uses icons throughout their documents which makes it easily interpreted by teachers who are not comfortable with the learning area of science.**

## CONTENT ELABORATIONS

### The draft content elaborations:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. illustrate the content descriptions effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. are clear and unambiguous	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. are relevant and appropriate illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Comments (please indicate specific strengths and/or areas for improvement with particular reference to specific year levels)

See additional comments.

## ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

The draft achievement standards are:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
14. clear and unambiguous, i.e. explaining in understandable language what students are expected to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. coherent, i.e. clearly articulate across year levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. sequenced appropriately, i.e. in an order consistent with your experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. pitched appropriately, i.e. realistic yet sufficiently challenging for students at each year level	<input type="checkbox"/>	* <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Comments (please indicate specific strengths and/or areas for improvement with particular reference to specific year levels) <b>It was felt the achievement standards (whilst in some areas were sufficient) lacked opportunities for 'in-depth learning' and at times the standards from year level to year level changed very minimally. The achievements and assessment would benefit from more explicit instruction as they appear to assume that teachers will know and understand what is an acceptable outcome that can be used for evaluation purposes at a school level</b>				

## STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM (F-10)

Rationale

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
19. The Rationale for the learning area provides a clear foundation and direction for the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Comments <b>Viewing the document with the cross-curriculum priority of sustainability as one of the key focus points, a concern regarding how this concept is introduced or more importantly not introduced until the final line (... <i>sustainable futures</i>) is an issue. Without the explicit link for teachers it is feared this priority will not be seen as a concept inherent to the teaching of the subject. A greater emphasis on addressing issues of 'sustainability' would complement the rationale. We must always insist on models/ systems that address sustainability issues in order to create hope rather than despair. Teachers will view the opening paragraph as representing what is mandated within a learning area, what are the key outcomes, it must be shifted towards the front of the rationale.</b>				

Aims

21. The Aims of the learning area clearly state the intent of the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Comments <b>The aims as outlined in the draft are relevant, despite this; they have not translated effectively into the knowledge, understanding, and skills sections of the document. A more explicit link in the content elaborations and/or scope and sequencing of the course draft would align these aims more effectively with the delivery of the course.</b>				

Strands

23. The nature of the two strands and their relationship is clearly recognisable in the	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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24. Comments

**Geographical concepts**

25.	The seven geographical concepts (place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change) that underpin the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography are clearly explained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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26.	The seven geographical concepts are evident and effectively represented in the curriculum sequence of the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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27. Comments  
**Some of the terminology specified in these concepts are foreign to generalist primary school teachers and thus may inhibit the effective teaching of these concepts, further clarification of these terms is needed (eg *Sustainability - ... will incorporate the source, sink and service function of the environment*)**

**Environmental and Human Geography**

28.	The draft Australian Curriculum: Geography has a reasonable balance between environmental and human geography.	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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29. Comments  
**This document presents as human geography and there is not a lot of evidence that the environmental is considered except in the light of how humans can get 'wealth' from its resources, the interpretation is that the exploitation of earths systems (other species) is not high on the agenda when making decisions about meeting human needs.**

## STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM (SENIOR SECONDARY)

### Rationale and Aims

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
30. The rationale provides clarity about the subject's broad scope, distinctive nature and importance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. The key concepts that inform the subject are clear from the rationale and unit descriptions	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. The aims clearly articulate the intention of the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Comments				

### Structure

34. The unit structure is clear and the units work well together	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Units 3 and 4 are more cognitively challenging than Units 1 and 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. The statements of expected learning across the units ( <i>ie by the end of the unit, students...</i> ) are comprehensive in their coverage of the essential learning for that subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. Comments				

### Unit 1

38. The learning outcomes articulate the essential learning for that subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. The unit contains an appropriate amount of content	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. The content descriptions are clear about what is to be taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. Comments				

### Unit 2

42. The learning outcomes articulate the essential learning for that subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. The unit contains an appropriate amount of content	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. The content descriptions are clear about what is to be taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. Comments				

### Unit 3

46. The learning outcomes articulate the essential learning for that subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. The unit contains an appropriate amount of content	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. The content descriptions are clear about what is to be taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. Comments				

<b>Unit 4</b>		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
50.	The learning outcomes articulate the essential learning for that subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
51.	The unit contains an appropriate amount of content	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52.	The content descriptions are clear about what is to be taught				
53.	Comments				

### DRAFT F-12 AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

54.	Takes into account available evidence about the nature of the learner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>
55.	Takes into account the needs of all students	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
56.	Enables teachers to cater for diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
57.	Comments				

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES

The following general capabilities are clearly evident in the content descriptions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
58. Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
59. Numeracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
60. Information and communication technology competence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
61. Critical and creative thinking		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
62. Ethical behaviour		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
63. Personal and social competence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
64. Intercultural understanding		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

65. Please provide any further comments and advice on the incorporation of general capabilities in the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography

**It appears the curriculum draft is limited in its use of differing pedagogical practices which could be applied by teachers. A greater emphasis on 'inquiry based learning' and the processes that occur for this to happen effectively within the classroom is needed. The current draft uses different elements of inquiry at each year level, however, for these to be effective in achieving 'in depth learning' they need to be applied together to better inform teachers and learners.**

**The curriculum also uses the term Critical and Creative thinking but the pedagogies included in the draft do not articulate types of accepted practices that would achieve this. Ethical behaviour should incorporate Ethic of Care into the language but a few years back the discussion around this indicated that senior geography teachers were challenged with this idea as they had no way to 'evaluate' this.**

## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

The following cross-curriculum priorities are clearly represented in the content descriptions:

66. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
67. Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
68. Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

69. Please provide any further comments you would like to make on the representation of the cross-curriculum priorities in the draft Australian Curriculum: Geography

**Cross-curriculum priorities (indigenous, studies of Asia, sustainability) are underrepresented in Scope & Sequence. The complexities of indigenous land use, seasonal patterns, and sustainability need further addressing. The term 'sustainability' doesn't appear until Year 5, and should be developed earlier in the F-6 years. These priorities as they appear in the current draft provide teachers with very little to focus on and would encourage teachers with limited knowledge of these terms to shy away from incorporating them effectively into their classroom. (Totally agree) agree completely with this, no evidence much the same as sustainability concept, if its to prominent then it will be avoided by teachers who are challenged with understanding how to imbed into their practice.**

## FINAL COMMENTS

**The Knowledge and Understanding (Scope and Sequence) of the F-6 years is not challenging and/or appropriate at many year levels. There is a lack of 'linking' and building on key concepts, such as**

**'sustainability'. The F-2 draft could be used as the basic introduction to all elements of the *Scope and Sequence*, on which the 3-6 years build upon. By introducing more explicit concepts of sustainability (living things, natural resources, weather, effects of natural environments etc) to the foundation year, these concepts could then build in complexity in subsequent year levels. Agree completely with this, the early years does not engage the children with an imbedded learning experience of the cross curriculum priorities in their 'place'. Young students are capable, teachers need support with explicit expectations to ensure they include appropriate learning experience supported by pedagogy that includes creative & critical thinking – this is what will set them up to tackle the more complex issues in later years.**

***The Inquiry and Skills (Scope and Sequence)* section should incorporate the 'inquiry' process from the Foundation level (at an appropriate level) as a complete model and not filtered in slowly over six years. For inquiry learning to be effective it must incorporate a section on 'creating' (a deep level of thinking) and have a greater emphasis on the process of questioning the world around us. In its current format it is most likely to be observed/used as a set of learning activities, instead of an opportunity for integrating different components of the subject into a larger more complex process of inquiry learning.**