



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

9<sup>th</sup> September 2011

Dear Ms. Palmer,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priorities. This submission is offered to provide a critical reflection and practical suggestions to inform the ongoing debate about the very heart of the emerging curriculum for future generations.

The Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) views the cross-curriculum priorities as the key innovation of the Australian Curriculum. In particular the Sustainability priority will support us as students, teachers, teacher educators, industry educators, community educators and community members in achieving our vision that includes:

*Every school student is engaged in practical, hands-on, dynamic sustainability education, including experiences in the natural world, in every year of their learning through a curriculum that integrates coherent sustainability principles.*

Point 6, AAEE's Ten Point Vision about Environmental Education for Sustainability in Australia

Our comments and suggestions for modification on the Cross-curriculum priorities are based on the experience and expertise within AAEE's membership. AAEE members provided momentum for the formation of the Australian National Action Plan and its subsequent revision in 2010. AAEE members were a significant stakeholder in establishing and evolving the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI) which now operates in over 3,000 schools and children's centres across Australia.

This collective energy has provided the impetus for the DEWHA document, Sustainability Curriculum Framework approved by MCYEETA in 2010. This is an outstanding example of a cross curriculum framework reflecting the very best research and teacher practice in Education for Sustainability. This framework offers teachers a blueprint to provide hands-on experiential problem solving tasks that ensure that all aspects of a curriculum will be met through engagement in purposeful life experiences connected to the broader community.

We look forward to supporting your endeavors to make clear the core values of a curriculum for the future that we know will be profoundly different, with challenges that are unique to those current and future generations who rely on us to engage with them in evolving understandings and skills to grapple with complex issues as a community of lifelong learners. We have encouraged AAEE members to complete ACARA's online Cross-curriculum priorities consultation survey.

The attached comments and suggestions have been gathered through consulting with AAEE Executive members and AAEE's Teacher and Teacher Education Special Interest Group.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jennifer Pearson

President Australian Association for Environmental Education

*working for sustainability*

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## **Australian Association for Environmental Education response to Cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum consultation August – September 2011**

### **General cross-curriculum priority comment**

AAEE considers that the three cross-curriculum priorities not only provide knowledge and skills content, they also provide challenges for how each of the learning areas is seen and described and how they are all connected through the priorities.

The cross-curriculum priorities also connect with and inform each other. For example there is a strong association between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Country/Place organising ideas and the Sustainability Worldview organising ideas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures organising ideas 2 and 3 clearly describe how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures see and practice their spiritual connection with Country - their worldview of people and Country connection.

This provides a different interpretation of the meaning of World view to that which is described in Sustainability organising ideas 5 and 6.

The connection of Sustainability organising ideas with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures organising ideas can also give greater credence to the statements

“The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world’s oldest continuous living cultures. This knowledge and understanding will enrich their ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia.”

The remaining comments and suggestions relate specifically to the Sustainability cross-curriculum priority

**Please find AAEE’s comments on Sustainability inserted below as notes within the ACARA text.**

The comments are inserted in two ways

- as comment on particular wording with suggested changes on the side bar
- as more detailed comments on the nature of organising ideas, world view, futures inserted within the general text.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability addresses the ongoing capacity of Earth to maintain all life.

Sustainable patterns of living meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Actions to improve sustainability are both individual and collective endeavours shared across local and global communities. They necessitate a renewed and balanced approach to the way humans interact with each other and the environment.

Education for sustainability develops the knowledge, skills and values necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It is futures-oriented,

*working for sustainability*

focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through action that recognises the interdependence of environmental, social, cultural and economic considerations.

**Comment [D1]:** Considerations needs to be replaced by a stronger word such as 'wellbeing' or 'health', which are terms used in sustainable futures and sustainability education thinking.

### Organising ideas

For each cross-curriculum priority, a set of organising ideas reflects the essential knowledge, understandings and skills for the priority. The organising ideas are embedded in the content descriptions and elaborations of each learning area as appropriate.

The AAEE believes that the organising ideas need to be carefully worded to clearly incorporate the nature and meaning of sustainability. This is important because as organisers they are set to steer how sustainability is interpreted and expressed in each learning area and between learning areas.

Code	Organising ideas
<b>Systems</b>	
OI.1	The biosphere is a dynamic system providing conditions that sustain life on Earth.
OI.2	All life forms, including human life, are connected through ecosystems on which they depend for their wellbeing.
OI.3	Sustainability of social and economic systems is closely related to sustainability of the environment.
OI.4	All people are connected through social systems on which they depend for their wellbeing.

**Comment [D2]:** Would the word 'integral' or 'reliant on' be considered as it could be considered a more active word.

**Comment [D3]:** I would go even stronger and state that social and economic systems are founded upon sustainability of the environment. It is undeniable that we are socially situated in the environment and derive much of our sense of identity from it. It is also undeniable that all economic activity is based on products derived from the environment this applies to service industries as well as manufacturing. Many of the resources that create products are finite and not renewable; the sourcing of them is often damaging to the environment in the short and long term. Until we admit this the situation will remain unchanged. This is not a "close relationship, or even an interdependence, it is "dependence". Sustainability refers to maintaining and ensuring the long term

### World View

The term world view, or worldviews, has particular meaning in sustainable futures and sustainable education discourse. Worldview basically refers to how a cultural group, and individuals within the group, see the relationship between themselves and their environment – how they view their place in the world. For example do they see humans existing within environment or do they see humans existing as separate from the environment? This in turn determines how humans see and practice living for sustainable futures.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures organising ideas 2 and 3 emphasise the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians spiritual connections with land, water and air to their cultures – their worldviews. How would we describe non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians connection with land, water and air - their worldviews?

The AAEE maintains there is no single sustainable futures 'World View' as such and recommends that the heading be World Views or Worldviews.

OI.5	Communities throughout the world have a common interest in maintaining environments for the future and deserve to be treated equitably.
OI.6	A world view is important to ensure social justice and the effectiveness of action to improve sustainability.

**Comment [JP4]:** Should be stronger as 'interest' implies low level commitment, that it can be by easily overlooked. Imperative may be a better word?

**Comment [D5]:** This links equity now with equity for those who will live in the future. I.e. Intra and Intergenerational equity

This could be worded as '...the future and in achieving equity within and between living and future generations.

**Comment [D6]:** It depends on what the world view of a person or group is. If their world view is based on survival of the fittest then social justice may not have an high priority.

What is needed is 'World views that recognise and practice social justice are an essential element for sustainable futures.

**Comment [D7]:** A more appropriate phrase is needed. As 'designed to intervene' can mean people altering and controlling the environment to meet human needs. This is a contested world view of sustainability.

'Sustainability action is action that incorporates ecological, social and economic systems thinking in evolving more sustainable patterns of living.'

**Comment [JP8]:** Disagree with this statement, designing implies humans are in control and have the power to make things adapt to their needs and does not include other living things.

**Comment [D9]:** This organising idea may be more relevant by reorganising its structure and intent.

Humans designing environments is a contested view of sustainability.

For example 'Our current behaviours and production methods are influencing humans' ability to work towards sustainable futures.

**Comment [D10]:** Once again it depends on the world views of the people who are designing and building.

Sustainable futures and sustainable education thinking suggests that human wellbeing and environmental wellbeing are one in the same in evolving sustainable futures.

**Comment [JP11]:** Agree there is an assumption implied that everything can be 'corrected' by designing. Will this include a connection to which culture/community/time period/ political persuasion/ is 'manipulating' the issues?.

**Comment [D12]:** The same as above.

## Futures

The use of the words “design, intervene, development, shape, products, systems, environments and manage” in this section, encourages the conceptualization of sustainability as human-centric and interventionist- humans existing as separate from the environment. This is potentially detrimental to the relationship of children to the natural world because it portrays that world as something merely to be acted upon and managed. Closer to the truth of the matter is that humans depend upon and/or are interdependent with the wider natural world.

OI.7	Sustainability action is designed to intervene in ecological, social and economic systems in order to develop more sustainable patterns of living.
OI.8	Sustainable futures are shaped by our behaviours and by the products, systems and environments we design today.
OI.9	Products and built systems and environments can be designed and/or managed to improve both people's wellbeing and environmental sustainability.
OI.10	Social and economic systems can be designed, managed and/or used to improve both people's wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

One AAEE member has provided the following suggested rewording for each of the Futures organizing ideas so as to more accurately reflect desirable attitudes and relationships with the natural world in relation to sustainable futures

- O1.7 Sustainability action is intended to develop more ecologically sustainable patterns of living. Both social and economic sustainability are, in the long term, served by and compatible with environmental health. Sustainability action is action that incorporates ecological, social and economic systems thinking for the purposes of evolving more sustainable patterns of living.'
- O1.8 The choice to adopt a sustainable future is shaped by the decisions, product designs, behaviors and positive impacts upon environments that are enacted today.
- O1.9 Products and built systems can be designed and/or managed to improve both people's wellbeing and environmental sustainability. The health of our local and global environments is essential to the long term sustainability of our social and economic systems.
- O1.10 Management that increases the health of the environment along with the health of our social and economic systems will improve people's well-being.