

Where did AAEE come from?

Provided by Professor Annette Gough, 2020

The Australian Association for Environmental Education (aka AAEE or A²E²) has its origins in the Curriculum Development Centre's (CDC) Environmental Education Project (EEP) (directed by John Smith from South Australia) which was active in 1978 and 1979. This was one of a number of environmental education projects¹ that were part of the CDC's environmental education program which was coordinated by Annette Greenall (now Gough). The CDC's environmental education program resulted from one of the recommendations from the CDC Study Group on Environmental Education (CDC, 1978), which was chaired by Peter Fensham.

The EEP was a national project with liaison officers from each state and territory education department as part of its structure². As can be seen from the project's culminating publications – *A Sourcebook for primary education* (CDC & EEP, 1981a) and *A Sourcebook for secondary education* (CDC & EEP, 1981b) – the modus operandi was to offer teachers and other educators small grants for them to describe their programs or positions on particular aspects of environmental education. The small grants were awarded around Australia and John Smith created the EEP newsletter as a communication and networking strategy for the liaison officers, grant recipients and others interested in environmental education. The Newsletter contained news items about developments in environmental education, short articles, resource reviews, updates from the State and Territory liaison officers among other items. This format was continued into the *AAEE Newsletter*, initially under the editorship of Alan Reid from ACF.

John created a blue and green stylised nautilus shell logo for the project's newsletter and letterhead, and this was the logo initially adopted for the AAEE newsletter, first published in April 1980.



According to Victorian liaison officer Jim Wilson (2015), "One evening in May 1979, after one of the regular project meetings in Melbourne, Smithy, Bob Stevenson (Qld) and I discussed the idea of a national body. Ideas need implementing and Smithy [John Smith] was the one who went out, consulted widely, gathered opinions and organised the ideas into a workable model." The EEP had its final meeting of State and Territory liaison officers in Canberra in November 1979. Based on the prior work by John Smith and the liaison officers, at this meeting it was agreed that the network should be maintained as a national forum for environmental educators – and the Australian Association for Environmental Education was born. The initial aims of the Association were:

- To maintain communication

- To organize a biennial conference
- To be a contact point for international organisations
- To lobby for environmental education at state, national and international levels

Peter Fensham was approached to be the first AEE president given his prominent roles in supporting environmental education up until that time. These roles included convening the Australian National Commission for UNESCO seminar on Education and the Human Environment in 1975 (Linke, 1977), representing Australia at the Belgrade Workshop (Fensham, 1976) and the Tbilisi conference (Fensham, 1978a 1978b). Peter had also been President of the Australian Science Teachers' Association in the 1970s and so brought a wealth of experience about what was needed to make an association succeed.

Jim Wilson took on the role of AEE Secretary and worked with the liaison officer network to get State and Territory support for the formation of the Association. At this time there were three state associations for environmental education: Victoria had the Environmental Studies Association of Victoria and the Environment Teachers' Association (which amalgamated in 1984 as the Victorian Association for Environmental Education), and there was the Association for Environmental Education (NSW). Gradually other states and territories formed their own chapters of AEE.

Other members of the first executive were Peter Biro as Treasurer, and Alan Reid and Marta Hamilton as Newsletter editors.

Brian Foreman, taking advantage of his role as Principal of Arbury Park Outdoor School in the Adelaide Hills providing a venue, set about organising the first AEE conference for October 1980 where the association would be formally launched, and it was.

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¹ These other projects included the *Investigating the National Estate* kit (a joint project with the Australian Heritage Commission) (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980), Australia's first national statement on environmental education (Greenall, 1980), and *Streets* (Ward & Kasepuu, 1980).

² The liaison officers included Bob Stevenson (Qld), Frank Haddon (NSW), Jim Wilson (Vic), Grant Godfrey (Tas), Lester Russell (SA), Jim Cameron (NT), Peter Hobbs (ACT), Harry Pearson (WA)