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The State of Environmental Education in New Zealand

**A baseline assessment of provision in
the formal sector in 2006**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Background

This report was commissioned by WWF-New Zealand and conducted by the University of Waikato to document the current level of activity related to environmental education/education for sustainability (EE/EFS) in New Zealand schools. The study identified a series of indicators that could provide information about the development of EE/EFS in the New Zealand school sector, and interrogated those indicators to provide a baseline of development at this point. The study was timed to coincide with the early years of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014, UN DESD).

Eight indicators of interest were identified: school staff professional development, pre-service teacher education, curriculum status, whole school approach, Education Review Office reports, school-community interactions, research and evaluation, and advocacy for the UN DESD.

The methods of data gathering to examine these indicators included interviews, questionnaires and document analysis. Sampling strategies were devised that were appropriate to the target group. These included random sampling, convenient sampling and purposive sampling.

The main findings of this report and recommended actions are summarised below for each indicator. The full report is available from WWF-New Zealand.

Findings and recommendations

1. School staff professional development

Major providers of school staff professional development (PD) appear to be regional councils, NGOs and the school support EFS advisers. These organizations appear to provide PD in the form of resource material, speaking at staff meetings, holding short workshops/hui/seminars and providing facilitation and advice in schools. A significant proportion of schools reported receiving no PD in EE/EFS in 2006. Over half of the EE/EFS topics for PD in 2006 were based on some area of content e.g. waste, water etc.

Recommended actions are:

- that local government (particularly regional councils) and NGOs be recognised as important sources of school staff PD in EE/EFS
- that providers of EE/EFS PD in these organizations balance their delivery in terms of content and pedagogy to satisfy the needs of school staff to know what and how to teach EE/EFS
- that attempts are made to ensure that every school has access to some form of EE/EFS PD for their staff as, without it, it is unlikely schools will deliver EE/EFS to their students
- that a database of EE/EFS providers be constructed and maintained and made available to schools to facilitate provision of PD
- that PD for school staff be provided in many EE/EFS knowledge areas to spread the focus wider than the predominance on waste

2. Pre-service teacher education

Some EE/EFS training is occurring in some teacher education institutions. Most universities offering teacher education programmes offer something in EE/EFS at primary and/or secondary level, but in most cases it is fairly limited in scope or in numbers of students accessing the EE/EFS. Recent initiatives at Auckland University, and more particularly at the University of Waikato, show increased

activity in teacher education EE/EFS. It can be concluded from this study that there is no teacher education institution in New Zealand that guarantees that every teacher graduate has had access to EE/EFS during their study.

Recommended actions are:

- that faculties of education in all teacher education providers, at least at primary and secondary level, review their offerings in EE/EFS with a view to ensuring that all of their graduates have access to EE/EFS training during their study programme
- that these offerings are informed by the latest international research and practice in EE/EFS, and that the providers consider a multi-disciplinary approach to their offerings
- that these offerings provide a well-defined pathway for teacher trainees who wish to develop strength in EE/EFS in their future practice in schools
- that teacher education providers model the sharing of knowledge and resources to enhance a coherent approach to EE/EFS for all teacher trainees
- that further research be conducted to examine the effectiveness of existing EE/EFS teacher education provision in its translation into schools

3. Curriculum status of EE/EFS

As this report was completed just prior to the release of the new curriculum in 2007, it is not clear exactly what the curriculum status of EE/EFS will be.

However, it is likely that the status will be slightly enhanced over the previous curriculum with a stronger emphasis on sustainability as a significant theme.

There also appears to be increased emphasis on issues of the environment and sustainability in the essential learning areas. There is also enhanced potential for schools to engage in these issues with the ability to tailor their curriculum to suit the local needs and interest of their communities. However, EE/EFS will likely remain a non-mandated area for learning and as such will depend on the same

individual interest of schools and teachers rather than government direction for its development.

Recommended actions are:

- that a strengthening of professional development opportunities in EE/EFS be pursued at all levels of school decision-making, including most particularly school leadership and governance
- that schools adopt sustainability as a key theme in their curriculum
- that the Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools is re-written to reflect current thinking about EE/EFS and how it can be incorporated into a school-based curriculum
- that research be conducted into how EE/EFS can respond to the need for incorporating values and key competencies into teaching and learning should these aspects be retained in the new curriculum

4. A whole school approach to EE/EFS

There is a promising growth trend in the number of schools becoming involved with the Enviroschools programme which promotes such an approach. More than 200 schools have joined the programme in the past two years. The Awards scheme appears to be assisting this trend with increasing numbers of schools being successful in gaining awards. The low numbers of schools attaining the highest award, the green-gold, to the end of 2006 provides an indication that few schools may be using a whole school approach to EE/EFS. This accreditation process of the development of a whole school approach to EE/EFS may be important in ensuring that the approach is genuinely being achieved and sustained.

Recommended actions are:

- continued support for the development of whole school approach programmes such as Enviroschools
- research into immediate and long-term educational outcomes of the whole school approach to EE/EFS advocated by programmes such as Enviroschools
- research into the range of whole school approaches being used by schools
- research into what enables or prevents schools from developing a whole school approach beyond the initial stages e.g. what may constrain a school with an Enviroschool Bronze Award from progressing to Silver

5. Education Review Office Reports

Education Review Office (ERO) reports in 2006 showed a very low level of reporting of EE/EFS activity. The data indicates that the ERO is likely to be choosing not to focus on EE/EFS in a significant number of schools. It is possible then that this approach is a reflection of the government's interest in EE/EFS. This lack of interest is then communicated back to schools and their communities who are guided by the outcomes of their school's ERO report. It does appear that involvement in structured EE/EFS programmes such as Enviroschools is more likely to result in ERO taking notice of EE/EFS activity.

Recommended actions are:

- That the Ministry of Education be encouraged to designate EE/EFS an area of national interest for ERO reporting to improve the visibility of the EE/EFS that is happening.
- That education review officers be offered training in EE/EFS to assist in their reviews of EE/EFS activity in schools.

6. School-community interactions

The examination of school-community interactions in EE/EFS in 2006 has revealed that much interaction is occurring with a wide range of community members. Major interactions with schools appear to be with parents, regional councils, NGOs and EFS school advisers. These groups appear to be assisting EE/EFS both within the school and away from the school. The survey data indicates that interactions are potentially fulfilling both of the suggested roles for school-community interactions, being the provision of expertise by the community group, and the benefits of a school being involved with its local community.

Recommended actions are:

- that parents and environmental community groups interact with schools in EE/EFS
- that schools and their teachers interact with their local communities in EE/EFS to access expertise and engage in local environmental issues
- that up-to-date resources be made available that facilitate contact between schools and community agencies. These resources should allow each party to readily identify the correct person to contact in each agency or school
- that research is conducted that explores the benefits to environmental community groups from school-community interactions
- that research be conducted that explores the benefits to the environment from school-community interactions

7. Research and evaluation of EE/EFS in New Zealand

There is a trend towards increased depth and connectivity of research about EE/EFS teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. An increase in the number of research qualified practitioners in EE/EFS in recent years holds potential to greatly increase the volume of published research and evaluation studies relating to EE/EFS in New Zealand schools. It is important that the findings of these research and evaluation works are widely disseminated

amongst the EE/EFS community in New Zealand so that we all can learn from them. Strategies for making publication accessible for a range of study types should be explored. An ongoing area where there is little published research relates to Māori concepts of, and practices relating to, EE/EFS.

Recommended actions are:

- that encouragement is provided for New Zealand EE/EFS practitioners at all levels to engage in research and evaluation through participation in programmes such as degree qualifications or partnerships with experienced researchers
- that a range of dissemination opportunities be made available for the full range of research and evaluation studies on EE/EFS in New Zealand, from local practitioners accessing small-scale practitioner studies of their own programmes, through to large-scale research studies being made available to international audiences
- that a database of such research and evaluation studies regarding EE/EFS in New Zealand is established

8. Advocacy for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 - 2014

The UN DESD has worthy goals and objectives. As the end of the third year of the DESD approaches, now is the time for action if any significant progress is going to be made towards those goals and objectives within the Decade. Recent developments hold promise for this progress but this promise must be realised. The international support provided by the Decade is an opportunity to foster EE/EFS in New Zealand schools.

Recommended actions are:

- that the new partnership involving Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand Inc. and the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO be supported and that the strategic plan is finalised and implemented immediately

- that the good work being conducted in EE/EFS for our schools be supported and enhanced by advocacy at all levels
- that achievements in EE/EFS in and for our schools be recognised throughout the Decade so that those who are working hard are encouraged in their efforts and recognised as making a valid contribution to the overall goals of sustainable development

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