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Inquiry into Teacher Education  
House Education Committee  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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**To the House Education Committee:** *Chair Luke Hartsuyker MP and Deputy Rod Sawford MP*

This statement is a response from the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) Teacher Education Special Interest Group (SIG) regarding the *Terms of Reference* written for the Inquiry into Teacher Education.

The Australian Association for Environmental Education is a robust national organisation with membership that is actively involved in education for a sustainable future. The Teacher Education SIG specifically deals with environmental education (also referred to as education for sustainability) as it relates to teacher education.

Our statement is structured into three sub-sections, namely environmental education in teacher education; general comments; and specific comments about the *Terms of Reference*.

### **Environmental Education and Teacher Education**

*The more attention we pay to environmental education in education curriculum the more people are going to be serious about taking steps towards sustainability*  
(Student Teacher Comment, James Cook University)

It is widely accepted that ecosystems are under threat. The recent Statement of the Millennium EcoSystem Assessment Board, *Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being* (March 2005), explicitly establishes that human beings have had and are having an adverse impact on the environment. Launching the report, Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, said, 'Only by understanding the environment and how it works, can we make the necessary decisions to protect it. Only by valuing all our precious natural and human resources can we hope to build a sustainable future.' The report states that better protection will require more coordinated efforts across governments, businesses, and international institutions. Ecosystem productivity depends on *policy choices* in investment, trade, taxation, regulation and education.

Three decades ago, seminal documents, namely The Belgrade Charter (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976) and the Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1977), recognised that the practice of environmental education in schools greatly depends on teacher education and preparation. One of the guiding

principles set out in the Tbilisi Declaration emphasised ‘a need to strengthen pre-service and in-service training programs for teaching personnel aimed at making them capable of including an environmental component in their teaching activities’ (UNESCO, 1980, pg.46). Since that time, the United Nations and UNESCO have continued to reiterate the importance of environmental education in teacher education, such that it was labelled as the ‘priority of priorities’ in teacher education during the 1990s (UNESCO-UNEP, 1990). Adding to this, the United Nations (2002) have declared 2005-2014 that Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It locates education and specifically teacher education at the centre of a range of tools needed to achieve a sustainable world.

Teacher education programs must prepare teachers for an uncertain age where global realities of ecological changes will increasingly absorb our attention. **It is wholly pragmatic to consider that any review of teacher education in Australia should consider the place and practice of environmental education in pre-service teacher education within its terms of reference.** AAEE argues that greater attention needs to be given to ensuring all teachers are prepared to teach environmental education within their curriculum areas and are capable of modeling, in their pedagogy, the practices and principles inherent in environmental education.

The comments below are presented in two sections, General Comments and Specific Comments.

### **General Comments**

It is disappointing that the current Terms of Reference do not refer to pedagogy explicitly. As pedagogy is the very art of teaching, teacher education should carefully focus on the qualities that develop excellence in teaching. The inquiry should investigate the extent to which teacher education courses are explicit about the art of teaching and the extent to which quality teaching is modeled by teacher educators. The models generated out of the Productive Pedagogies work in Queensland (and adapted across the country) ought to provide starting points for assessing the quality of teaching *within* teacher education programs.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary pedagogical approaches (*integration*) are central to national, state and territory mandatory curriculum and policy documents. Given the emphasis placed upon such approaches, the inquiry should examine how these specific approaches are dealt with and modeled in teacher education programs.

### **Specific Comments**

1. The Terms of Reference make no reference to environmental education. To ensure that environmental education is integrated into all Australian schools, teachers must engage in effective teacher education in environmental education based upon suitable teacher standards (Cutter-Mackenzie, 2005).
2. The Terms of Reference state that they will review the ‘*preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia’s schools*’. The inquiry needs to investigate if and where and how ‘future demands’ are articulated and communicated to teacher education faculties.
3. The second Term of Reference is about examining the extent to which courses can attract high quality students. *Is this really how it works? Do students not pick their careers until they have seen the quality of the courses?* This inquiry needs to examine the factors that help senior secondary students make career and education choices and those that attract students into teaching.
4. The fifth Term of Reference refers to the educational philosophy of teacher education courses. This is important to do. Equally important is to examine the extent to which each teacher education institution’s philosophy is made explicit, is communicated to students and is held up for discussion and critique.

5. The Term of Reference Seven suggests teachers are to deal with 'dysfunctional families'. *Is this the responsibility of teachers?*
6. Term of Reference seven should specifically incorporate environmental education and student teachers' preparation (and ability to teach) in this area.
7. Research relevant to the tenth Term of Reference strongly recommends that all teachers undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that is sustained, cumulative, ongoing and in, many instances, collaborative (Hoban, 2002). Further, environmental education needs to be the focus of separate CPD courses as well as integrated into CPD related to other topics/subjects. Coming from the perspectives of complexity and systems theories, Hoban (2002) argues that 'teacher learning' is part of a spider-web of interactions that must be considered for educational change to be successful. He also notes that 'teacher learning' is at the core of educational change and that the perceptions teachers have about teaching and learning is the basis of teacher learning. In this situation, therefore, teachers' perceptions about teaching and learning need to be challenged.

On behalf of the AAEE Teacher Education SIG, I submit this statement and trust that it will inform and enrich the current inquiry. Should you have further queries or need for clarification, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Amy Cutter-Mackenzie at [Amy.CutterMackenzie@Education.Monash.edu.au](mailto:Amy.CutterMackenzie@Education.Monash.edu.au) or on (03) 990 44638.

Yours sincerely,



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