

Secretary: *Frank Noonan*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

SUBMISSION NO. 16

Melbourne Environmental Jobs Network  
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Australia

26 August 2002

Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage,

**Response by the Melbourne Environmental Jobs Network Inc. to the Inquiry into Employment in the Environment Sector.**

The Melbourne Environmental Jobs Network (MEJN) Inc. commends you on the decision to run this inquiry. We are an organisation which started due to the large number of graduates being unable to find employment in the environmental field. I hope this inquiry will be able to add further momentum to alleviating this problem.

MEJN is a non-profit web-based organisation run by volunteers, which aims to be a central resource for environmental jobs and career information in Victoria and across Australia. We are a unique resource in Australia with very few other services or products focusing on how to find, apply and get environmental jobs.

MEJN is very popular and has found that indeed people are despondent at the perceived inability to get a job in the field they are passionate about and which they have spent many years studying. We currently have 15 active volunteers, over 100 members, and the City of Melbourne as a Principle Partner of the network. The work put into producing the free web-based resource is obviously well received as we have over 2,000 visitors to the web site each week. This is growing all the time, especially as we continue to expand to a national service.

MEJN was set up in early 2001 by two environmental graduates, a web graduate, and a commerce student. We all knew how hard and demoralising it was looking for employment in the environmental field, and have found that many volunteers, members, and customers have shared similar experiences. Here are just some of the responses to our web site:

"Thank you for setting up this very helpful web site. Looking for environmental jobs in the usual mediums was quite disheartening until I came across MEJN!"

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"I thought that I would just write a quick note to say how refreshing it is to see your web site. As an environmental graduate and full time job seeker for the past year, I found your web site to contain many interesting notes of information and links."

"I would like to congratulate you on the wonderful job you have done creating the MEJN web site. I saw it for the first time today and already it has helped me more than any of my lecturers have in how to search for a job."

"Hey, I think it's a great web site. I would love to have a job where I can help the environment at the same time."

"What a great web site you have developed. The site provides me access to more jobs out there, so I thank you."

### **1) The current contribution of environmental goods and services to employment in Australia**

The current contribution of environmental goods and services to employment in Australia is growing. The growth rate of the sector can be seen by the amount of jobs we have on our web site. We currently have between 60-80 jobs online at most times. We know that this is only a drop in the ocean compared to what is out there, but it gives some indication. This is especially because Victorian jobs make up the largest proportion of jobs on the MEJN web site, so when we expand further into the Australian market this number will certainly rapidly grow.

The environment sector is diverse, and in the future there will be few industries which will not have an environmental officer in some regard. There is growing demand for business to become more environmentally accountable from the community, government and shareholders. Most of the car manufacturers for example stipulate that to get the contract to supply a component the organisation must have an Environmental Management System. Australia must be in the position to respond to these demands and we have trained professionals who are equipped to do so.

There is also a huge chance to grab the bull by the horns and become a world leader rather than follower in environmental technology. Australia invented the world's first solar panel, but now purchase most environmental technology from overseas. In Victoria for example we export \$400 million in environmental technologies. However, we import \$1.6 billion. If we were able to turn this around we would have a \$1.6 billion industry, which would employ many Australians, boost the economy, and help the global environment. This is in Victoria alone, and just in the environmental technology sector.

Australia can become a world leader in environmental goods and services, but this requires a change of thinking and priorities.

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**2) The future potential growth, including barriers and opportunities for growth, of environmental goods and services and impact on employment**

One of the barriers for potential growth of the industry is the amount of qualified people that are turning away from the industry due to lack of initial opportunities. There needs to be better programs in place to allow graduates to get that foot in the door. Many of these jobs are also going to friend of friends, and are not occupied by the most highly skilled people. It is only by getting the right people into the right jobs that the industry will develop, benefiting the economy, society, and the environment.

**3) Current status and future requirements for an appropriately skilled workforce**

There are many people who are becoming highly skilled in environmental studies from universities, however they find that it is very hard to get jobs of their choice at the end. Therefore, we see a future requirement for this skilled workforce being the jobs available at the end, and the programs to bridge the gap between university and the workforce to ensure that they do not get disgruntled and turn away. Many employers are seeking qualifications and experience that are far above graduates, and the numbers of people looking for these kinds of jobs far exceeds the positions available.

Anecdotal evidence that has come through MEJN suggests that this is still the case. Kimone Stacey-Missen, an Environmental Project Officer at the City of Melbourne, says the following: "Out of 30 people to do my course there is only two of us that have gone onto get employment in the field. The rest are working in non-environmental disciplines due to the frustration and inability to land that first job. I was lucky."

Evidence that the demand is just too high was shown when I applied for a job at the Department of Natural Resources, looking at ecological research surrounding forest communities. This was exactly what I had just completed my honours in (after a Bachelor of Environmental Science). It was only a VPS-2 paying \$28,000 so I thought I was a chance. However, I did not even rate an interview. There were too many people with PhD's and/or substantial industry experience who applied. And that was for a job under \$30,000 a year.

MEJN would like to be involved in a survey of graduates and employers to get more substantial evidence to back this up. We would be pleased to work with the House of Representatives as part of this inquiry, or alternatively would be pleased if you could point us toward possible sources of funding.

**4) Appropriate policy measures that could encourage the further development of the environmental goods and services sector**

The major focus at this time needs to be on connecting employers with environmental work to people seeking such positions. A strong environmental sector requires a large,

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qualified, passionate and talented group of people seeking environmental jobs. Too many people stumble at finding that first job in the field and then give up. Policy measures should be aimed at marketing environmental jobs and the sector in general, and improving the communication between employers and job seekers so that the many jobs that do exist are advertised to the largest possible audience.

Yours Sincerely,

**Michael Oke**

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