



WORKING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

As we enter the 21st century it is apparent to many people across the world that humanity is confronted with a wide range of environmental problems, including global climate change, water and air pollution, mountains of waste, diminishing biodiversity, and an ever increasing human population (Renner, 2000). Addressing these challenges will require a considerable shift in our systems of production and consumption. An underlying fear is that greater sustainability will cause economic disruptions and result in unemployment.

The notion that jobs and environmental protection are incompatible goals has therefore created tension between labour unions, business leaders and the environmental movement (Renner, 2000). In reality there is little evidence to suggest that higher environmental standards results in any significant job loss (Goodstein, 1999). In fact, jobs are more likely to be at risk where environmental awareness is low and where innovation is lagging.

It is possible to see the beginnings of a more sustainable economy and the jobs that will grow out of it in wind power generation, investment in solar photovoltaic technology, and production of energy efficient lights (Renner, 2000). The future for renewable energy looks very bright indeed and this should result in a whole new employment sector (ACG, 2003). There is also considerable potential for job growth in energy and materials efficiency, as well as recycling and re-manufacturing. The growing commitment within organisations to extend the life of products and maximise utility will further stimulate employment opportunities (ENDS, 2002).

Government regulations, international conventions, pro-active business, and community concerns have all helped to create a sizable environmental industry that employs at least 11 million people worldwide with the promise of millions more in the near future (Renner, 2000). The growing numbers of environmental organisations, and the jobs that go with them, also generates legitimacy for the debate about the health of the environment and sustainable development.

Around the globe people are working on some immense tasks: 1) to restore damaged ecosystems to a healthy and vibrant state; 2) to reduce the negative environmental impacts of our society; and 3) to build a sustainable way of life for future generations. This is the world of environmental jobs and careers where the challenges are as big as the rewards (Doyle *et al.* 1999). Working for the environment is stimulating, vital, and worthy of devotion.

Many young Australians with concerns for the environment are talented, passionate, qualified and ambitious. They want to be working in organisations that are environmentally and socially responsible. But there are few services that provide information on environmental jobs or bring job seekers together with the relevant employers to transform these concerns into careers of choice.

In early 2001, the Environmental Jobs Network (EJN) was formed by a group of young students who were frustrated by the difficulties confronted by those seeking employment in the environmental field. EJN is a not for profit incorporated association with the mission to

help job seekers (see figure 1), primarily students and recent graduates, and employers (see figure 2) share and find valuable information on environmental jobs and careers in Australia.

Figure 1: What some employers have to say about EJM

"The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) advertises our vacant positions on the EJM website because it provides us with the opportunity to reach committed, passionate and skilled people who have the very great potential to join ACF as staff members and work positively to protect, restore and sustain Australia's environment."

"Earth Systems was pleased with the number and quality of applicants for the position advertised on EJM. Our last ad was in a newspaper. It was expensive, had a shelf life of only a single week, and ultimately did not produce a suitable candidate. EJM will definitely be our first stop next time round."

Figure 2: What some job seekers have to say about EJM

"I would like to congratulate you on the wonderful job you have done creating the EJM website. 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."

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

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

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

EJM utilises the internet to connect people by firstly, providing a website, which lists environmental jobs and events from throughout Australia, and secondly, circulating a weekly e-bulletin. EJM also acts as an information service with up-to-date webpages on how to get your foot in the door and find employment in the environmental sector. There are webpages on graduate programs, environmental organisations, volunteer work, vacation work, and environmental education.

EJM has had its services recognised in the community through the "Spanner in the Works" awards run by the Anna Wearne Trust, which acknowledged "the community contribution, initiative and commitment that these students have made in their unselfish quest to benefit others in society. EJM has filled a significant gap in creating a network which enables ongoing communication among those working in the environmental field and students entering the environmental field."

The health of the environment is a significant concern for many Australians. Young people stand out in the community as being pro-active when it comes to environment and development issues. Many of these people believe that it is necessary to achieve a balance between environmental, social and economic demands (Connell *et al.* 1998). It should not be surprising then that a growing number of recent graduates are seeking work with an environmental edge.

But finding meaningful and rewarding employment is not easy – in fact it is hard work. For students the transition between university studies and the workforce can be much more difficult than most imagine. Competition in the environmental industry among fresh graduates is tough (ENDS, 2002). For those already working who want a change in direction it can also be hard to know where to start. EJN fills a gap in Australian employment services and acts as a link between the environmental industry and job seekers, especially young people. For EJN, the importance of environmental jobs is clear – the more people there are working to protect the environment, the better it is for the world today, and future generations.

References

Allen Consulting Group (ACG). (2003) *Sustainable Energy Jobs Report*. Melbourne: ACG.

Connell, S., Fien, J., Sykes, H. & Yenchen D. (1998) Young People and the Environment in Australia: Beliefs, Knowledge, Commitment and Educational Implications. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*. 14: 39-48.

Doyle, K., Heizmann, S. & Stubbs, T. (1999) *The Complete Guide to Environmental Careers in the 21st Century*. Washington: Island Press.

Environmental Data Services (ENDS). (2002) *Environmental Consultancy Directory*. London: ENDS.

Goodstein, E. (1999) *The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction about Jobs and the Environment*. Washington: Island Press.

Renner, M. (2000) *Working for the Environment: A Growing Source of Jobs*. Washington: Worldwatch Institute.

The **Environmental Jobs Network** (EJN) is a not for profit incorporated association with the mission to help job seekers and employers share and find valuable information on environmental jobs and careers in Australia.

WORKING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT by Kes McCormick is part of a series of papers on environmental jobs. The aim is to develop several papers and with the help of sponsorship to combine the papers in the publication of a comprehensive guide. Please contact EJN for more information about the project.

Web: <http://www.environmentaljobs.com.au/>

Email: ejn@environmentaljobs.com.au

Copyright © 2004 Environmental Jobs Network