

Plenary Session 6 – Thursday 29 June 2006

The Environment and Climate Change

People have the Power to Change the World

Sue Lennox, Co-Founder/CEO Oz GREEN

Oz GREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network Australia Inc) is an independent, not for profit organisation best described as a social enterprise. Oz GREEN was established in 1992 and is working nationally in Australia and internationally in India, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Pakistan.

Oz GREEN runs life changing learning and leadership programs for sustainability. We harness the creativity and intelligence of people to build pathways to a sustainable future. Our goal is to enable people to tackle the major issues of our times – water and climate change. These issues are environmental but the solutions are social.

Oz GREEN Beginnings

During my career as a teacher over the past 30 years, I have become increasingly concerned about the state of the world and growing levels of despair and overwhelm amongst the young people I had the privilege to teach. Social research tells us that 89% of young people are very worried about the environment but they do not know what to do. (NSW EPA 2002, unpublished) I felt a real responsibility to build the skills and resilience of young people to be able to face up to these serious challenges and move through the sense of overwhelm into engaged and informed action. This search has led me to draw on learning from the indigenous communities I have had had the privilege to know and from the fields of community development, health promotion and environmental education. I am especially grateful to wonderful social change agents such as Fran Peavey and Joanna Macy for the valuable contributions they have both made to this field.

During the late 1980's, my husband Colin and I developed award winning environmental education programs at Freshwater High School on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. There was a particular incident when a major pollution event in our local lagoon caused the death of thousands of fish. The kids we were working with were very angry. We worked with them to identify what they could do about it. They came up with one hundred different ideas, and we settled on three that they felt they could achieve. They decided to begin testing the quality of the water; to go out and personally interview the 1500 businesses around the school; and the make video about the importance of the lagoon and what people could do to protect the environment.

It is important to note that none of us knew how to do any of these things when we started. We began a water quality monitoring program at the school and were contacted by Sydney Water. We were able to work with them during the early years of establishing the Streamwatch Program and were the first Streamwatch school. This program now involves 15000 groups nationally. The kids went out to interview businesses about what they were doing to care for the lagoon and in the process we learnt what powerful educators of adults they can be. The video ended up winning a UN Media Peace Prize. The school was designated as a Centre of Excellence in Environmental Education and many people started to come to see what we were doing.

As a result we were invited to travel to India to help the Clean Ganges campaign. This journey was to change our lives. Seeing the impacts of the global water crisis first hand we decided we had valuable skills to contribute. The following year we left their work as teachers, sold our home, moved our young family in with Colin's Mum and set up Oz GREEN as two volunteers working out of a borrowed garage.



Today Oz GREEN is working nationally in Australia and Internationally in India, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Pakistan. Oz GREEN has three headline programs in Australia: Youth LEAD, MYRiveR and Living Communities.

Living Communities – is our sustainable living education program that strengthens local communities and brings people together to adopt more sustainable ways of living. Volunteer *Eco-team Leaders* are trained to facilitate the program with their own community – be that workplace, local church, neighbourhood, club or friends and family. To date 150 volunteer team leaders have been trained.

Our current **Living Communities** hero is James, a wonderful 15 year old from City of Onkaparinga in South Australia who has wiped a massive 66% off his family's footprint since beginning the program in March this year. We are currently working with Dimension Data to trial the program with staff as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility program. Participants have achieved an average 27% and a 200 point reduction in their ecological footprint to date (taking the average from 4 planets to 3 planets). Significantly they rate their capacity to work as agents of positive change within the business, has increased from an average score of 2/10 to an average score of 8/10.

In Australia, Oz GREEN has a geographical focus on the Murray-Darling basin. We recognise the basin is one of Australia's most vulnerable environments. There has been a frightening decline in the ecological health of the river system and floodplain in the past 10 years. This is a result of the combined impacts of climate change (30% reduction in rainfall), 50% increase in extraction of water for irrigation and salinity. The Murray-Darling is Australia's biggest river system – over 3,500km in length.

MYRiveR is a whole river basin approach to engaging young people and their communities across the Murray-Darling basin to build pathways to sustainable river futures. In 2002 - 2005 Oz GREEN has worked with over 1,500 young people from 80 schools and 30 regional communities. We have travelled over 50,000 km on the ground.

MYRiveR involves schools in assessing the health of the environment, surveying their community, developing their own vision for the future and action plans for youth driven projects to achieve this vision. They then present this information back to their and ask for their help. Stage 2 MYRiveR continues to build social capital through Youth LEAD training and whole river basin youth congresses.

We have had young people come together in Sydney to address NSW Parliament and in Adelaide to address South Australian Parliament. In March this year we brought together young leaders from throughout the river basin for the MYRiveR Murray-Darling Muster. They worked together for a week to share challenges and develop ideas for projects they will undertake together over the coming months. On the final day of the program, they presented their finding to Federal Parliamentarians.

We also provide opportunities for young people to get involved in our international programs, and have had two groups of young Australians travel with us to India to participate our International Youth River Congresses on the River Ganges.

"Initially I didn't see that we could make a difference. But after MYRiveR, I now realise we can make a big difference and that youth are going to be the ones that will make these changes happen."
(MYRiveR Participant)

Youth LEAD - is building a national network of young leaders who are working in their local community and beyond to build a life-sustaining society. Youth LEAD is achieving this through leadership training and mentoring, that enables young people to face up to the big challenges of our times and develop eco-social projects that address their major concerns. *Winner of the Social Ventures Australia BIG BOOST!* **Youth LEAD** already involves 250 participants across 6 states; 95% of participants rate the program as life-changing, excellent, really relevant and worthwhile. (*Best practice Learning for Sustainability case study Australian Association for Environmental Education 2006*) We are about to pilot our first adult community leadership program based on the successes of Youth LEAD.

"Before Youth LEAD I was overwhelmed by the issues of our time... Now I am inspired, happy and empowered with a clear plan of action!" (Youth LEADer November 2005)

Young people involved in the MYRiveR and Youth LEAD programs are achieving amazing impacts in their communities. For example the young people for Renmark in South Australia have grown up on the River Murray. In their life time they have watched the river red gum forests die. They decided that the community was not responding to this situation. They decided to run a major community event to draw the communities attention to what was going on. They garnered the support of their school, local council and local businesses and succeeded in running a major media campaign across print, radio and TV (including an annoying jingle!) that reached 20,000 people in the Renmark area. Their event involved 600 participants. More importantly their school recognised the impact of the project on both the kids and the community and established a new school action based learning program called "Hands on Land and Water". These young people have just been with us in Alice Springs as youth to youth mentors in the Youth LEAD program. Their story has inspired many thousands of young people to see they can make a difference. They have been key note speakers at the National Irrigators Conference and teacher professional development programs. They have won many awards for their work. They are currently embarking on their 3rd action plan – this time to run a program with students in year 6 and 7 – to engage them in caring for the river.

Oz GREEN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Clean Ganges Campaign, India (Varanasi, 1992 - present)– working in partnership with the Sankat Mochan Foundation to conduct environmental education programs with schools, river priests, media, boatmen, community: village water supply program; strategic planning and capacity building. Together we have established an environmental education centre and water quality research laboratory.

East Timor (Oecusse, 2000 – present) Village Environmental Action Planning (VEAP) involving local communities in mapping their village resources, developing a vision and plans to restore their land and waters. East Timor program also includes an extensive schools environmental education program.

Papua New Guinea – (Western Province and East Sepik Province 1998-2001) Oz GREEN has been working in partnership with Ecoseeds in Daru and East Sepik Local Environment Foundation in Wewak. We have conducted capacity building and training programs with our partners organisations to enable them to facilitate the VEAP

Youth Water Challenge is an exciting new joint initiative of Oz GREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network Australia Inc) and the Duke of Edinburgh International Award for Young People Asia Pacific Region (IAA). The project involves young people in assessing the health of the environment, developing their own vision and action plans and implementing eco-social projects they have designed. The scope of the Water for Life Project can be tailored to meet the needs of different communities. IAA and Oz GREEN are committed to establishing the Water for Life Project as a project which is youth driven and conducted in the spirit of co-operation with key stakeholders.

Youth Water Challenge is measurable, It has reach and is a transferable model – essential criteria for rolling out in the Asia Pacific Region. If implemented successfully, this innovative programme has the potential to propel the Award Programme to a leadership position in environmental education among youth in Asia and the Pacific and can work towards achieving a sustainable future for all countries involved.

Youth Water Challenge – MYRiveR Pakistan Pilot - Training of Pakistan coordinators and volunteers was undertaken by Oz GREEN in November 2005. Sixty awardees worked with Award staff and Oz GREEN to undertake a study of the Ravi River in Lahore and prepare visions and plans for action. The biggest concern for young people was the lack of awareness about the state of the river and what communities and businesses need to do to prevent pollution. Young awardees have



since completed the implementation of their action plans, with most choosing to focus of awareness raising activities in their schools. Feedback from program participants was very positive.

I have never learned so much and had so much fun before. Water for Life is a wonderful program.
(Participant Lahore Pakistan Nov 05)

Youth Water Challenge – Youth LEAD Pakistan Pilot The second stage of the training program took place in April 2006. Eight awards staff and volunteers were trained in program facilitation. A group of thirty young awardees participated in the first Youth LEAD training workshop that ran over 4 days. The range of action plans was extensive, with most choosing to begin in their own homes by reducing water and energy consumption. Once again participants chose to focus on community education activities – focusing on their local communities, local business and local farmers.

Following the completion of the pilot program, it is planned to extend the program to extend the program to other states of Australia and other award countries in the Asia-Pacific Region (including Fiji, India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia in the first instance and extending to New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore). There is potential for additional new programs to be developed as new countries come into the program – including Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia.

Shoot for the best and prepare for the worst

Oz GREEN enables people to design practical positive social actions and reach for big visions through carefully planned small steps. We also recognize the need to prepare for the worst. This year our international programs in India, Pakistan and East Timor have been directly affected by the social impacts of terrorism or political and social unrest. We have learnt many sobering lessons about the need to pay very close attention to what is happening in our world – including facing up to the big challenges before us.

This is our watch on this wonderful Earth we share with so many other species. It is up to us to rise to the challenges before us and to bring our best as we seek to consciously evolve and bring world peace into being. It has been an incredible privilege for me to meet you all and I wish you well on your forward journeys from here. Please contact me if there are ways that Oz GREEN can contribute to the visions you have for your place.

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Sue Lennox - Oz GREEN Co-founder/CEO (BSc DipEd)

To Sue, Oz GREEN is not a job – it is her strategic response to her deep concern about the world's waters and her vision to build a more sustainable, peaceful and equitable world. Sue, along with her husband Colin, has been the driving force behind Oz GREEN since its inception. She has 30 years experience in environmental and health education program innovation, development, management and implementation in Australia, India, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Pakistan.

Oz GREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network – Australia Inc) is an independent, not for profit organisation established in 1992. Oz GREEN runs life changing learning and leadership programs that harness the creativity and intelligence of people to build pathways to ecologically sustainable futures. Donations to Oz GREEN are tax deductible in Australia.

Sue has received Banksia Environmental Awards, UN Media Peace Awards, Environmental Educator of the Year (1998), Award for Excellence in Teaching from NSW Department of Education and her former school was designated a Centre of Excellence in Environmental Education. Sue is an Australia Day Ambassador. She represents the NGO sector on the NSW Government Advisory Council on Environmental Education. She is a member of the Australian Association for Environmental Education and Women Chief's of Enterprise International. Oz GREEN is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct and a member of the AusAID NGO Cooperation Program.

