



Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability  
Victoria

Living well within our environment

# Assessments of community education for sustainability – *Framework*

January 2007



## Executive summary

This framework explains how Victoria’s Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (“the Commissioner”) will assess the State Government’s sustainability education programs. The assessments will focus on community education programs that are not primarily delivered through the formal education system. The Commissioner has a responsibility to advise the Minister for Environment, Water and Climate Change on the effectiveness of these programs.

The aim of the assessments is to achieve more effective community education for sustainability in Victoria by providing independent scrutiny, reporting and expert advice. They will have two main parts:

- *Strategic assessments* – managers of all education programs delivered or funded by government agencies (within the scope) will report to the Commissioner on their programs. The Commissioner will use these reports to examine how well these programs are, as a whole, contributing to effective community education for sustainability. These assessments will be conducted regularly to track changes over time.
- *Program assessments* – the quality of some education programs will be examined in greater depth. A small number of programs will be assessed in this way each year. The Commissioner will work with program providers directly or through researchers and consultants to conduct these assessments.

The assessment findings will be formally reported to the Minister for Environment, Water and Climate Change and made publicly available.

Throughout the assessments, the Commissioner will look for evidence of improved environmental outcomes. However, other changes that promote sustainability (e.g. community strengthening) will also be highlighted.

The Commissioner is keen to ensure that the assessments are a useful learning process for all involved. The Commissioner will work with education providers to promote the development of more effective education programs, while keeping an independent perspective.

### Work plan

A separate work plan accompanies this framework. It identifies:

- the scope of the assessments, which will initially be limited to selected government agencies
- the timeframe and process for implementing the assessments.

Copies of the work plan are available at [www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au) and hard copies can be requested from the Commissioner’s office by calling (03) 9637 8173.

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# 1. Introduction

*Victoria is proud to be one the most liveable places in the world. However, there is a tension at the heart of our liveability. All Victorians want the benefits of a high quality of life. We want high quality goods and services, but we do not want the drawbacks such as pollution, climate change, congestion and waste. Collectively, the daily actions of all Victorians are having a significant impact on the environment.*

– Our Environment, Our Future<sup>1</sup>

The Victorian Government is committed to making Victoria a sustainable state.<sup>2</sup> Education must play a critical role in this process. Ongoing learning is needed that enables and encourages all people to make changes that contribute to sustainability. This learning needs to go to the heart of government, business and the many communities that make Victoria.

Victoria's Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability ("the Commissioner") has developed this framework to assess the State Government's sustainability education programs. The assessments aim to contribute to more effective learning in the community to make Victoria a better place to live and more sustainable in both a local and global sense.

*Since 1992, an international consensus has emerged that achieving sustainable development is essentially a process of learning.*

– UNESCO (2002:7)

## 1.1. The role of the Commissioner

The Commissioner is an independent voice that audits and reports on environmental sustainability.<sup>3</sup> The main objectives of the Commissioner are to:

- report on the natural environment
- encourage ecologically sustainable development
- enhance knowledge and understanding of environmental issues
- encourage sound environmental practices across government.<sup>4</sup>

Ecologically sustainable development is central to everything the Commissioner does. This is "development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends"<sup>5</sup> (see Appendix 1 for more details).

A key function of the Commissioner, as stated in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, is to:

*audit public education programs relating to ecologically sustainable development and advise the Minister [for Environment, Water and Climate Change] as to the effectiveness of the programs in encouraging the community to adopt ecologically sustainable development principles and practices.<sup>6</sup>*

This framework explains how the Commissioner will fulfil that function. It has been designed to provide consistency over time (to allow comparisons between assessments) as well as flexibility (so that the assessments can adapt with experience).

## 1.2. Purpose of the assessments

The Commissioner will assess the government's sustainability education programs, with a focus on community education programs that are delivered outside of the formal education system.

The assessments will involve:

- *Auditing* – looking back at what was done to evaluate performance.
- *Advising* – looking forwards and providing guidance.

The aim of the assessments is to encourage more effective community education for sustainability in Victoria by providing independent scrutiny, reporting and expert advice. The emphasis on seeking more effective education programs is significant. A guiding principle of the Commissioner is that decision making should focus on developing solutions and achieving improvements.<sup>7</sup> The assessments will also help the government to ensure that it is getting good value for the investments being made in sustainability education programs.<sup>8</sup>

Section 3.2 identifies specific outcomes that the assessments aim to achieve.

## 1.3. How this framework was developed

Key steps in the development of this framework were:

- The Commissioner sought advice from experts in the field of education for sustainability on possible approaches for the assessments. Advice was received from Daniella Tilbury and Kristina Cooke (Macquarie University), John Fien and Matthew Bentley (RMIT University) and Brian Sharpley (Victorian Association for Environmental Education).
- The Commissioner held a consultative forum, in collaboration with the Victorian Association for Environmental Education, to seek the views of Victoria's sustainability education community on how the Commissioner should proceed with the assessments.
- Ongoing guidance was provided by the education sub-group of the Commissioner's Reference Group.<sup>9</sup>
- A working group was established to discuss the details of a draft framework. This group included people from government agencies and local non-government organisations. Representatives were from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Sustainability Victoria, the Environmental Protection Authority, CERES, Environment Victoria and the Gould Group.
- A draft framework was released for public comment in September 2006. Feedback on the draft was incorporated into this final framework.

The Commissioner is grateful for the involvement of everyone who participated in this process.

## 1.4. Structure of this framework

This document has 4 sections:

- Section 1** Provides an introduction.
- Section 2** Explains community education for sustainability and explores features of effective education programs. It also explains how effectiveness can be assessed and considers the current state of community education for sustainability in Victoria.
- Section 3** Identifies the approach that the Commissioner will use to conduct the assessments. It explains the desired outcomes of the assessments and their focus.
- Section 4** Explains how this framework will be evaluated and refined with experience.

### *Work plan*

A separate work plan accompanies this framework. It identifies:

- the scope of the assessments, which will initially be limited to selected government agencies
- the timeframe and process for implementing the assessments.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Achieving effective community education for sustainability

### 2.1. What is community education for sustainability?

Education for sustainability aims to encourage and equip people to make changes, in their own lives and in their communities, which improve quality of life and maintain or improve the natural environment.<sup>11</sup> Individuals and organisations across society, including those in government, business and the wider community, need to be actively involved in learning to achieve sustainability.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of this framework, 'community education' refers to education programs that are aimed at people in the 'general public' and are *not primarily delivered through the formal education system*.<sup>13</sup> It encompasses a broad range of education methods and approaches, and can include aspects of:

- community engagement by government agencies
- adult education
- community development.<sup>14</sup>

Community education for sustainability can be provided by various organisations, such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations, universities, TAFEs or businesses.<sup>15</sup> This framework is designed to assess programs delivered or funded by Victorian Government institutions.

*In Australia, community education has evolved over time to result in a diverse range of learning for sustainability programs initiated at governmental and non-governmental levels. Community environmental education ranges from 'add on' or 'feel good' programs that focus on information sharing to participatory programs that focus on action and lifelong learning aiming to build healthy and vibrant communities.*

– Tilbury and Cooke (2005: 58)

Some examples of community education for sustainability, using energy as a theme, are:

- a media campaign that raises awareness of the links between energy use and climate change
- encouraging households to save energy and money, in combination with energy audits and incentives to install more energy efficient appliances
- public forums to explore the implications of peak oil and climate change for local communities
- workshops to develop scenarios for the future of local communities, with a focus on energy use and supply.

#### Terminology

This document uses the terms 'education for sustainability' and 'sustainability education' interchangeably. The relationship between these terms and 'environmental education' is discussed in Appendix 2.

## Community education approaches

Many approaches can be used in community education for sustainability. They range from simple communication techniques, such as information sharing, to approaches that encourage deeper learning. Table 2.1 identifies some common methods. They vary widely in their philosophy and intent, such as:

- using one-way communication or developing dialogue
- emphasising individual actions or community-wide changes
- focusing on 'end-of-pipe' solutions (e.g. recycling) or source reductions (e.g. redesigning production processes)
- using ongoing reinforcement techniques to shift behaviour (e.g. through marketing) or developing deeper understanding and learning (e.g. through critical thinking and reflection) that embeds changes
- pre-determining the actions that people should take or supporting people to develop their own potential to change.<sup>16</sup>

*It is important that we maintain a multi-faceted approach to fostering sustainability, as different people and communities respond to different forms of encouragement, and different issues require different modes of address. Diverse interventions (such as social marketing, good legislation and community education programs) should support each other, and should consider behaviour change a goal.*

– Environment Victoria (2005:4)

Despite their differences, all these approaches have the potential to promote learning and change. Different communities have diverse needs, capabilities and learning styles, so appropriate education approaches and engagement strategies need to be selected. Wherever possible, however, increasingly active forms of community engagement should be pursued to develop the capacity of communities to deal with sustainability issues on their own terms.

It is also important to note that many community education programs actually use a combination of methods (so they will not easily fit into only one of the four categories identified in Table 2.1). Indeed, an approach that draws on the strengths of different methods is likely to contribute to the effectiveness of education programs.

### **Behaviour change: method or outcome?**

*Behavioural change is fast becoming the 'holy grail' of sustainable development policy. But understanding how, why and where behaviours change is an important pre-requisite for making progress here. – Jackson (2005: xi).*

'Behaviour change' is often highlighted as a goal of education programs. However, it is important to recognise the difference between behaviour change as a *method* or as an *outcome*.

- As a method, behaviour change is often associated with social marketing, which aims to change specific individual behaviours.
- As an outcome, behaviours can change through education or due to wider social and economic changes (e.g. to regulations, infrastructure or incentives) that encourage people to act in more sustainable ways.

To achieve significant long-term behaviour changes, governments need to consider a wide range of possible approaches and pursue the most effective combination of strategies.

For more discussion on this distinction see Environment Victoria (2005:3) and Jackson (2005). See also UK Government (2005, chapter 2).

**Table 2.1: Types of community education programs**

	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Examples of methods</b>
↑ <b>Passive</b> ↓ <b>Active</b> ↓ <b>Community engagement</b>	<i>Information sharing</i>	Raising awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing information in various forms</li> <li>• Tends to be one-way communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory services</li> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Demonstration projects</li> <li>• Internet sites</li> </ul>
	<i>Social marketing</i> <sup>17</sup>	Persuading people to change behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on marketing techniques</li> <li>• May be wide-scale or targeted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Incentive schemes</li> <li>• Market research</li> <li>• Promotions</li> </ul>
	<i>Community involvement</i>	Involving community in dialogue and / or collaborative actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue is aimed at developing mutual understanding and concern</li> <li>• Actions may be determined by education providers or driven by participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community action programs</li> <li>• Community monitoring of an area or resource</li> <li>• Public forums</li> </ul>
	<i>Capacity building</i>	Developing skills, abilities, and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the potential of individuals and groups to make changes in their own areas of influence</li> <li>• Often done in more formal settings, such as courses or workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Participatory extension<sup>18</sup></li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Scenario planning</li> </ul>

**Notes:**

- The glossary defines key terms.
- Many education programs actually combine multiple methods.
- This spectrum (from informing to empowering) has been represented by other authors in different ways. See for example the International Association for Public Participation spectrum in DSE (2005a: 27).

**Source: Adapted from Fien et al. (2001) and Tilbury et al. (2005).**

## 2.2. What makes education effective?

The effectiveness of an education program can partly be judged by its success in achieving what it set out to do (i.e. its intended or desired results). Ultimately, sustainability education programs also need to make a contribution to better environmental, social and economic outcomes (with a long-term focus).<sup>19</sup>

Much has been written on the principles of education for sustainability and features of effective programs.<sup>20</sup> Most of this work focuses on the formal education system, which has historically received much more attention than community education programs. Given the broad range of approaches that can be used for community education, and the need to design programs that suit different groups and individuals, it is difficult to identify common features of effective programs. However, there is strong agreement in the available research and among many practitioners<sup>21</sup> that:

- *Education needs to go beyond awareness-raising.* Change rarely occurs as a result of simply sharing information. Awareness-raising should only form part of education efforts.

- *Changes in attitudes do not necessarily lead to changes in actions (and vice versa)*. It is essential to develop people's capabilities to make changes.
- *Two-way communication is required*. Education providers need to constantly interact with the communities they are working with to better understand them and to ensure programs are relevant. Communities need to be listened to early in the process.
- *Education needs to be inspiring and empowering*. Negative and doomsday approaches can be overwhelming. It is important to develop people's motivation to make changes and to promote actions that will make a positive difference. Environmental problems need to be placed within a context of potential solutions.
- *Most learning takes place within social networks*. People learn by observing others and by engaging in activities or conversations with family members, friends and other people in their community.
- *'Deep' learning is more likely to be developed through reflective thought and action, instead of simply telling people what to do*. A reflective learner incorporates new learning by relating it to what they already know, making sense of what it means for them, and turning thought into action.<sup>22</sup>
- *Education should not be done in isolation*. Instead, it needs to form part of wider efforts to promote sustainability, such as regulations, economic incentives, self-regulatory approaches, and changes in infrastructure and governance arrangements.

*Information campaigns have been widely used for achieving public interest goals. But they are known to be less effective than other forms of learning. Research suggests that learning by trial and error, observing how others behave and modelling our behaviour on what we see around us provide more effective and more promising avenues for changing behaviours than information and awareness campaigns.*

– Jackson (2005: xi)

*All too often, people today feel disempowered by the familiar negative images and doomsday projections about the future...all-encompassing negativity often leads to feelings of powerlessness, apathy, guilt and disillusionment, clouding the path towards real solutions.*

– Tilbury and Wortman (2004:20)

It is also possible to identify some design features of effective education programs. They should:

- clearly identify the outcomes they are seeking
- be based on good research
- promote a holistic approach to sustainability by making connections between environmental, social and economic aspects<sup>23</sup>
- be responsive to community diversity (eg. age, culture, language and income differences)
- specifically target groups and / or individuals (e.g. focusing on people who are effective at influencing others) and use methods that are appropriate for engaging with them
- have built-in evaluation processes to demonstrate if they are being effective and to enable ongoing learning and improvements
- encourage collaboration between other education programs and sectors, to share learning and boost impacts
- readily adapt with experience and changing circumstances.

Furthermore, education programs need to be part of a system that:

- provides secure, long-term support for education that builds successful learning
- addresses the most significant sustainability issues in, and for, communities
- creates opportunities for people to learn in different contexts (such as in homes and workplaces and through the media), so that individual education programs complement each other and build the momentum for change.

To ensure education programs are credible, it is also essential for governments to show good leadership on environmental sustainability. They need to demonstrate that their actions and activities are consistent with the behaviours they are trying to impart in the community. Otherwise there is a significant risk that education efforts will be undermined.<sup>24</sup> This point is particularly important when considering if education programs provide good 'value for money'. Change is more likely to occur in a supportive context that makes it easy for people to act in sustainable ways and where people can see others behaving in a similar way.

Additional features of effective education programs depend on the approach being used. The rest of this section examines elements that are particularly important for effective information sharing, social marketing, community involvement and capacity building.

### **Information sharing**

Governments have historically favoured information campaigns to raise awareness or shift attitudes in communities. As highlighted above, there is strong evidence that providing information, on its own, is ineffective for achieving change. Nonetheless, there is still a need to provide communities with information on sustainability issues. This is particularly important when there are low levels of awareness or understanding of an issue. Information-only approaches may also play a role in preparing people for new policy initiatives, or to encourage compliance with legislation.

Information needs to be accurate and should come from a credible source. To actually encourage change, it needs to be provided as part of a broader approach to community education that equips and empowers people to make changes.

### **Social marketing**

Social marketing usually focuses on individual actions that people should take to reduce their environmental impact, such as recycling, composting, or using less water.<sup>25</sup> The aim is to improve the efficiency of resource use, which is important for sustainability.

An area where social marketing is often highlighted as effective is public health education. This aims to improve community health by changing individual behaviours such as smoking.<sup>26</sup> Some of the key lessons from this area, which are also emphasised by social marketing practitioners in the environmental field<sup>27</sup>, are the need to:

- use ongoing research to understand what people think about specific issues and to see what moves and motivates them
- use 'segmentation' approaches that target different groups within a community

*Good communications can often be successful in persuading people that they have a role to play in sustainable development. But this opportunity will be wasted unless the infrastructure is there for them to make a contribution.*

– UNEP/Futerra (2005:11)

- ensure that communications form part of an integrated approach that involves other interventions (e.g. infrastructure changes, regulations and incentives) that remove barriers to more sustainable behaviour, and reward people for doing the 'right' thing.<sup>28</sup>

While social marketing can be effective (as part of an integrated strategy) it seldom addresses the underlying causes of consumption or production patterns. For example, encouraging people to recycle can lead to more efficient resource use, but a society's overall environmental impact is likely to keep growing if people are consuming more and more. To use a health analogy, encouraging people to stop smoking can *improve* health, but this will not necessarily lead to *good health* (which depends on many factors).

Social marketing tends to break sustainability issues down into small 'chunks' to enable easy communication. While this can have benefits, the complex social, cultural and economic aspects of sustainability need to be addressed through other forms of communication and education.

### **Community involvement**

Communities can be involved in local sustainability issues in many different ways, including:

- dialogue to develop deeper understanding of sustainability issues
- collaborative actions to monitor or care for a local area (e.g. beach or river)
- shared decision-making processes.

Compared to social marketing, community involvement offers more potential to encourage deeper learning among participants. There is also more scope to develop critical thinking and systems thinking (which are necessary to address the root causes of sustainability issues). However, it is often difficult to encourage many people within a community to become actively involved.

*Evidence in literature and through personal experience across DSE/DPI suggests the link between knowledge and implementing change is strongest when people who are expected to implement change are involved in developing the knowledge that provides the capacity to act.*

– DSE (2005a: 21)

Strong community involvement relies on a good sense of ownership (in both process and outcomes) among participants. Increasingly, effective involvement is being characterised by the ability of communities to participate in, influence, share and/or control planning and decision-making processes.<sup>29</sup>

### **Capacity building**

Capacity building has close parallels with formal approaches to education for sustainability. It involves developing the potential of individuals and groups to make changes in their own areas of influence. Education providers tend to take the role of a facilitator or mentor to guide participants through their learning. Capacity building is likely to involve an open-ended approach in which people in a community identify and take action on issues that are important to them.

Commonly cited<sup>30</sup> principles of effective capacity building for sustainability are:

- *participation in decision-making* – to develop ownership and responsibility for making decisions and achieving outcomes
- *critical thinking and reflection* – to encourage people to critically question and identify the root causes of problems

- *futures thinking* – to assist people in developing visions for a sustainable future and to motivate them to work towards those visions
- *systems thinking* – to better understand the complexity of sustainability issues and the relationships between different influences.<sup>31</sup>

### **Summary**

Table 2.2 summarises the features discussed in this section that are likely to contribute to effective learning and change. Some features apply to the education delivery system as a whole, instead of any single program. For example, an individual program may not target different cultural groups in a community, but the suite of programs provided by an agency (or group of agencies working together) should be responsive to this diversity. Many of the features are applicable to all types of education programs, while some features are more relevant to different approaches.

The actual effectiveness of an education program will also be influenced by many other factors that are unique to each program (e.g. the existing 'readiness' of a community to engage in learning and change). These contextual factors therefore need to be considered when considering the effectiveness of individual programs.

**Table 2.2: Key features of effective community education for sustainability**

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***Universal features***

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*Delivery system*

- Education is **integrated** and consistent with other strategies and policy tools for sustainability, which provide a supportive context for changes
- Successful education programs have **secure, long-term support**
- Education addresses the most **significant sustainability issues** in and for communities
- Education programs, as a whole, are **responsive to diversity** (e.g. cultural and socio-economic differences) in communities
- Education programs provide opportunities for **learning in different contexts**.

*Individual programs*

- Focus on achieving **outcomes** that promote sustainability
- **Promote a holistic approach** to sustainability by highlighting the connections between environmental, social and economic aspects
- Based on **good research**
- Use **two-way communication**, including early engagement with communities, to ensure education is relevant
- **Target** specific groups or individuals (champions / influencers) to foster change within social networks
- Use **appropriate methods** for engaging with target groups or individuals
- Go **beyond awareness-raising** to achieve changes in actions / lifestyles / mindsets
- **Empower** people and develop their capabilities to make changes
- Encourage **reflective learning and action**
- Include **evaluation** processes to promote ongoing learning and improvements
- **Readily adapt** with experience and changing circumstances
- Promote **collaboration** with other programs and sectors to share learning and boost impacts.

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***Approach-specific features***

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*Information sharing*

- Provide accurate information from a credible source, as part of broader approaches to community education.

*Social marketing*

- Emphasis on removing barriers / providing incentives that create a supportive context for behaviour change.

*Community involvement*

- Emphasis on community participation in planning and decision-making.

*Capacity building*

- Emphasis on participation in decision-making, critical thinking and reflection, systems thinking and futures thinking.
-

## 2.3. How can effectiveness be assessed?

*The mainstreaming of community-based action on sustainability requires a strong government framework to create the enabling conditions for it to thrive. Community projects do have the power to effect significant behaviour changes. Nonetheless, there are currently few measures of their long-term impact, or evaluation of successes.*

– UK Sustainable Consumption Roundtable<sup>32</sup>

Assessing, or evaluating, the effectiveness of education programs is inherently complex. The long-term impacts of education efforts are hard to demonstrate and it is difficult to attribute changes to any single influence. Nonetheless, it is essential to evaluate education programs to:

- *improve effectiveness* – continuously seek ways to improve education programs
- *provide accountability* – demonstrate their effectiveness to stakeholders (e.g. funding agencies)
- *facilitate dialogue* – so stakeholders can talk about, describe and make judgements about programs
- *motivate* – celebrate and share successes with education providers, participants and others.

As noted in section 2.2, education programs need to be integrated with other government strategies and policy tools to promote sustainability. These initiatives should also be evaluated, so that education programs are not evaluated in isolation.

### **Outputs, outcomes and impacts**

Evaluations and assessments can cover three aspects:

- *Outputs* – the material products or services of a program (e.g. a brochure or a training course).
- *Outcomes* – the achievements or changes brought about by a program (e.g. better understanding of a sustainability issue or a shift in behaviours). These changes may be short-term, but they provide a supportive context for longer-term changes.
- *Impacts* – the long-term cumulative effects of a program (e.g. significant shifts in lifestyles) in which changes have become the norm.<sup>33</sup>

Wherever possible, evaluations should focus on outcomes and impacts. It is important to recognise, however, that many outcomes and most impacts can only be measured over a long time period.

### **Internal evaluations and external assessments**

Although the words 'evaluate' and 'assess' are closely related, this framework distinguishes between:

- *internal evaluations* – which are done as an integral part of an education program
- *external assessments* – which are done by an independent agency.

Both internal evaluations and external assessments can be valuable.

Formal evaluation processes should be built into the design and delivery of education programs. There is not a single way to do an evaluation. Instead,

evaluation methods need to be selected to suit the unique features of each program. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used. For example, a social marketing campaign may use many quantitative measures, such as the number of people reached (an output) and measurable changes in behaviour (outcomes). A capacity-building program may use a more qualitative approach that asks participants to reflect on what they have learned and how this has contributed to their capabilities to make changes (outcomes).

The role of the Commissioner is to provide independent, external assessments of education programs.<sup>34</sup> Section 3 explains the approach the Commissioner will take.

*Not only is it impractical and costly for people not to do their own evaluation, but it is also wasteful of insiders' vast store of practical wisdom and experience on which we all act daily anyway...the insider's evaluation stand a better chance of being more practically fruitful. The outsider can, however, amongst other things, contribute a perspective that can assist insiders to be more self-critical.*

– Wadsworth (1991:21)

## 2.4. Community education for sustainability in Victoria today

*Victoria needs a unified, holistic approach for learning and behaviour change that reflects the comprehensive nature of environmental sustainability, makes best use of public resources and specifically addresses priority needs and opportunities identified through research and consultation.*

– Victoria's Draft Learning to Live Sustainably Strategy<sup>35</sup>

It is not possible to develop a clear view of community education for sustainability in Victoria today, as a comprehensive assessment has not been done. However, recent reports do provide some indication.<sup>36</sup> Many good education initiatives exist, but there have been serious concerns about the:

- fragmented nature of education programs, with a need for more leadership and co-ordination
- instability of funding and resources for education programs, which require long-term support
- lack of integration between education and policy tools such as regulations and incentives
- weak links between environmental issues and other goals, such as community strengthening or improving public health.

*...a comprehensive approach to sustainable household consumption policy including the use of regulation, economic instruments (incentives and penalties), infrastructure and information is needed. Stand alone information-based campaigns to raise awareness of environmental issues rarely produce significant or sustained behavioural change.*

– Environmental and Natural Resources Committee (2005:8)

These reports have also highlighted a need to improve:

- research into effective practice
- evaluations of education programs
- professional development and training for environmental and sustainability educators.

Similar concerns have been raised in other Australian territories and many other countries.<sup>37</sup>

In recent years, environmental and sustainability educators and the Victorian Government have made major moves to address these issues and strengthen education programs in Victoria. Key initiatives include:

- The *Sustainability Education Roundtable* – formed in 2004, as an informal, broad-based forum open to anyone with a commitment to education for sustainability. It improved dialogue on ways to improve environmental and sustainability education in Victoria and advised the Victorian Government. The Roundtable held its last forum in mid-2006. Work is currently underway to continue its legacy in other forms.
- Let's share our experiences. Let's develop more networking opportunities. Let's make room for visionaries in all their diversity. We need trans-disciplinary thinking to translate problems into opportunities.*

– Sustainability Education Roundtable (2005:6)
- The development of the *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy – the Victorian Government's framework for learning-based change for environmental sustainability. Its purpose is to "significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Victoria's approach to learning and behaviour change for sustainable living."<sup>38</sup> It was developed through extensive research and consultation and aims to set a new standard in the scale and quality of education programs. A draft strategy was released in 2005. A final strategy and action plan were scheduled for release in 2006, although they were not available when this framework was completed.<sup>39</sup>
  - The establishment of *Sustainability Victoria* in 2005 – as a successor to the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria and EcoRecycle.<sup>40</sup> Education will be a major focus of Sustainability Victoria's work, as one of their key objectives is to drive a water-, energy-, and materials-saving culture in business, communities and government.

As section 3 will highlight, this framework is designed to address many of the concerns highlighted above. The assessments are also timely, as they will examine education programs delivered in a new institutional setting, given the recent emergence of the *Learning to Live Sustainability* strategy and Sustainability Victoria.

## 3. Assessment approach

This section identifies how the Commissioner will assess the government's sustainability education programs.

### 3.1. Overview of the approach

The Commissioner will provide independent assessments of sustainability education programs that are delivered or funded by the Victorian Government.

#### ***The assessment components***

The assessments will have two main parts:

- *Strategic assessments* – managers of education programs delivered or funded by government agencies (within the scope, as discussed below) will report to the Commissioner on their programs. The Commissioner will use these reports to examine how well these programs are, as a whole, contributing to effective community education for sustainability. These assessments will be conducted regularly to track changes over time.
- *Program assessments* – the quality of some education programs will be examined in greater depth. A small number of programs will be assessed in this way each year. The Commissioner will work with program providers directly or through researchers and consultants to conduct these assessments.

To supplement these assessments, the Commissioner will also:

- Ask government agencies to demonstrate how they are contributing (or planning to contribute) to the delivery of the *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy.
- Monitor the approaches that governments in other Australian states and other countries are taking towards community education for sustainability.
- Collate findings of research and polling conducted by government agencies to assess community attitudes toward environmental sustainability issues.

These components are explained in greater detail in sections 3.3 to 3.5.

#### **Scope of the assessments**

An accompanying Work Plan for this framework (see section 1.4) identifies the scope of the assessments. The assessments will initially be limited to selected government agencies, but the Commissioner intends to extend the number of agencies within the scope over time. Longer term, the Commissioner may also investigate education programs in the formal education sector. This is because schools and higher education institutions also play an important role in developing learning and change within communities.

#### ***Focus of the assessments***

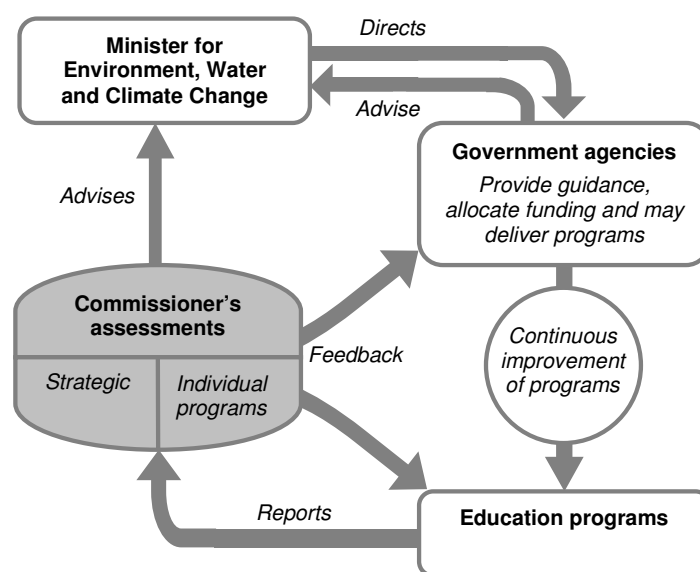
The Commissioner will not evaluate the outcomes or impacts of programs directly. This is because evaluation processes should ideally be built into the design and delivery of education programs. In addition, it would not be possible for the Commissioner to rigorously assess the outcomes of programs unless baseline information was collected before their delivery. In the strategic assessments, the Commissioner will examine the extent and quality of evaluations done by education providers. The Commissioner will also use these evaluations to build a picture of the collective impact of these programs in the

community. The program assessments will look in greater depth at any evaluations done.

Throughout the assessments, the Commissioner will look for evidence of improved environmental outcomes. However, other changes that promote sustainability (e.g. community strengthening) will also be highlighted.

### Reporting and feedback

The Commissioner has a responsibility to advise the Minister for Environment, Water and Climate Change on the effectiveness of sustainability education programs.<sup>41</sup> The findings of the assessments will be formally reported to the Minister and also shared more broadly. As Figure 3.1 highlights, the assessments will follow a cyclical process, in which ongoing assessments and feedback aim to promote continuous improvements in education programs.



**Figure 3.1: Assessment approach overview**

The Commissioner will work with education providers to promote the development of more effective education programs, while keeping an independent perspective.

### 3.2. Desired outcomes of the assessments

The assessments aim to achieve more effective community education for sustainability in Victoria by providing independent scrutiny, reporting and expert advice. The assessments seek to:

1. assist strategic, long-term planning
2. highlight successful approaches to community education for sustainability
3. contribute to an ethic of continuous improvement, based on high quality research, evaluation and professional development
4. assist collaboration across programs and between organisations
5. promote a supportive policy setting for effective education programs, with secure funding and resources targeted at achieving lasting social change
6. encourage integration of education with policy tools and approaches to achieve sustainable development.

These outcomes are aligned with the priority needs in Victoria's *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy, which were identified through extensive research and consultation.<sup>42</sup> They are also closely related to the aims of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.3. Strategic assessments

The strategic assessments will establish if the education programs provided by government agencies are, as a whole, being delivered in a comprehensive and effective way. They also aim to build a picture of the outcomes that programs are collectively having in the community.

#### **Rationale**

The strategic assessments will be done for the following reasons:

- The current state of community education for sustainability in Victoria is unclear. Also, the need for an overarching vision for this sector has been highlighted.<sup>44</sup> It is difficult to develop a clear path to the future if the existing landscape has not been well-established.
- The effectiveness of individual education programs cannot be assessed in isolation. It is important to consider the context in which education programs exist and to explore how different programs fit together.
- The Victorian Government provides many environmental and sustainability education programs through various agencies. Diversity is important, as sustainability education programs need to be customised for specific communities. However, as the *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy highlights, there is a need to ensure that programs as a whole are comprehensive (e.g. cover a range of issues and different groups of people) and that they are delivered in a coordinated way.

The strategic assessments will therefore build a better picture of the Victorian Government's efforts to provide community education for sustainability. They will look at how education programs relate to each other, to other activities of government and to major sustainability issues in Victoria and beyond.

#### **Victorian Inquiry into Sustainable Communities**

In 2005 Parliament's Environment and Natural Resources Committee reported on their inquiry into sustainable communities. The Committee was concerned that there had not been a comprehensive assessment of education programs in Victoria. They recommended that:

*6.4. As a priority the State Government in conjunction with the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability conduct a comprehensive assessment of environmental education and behavioural change programs in Victoria across all sectors by 2007. The assessment should evaluate:*

- a) the coordination and integration of programs*
- b) the content of programs*
- c) the resourcing of programs*
- d) the performance measures and outcomes of programs.*

## **Focus**

The strategic assessments will focus on the following:

### *Co-ordinated alignment with strategic government goals*

- what programs are being funded and delivered
- the objectives and desired outcomes of each program
- how, if at all, each program aims to contribute to strategic government goals for environmental sustainability
- coordination between programs (both within and between agencies)

### *Coverage of environmental sustainability issues across the community*

- content of programs (i.e. the sustainability issues addressed)
- who in the community is being targeted, and who is not

### *Community education methods*

- education approaches being used
- key influences (e.g. research) that have shaped and informed programs
- integration, where appropriate, between education and policy tools such as regulations and incentives

### *Program planning and resourcing*

- resourcing and funding arrangements for each program (current and future)
- significant changes made to programs as a result of experience or shifting circumstances
- challenges that programs are facing to achieve effective outcomes

### *Evidence of effectiveness*

- extent and quality of evaluations
- outcomes achieved by programs.

As noted previously, the Commissioner does not intend to assess the outcomes of individual programs directly. Instead, the Commissioner will examine evaluations done within programs (and highlight the need for evaluations if they are not being done). These evaluations will then be used to build a bigger picture of the outcomes that programs are collectively having.

These areas of focus are based on section 2.2, which explored features of effective community education for sustainability. Section 2.2 also highlighted the need for governments to be consistent in their own activities with any actions that they are encouraging in the community. Although the Commissioner will not directly address the broader activities of government in the assessments, other work in the Commissioner's office is relevant in this respect (see section 3.6).

### **Assessing alignment with *Our Environment, Our Future***

A major strategy of the current Victorian Government is *Our Environment, Our Future* – Victoria’s environmental sustainability framework. An accompanying Sustainability Action Statement for this strategy was released in 2006. It focuses on:

- responding to the challenge of climate change
- maintaining and restoring Victoria’s natural assets
- using resources more efficiently
- reducing everyday environmental impacts
- showing government leadership.

The *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy and action programs (discussed in section 2.4) are initiatives of this framework.

Given the importance of *Our Environment, Our Future* and *Learning to Live Sustainably*, both the strategic and program assessments will examine how education programs aim to contribute to the goals of these government frameworks.

For more information see [www.dse.vic.gov.au/ourenvironment-ourfuture/](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/ourenvironment-ourfuture/)

### **Links with desired outcomes**

The strategic assessments will contribute to the following outcomes (identified in section 3.2):

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
1	<p><i>Assist strategic, long-term planning by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing a better picture of the Victorian Government’s sustainability education programs and their alignment with strategic government goals</li> <li>– establishing a baseline for assessing progress and tracking changes over time, particularly during the implementation of the <i>Learning to Live Sustainably</i> strategy.</li> </ul>
3	<p><i>Contribute to an ethic of continuous improvement, based on high quality research, evaluation and professional development by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– assessing the extent and content of existing evaluations</li> <li>– advising on measures to encourage more widespread quality evaluations, if necessary.</li> </ul>
4	<p><i>Assist collaboration across programs and between organisations by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– looking for gaps and overlaps between education programs</li> <li>– highlighting opportunities to improve collaboration.</li> </ul>
5	<p><i>Promote a supportive policy setting for effective education programs, with secure funding and resources targeted at achieving lasting social change by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– assessing funding arrangements of education programs</li> <li>– advising on changes to promote a more supportive setting for effective education programs, if necessary.</li> </ul>
6	<p><i>Encourage integration of education with policy tools and approaches to achieve sustainable development by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– examining the extent to which education programs are linked to broader policy initiatives</li> <li>– highlighting the need for better integration, if necessary.</li> </ul>

### 3.4. Program assessments

The program assessments will look in-depth at individual education programs. They will examine the quality of their design and delivery and seek insights into effective practice.

#### **Rationale**

The program assessments will be done for the following reasons:

- Education programs will not be examined in depth in the strategic assessments, which have a high-level focus and will be general enough to cover a diversity of programs. The program assessments will address these limitations.
- Good-quality evaluations among education programs may not be widespread. If so, it will be difficult to develop a picture of the outcomes that the Victorian Government's programs are having. The program assessments will encourage good-quality evaluations by assisting educators to critically reflect on their programs and to seek improvements.
- There is a need for more research on what makes community education for sustainability effective.<sup>45</sup> Features of effective programs will also change over time. These assessments will seek insights into effective practice. This knowledge will be shared with others and will contribute to the ongoing development of the Commissioner's assessment approach.

The program assessments will also aim to develop understanding of the relative strengths and limitations of different approaches to community education (e.g. social marketing compared to capacity building).

#### **Focus**

Compared with the strategic assessments, the program assessments will be more qualitative and open-ended. This is to enable insights to emerge and to ensure that the complexities and context of each program are properly considered.

These assessments will examine:

- the purpose of the program
- how it aims to contribute to environmental sustainability and strategic government goals for sustainability
- assumptions about learning and behaviour change, and whether these assumptions are well-grounded in research or effective practice
- how, if at all, people in the community were involved in research and development for the program
- the extent to which the program empowers people in the community to make changes
- whether programs are encouraging people to reflect and think critically about sustainability issues
- in the case of social marketing in particular, the degree of integration with supporting policy instruments such as regulations and incentives
- the quality of evaluations and reporting on outcomes
- barriers to more effective practice.

These areas of focus are based on section 2.2, which explored features of effective community education for sustainability.

### **Links with the desired outcomes**

The program assessments will contribute to the following outcomes (identified in section 3.2):

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
2	<i>Highlight successful approaches to community education for sustainability by:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– identifying effective elements of programs, as well as their weaknesses or limitations</li><li>– providing case studies of successful approaches.</li></ul>
3	<i>Contribute to an ethic of continuous improvement, based on high quality research, evaluation and professional development by:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– encouraging critical reflection among educators during the assessment process</li><li>– working with educators to seek improvements</li><li>– sharing the findings of the assessments widely, as a contribution to research and professional development.</li></ul>

### **Selecting programs to assess**

The quantity of programs that will be assessed each year will depend on the resources available to the Commissioner.

A pool of possible programs will be identified through:

- monitoring by the Commissioner’s staff
- nominations by groups and individuals outside the Commissioner’s office
- self-nominations by education providers.

The criteria for selecting programs will include:

- relevance to significant and topical sustainability issues
- relevance to current government priorities for sustainability and education in the community
- public interest in programs
- resources required to do the assessments
- the need to include a range of programs (e.g. different scales / educational approaches / sustainability issues) over time.

A group of people will be involved in making the selections, including members of the Commissioner’s Reference Group.<sup>46</sup> If the need arises, a separate advisory group could also be established, subject to Ministerial approval.

The Commissioner may also receive requests from the Minister for Environment, Water and Climate Change to assess specific programs.

### 3.5. Other assessment components

To supplement the strategic and program assessments, the Commissioner will periodically undertake other pieces of work as the need arises, including those identified below.

#### ***Examine delivery of the Learning to Live Sustainably strategy across government***

Given the pivotal importance of *Learning to Live Sustainably*, and the significant amount of consultation and resources that went into developing this strategy, the Commissioner will ask government agencies to demonstrate how they are contributing (or planning to contribute) to its delivery.

This work is relevant to Outcome 1 (assist strategic long-term planning).

#### ***Encourage learning from other jurisdictions***

The Commissioner will monitor the approaches that governments in other Australian states and other countries are taking towards community education for sustainability. Successful approaches in other jurisdictions will be highlighted and compared with the Victorian Government's approach.

This work is relevant to Outcome 2 (highlight successful approaches to community education for sustainability).

#### ***Keep track of community views***

Different government agencies currently undertake research and polling of community attitudes towards the environment and their understanding of sustainability issues. The Commissioner intends to collate the findings of this research in order to develop a general picture of community views toward the environment.<sup>47</sup>

This work will be a useful complement to the strategic assessments and will contribute to Outcome 1 (assist strategic long-term planning). The Commissioner will look for differences between community understandings of sustainability issues and the focus of the government's education programs. By keeping track of this research over time, it may also be possible to highlight some of the effects that education programs are having.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.6. Links with the Commissioner's other work

The education assessments have close links with other work in the Commissioner's office.

#### ***State of Environment (SoE) reporting***

The Commissioner has a responsibility to report on the state of Victoria's environment. The SoE reports will provide information on the condition of the environment and significant influences that are affecting it. They will also evaluate the effectiveness of responses to environmental challenges and make recommendations for improvements.<sup>49</sup> The first report will be published in 2008.

Key links between the education assessments and SoE reports are:

- The SoE reports will highlight significant environmental conditions and trends in Victoria. The education assessments could highlight the extent to which the government is engaging with communities to take action on these issues.<sup>50</sup>

- Social and cultural factors will be considered in the SoE reports. The Commissioner’s framework for SoE reporting notes that “the role of education will be assessed in shaping our relationship with the natural environment.”<sup>51</sup> The education assessments will provide useful insights in this area.
- The SoE reports will include recommendations from the Commissioner on specific actions and future directions for Victoria to become more environmentally sustainable. Education is an essential response to environmental challenges. However it is important to consider the quality and effectiveness of different education approaches, which will be examined in the education assessments.

### **Environmental management system (EMS) audits**

The Commissioner carries out an annual strategic audit of the environmental management systems of Victorian Government departments and agencies. These audits aim to inform the public about the government's environmental performance and to influence the government to work in a more sustainable way.

It is essential for the government to demonstrate leadership on environmental sustainability and to set a good example to the rest of the community. This is particularly important when they are encouraging people in the community to adopt environmentally sustainable lifestyles. There is the potential for the Commissioner to highlight the consistency between the government’s community education programs and the environmental performance of government itself.

*...social learning theory highlights the critical role that Government can play in providing leadership on sustainable consumption. While Government departments may not be the most obviously influential 'role models' for consumers there are a number of reasons why the starting point for effective behavioural change policy should be the example of government. In the first place, a failure to exemplify the behavioural changes that policy wishes to see will significantly undermine any information and persuasion campaigns in which the government attempts to engage. In the second place, the example of successful internal procurement and environmental management programmes sends a strong signal to both businesses and consumers both about what is possible, and that government is serious about achieving what is possible.*

– Jackson (2004: 111)

### **Our Environment, Our Future review**

The Commissioner has a role to annually review government’s adoption of the directions of *Our Environment, Our Future* – Victoria’s environmental sustainability framework (discussed in section 3.3).<sup>52</sup> The Commissioner will examine how government agencies are building the directions of this framework into their business and operational planning activities, including in their environmental management systems, where applicable.

The education assessments are likely to play a useful role in this review, as the *Learning to Live Sustainably* strategy and action programs are initiatives of this framework.

## 4. Ongoing development of this framework

The Commissioner is keen to ensure that the assessments remain relevant. This framework and the Commissioner's assessment approach will therefore be refined through experience over time. Ongoing evaluation will be built into the process. This will mainly be achieved by encouraging feedback from stakeholders, particularly government agencies and members of Victoria's sustainability education community, as well as through regular reviews.

### 4.1. Preliminary review

The first review will be conducted after completing the first full strategic assessment. Its purpose will be to investigate any difficulties during the start up of the assessments and to identify opportunities for improvements. The aim will be to make refinements, rather than overhaul, the assessment approach. It will cover both the strategic assessment and any program assessments that have been completed by this time.

Key questions that will be included in this review are:

- Were any significant logistical problems encountered during the assessments?
- Was the process sufficiently straightforward for education program providers?
- Were the findings of the assessment useful for government and sustainability educators?
- Should the approach be modified to improve future assessments and, if so, how?
- Should the scope be extended for the next assessment and, if so, how?
- Should the timeframes for the assessment be revised?

This review will involve consultation with stakeholders, including Victoria's sustainability education community and organisations whose education programs have been assessed.

### 4.2. In-depth review

A more comprehensive review will be conducted after completing the second strategic assessment. Its purpose will be to identify the emerging outcomes of the Commissioner's assessments and to investigate the ongoing relevance of the assessment approach.

Key questions that will be included in this review are:

- What have been the most significant findings and useful elements of the assessments?
- What changes have been made to education programs, based on the Commissioner's advice?
- How effective have the assessments been in achieving the desired outcomes (see section 3.2)?
- Are the desired outcomes still relevant?
- Should the approach and scope be modified to improve future assessments?

This review will also involve consultation with stakeholders, as outlined above.

The work plan that accompanies this framework identifies a time frame for conducting these reviews. Subsequent reviews will be conducted as the need arises.

## Glossary and acronyms

<i>action research</i>	a collaborative research approach that aims to improve some aspect of society through the research process, with an emphasis on reflection and cyclical (ongoing feedback) processes
<i>advisory services</i>	providing information or knowledge of specific skills to a specific group in order to raise awareness or improve practices
<i>assessment</i>	in the context of this framework, a review of performance and giving of advice to achieve improvements
<i>audit</i>	a systematic review of performance against pre-established criteria
<i>capacity building</i>	the development of skills, abilities, relationships and networks between and within individuals and groups in a community
<i>community</i>	a group of people that live in the same place or share a common interest or identity (e.g. ethnic / professional / religious)
<i>community action programs</i>	organised community actions that usually involve hands-on activities such as pest control, revegetation, monitoring or caring for specific areas
<i>community development</i>	developing the capabilities of people in a community to take control over and improve conditions in their community which affect their way of life
<i>community education program</i>	a combination of resources, processes, activities, and approaches that are designed to achieve learning-based changes in communities (primarily not through the formal education system)
<i>community engagement</i>	a planned process of interaction with groups and individuals in a community, such as consultation, advisory services, communication, education, public participation and working in partnership
<i>critical thinking</i>	an ability to question dominant views and assumptions, recognising that knowledge is never value-free
<i>ecologically sustainable development</i>	development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends
<i>education</i>	any activity that engages people in learning
<i>effective</i>	achieving an intended or desired result
<i>extension services</i>	reaching out to individuals, groups and communities to share expertise and develop their abilities to deal with issues that affect them
<i>evaluation</i>	in the context of this framework, an ongoing process for judging the effectiveness of an education program and seeking improvements, which is built into its design and delivery

<i>framework</i>	a high-level structure that provides direction
<i>futures thinking</i>	also known as envisioning, the process of exploring different visions of the future and the actions that could be taken to achieve a desired vision
<i>impacts</i>	the long-term cumulative effects of a program
<i>mentoring</i>	providing individuals and groups with support, understanding and advice
<i>outcomes</i>	the achievements or changes brought about by a program
<i>outputs</i>	the material products or services of a program
<i>reflective learning</i>	occurs when a person incorporates new learning by relating it to what they already know and making sense of what it means to them. As people become increasingly reflective, they can also develop their ability to think critically about information and ideas, and develop their ability to think about their own thinking. In contrast, non-reflective learning involves taking in information with little or no active thinking or understanding.
<i>scenario planning</i>	a tool for thinking about and preparing for the future, involving collective visioning of possible and preferred futures
<i>social marketing</i>	adapting commercial marketing techniques to persuade individuals to adopt behaviours that improve personal and social wellbeing
<i>sustainability</i>	the goal to be achieved through ecologically sustainable development, it is the ability to continue an activity into the future or maintain a state or condition undiminished (or enhanced) over time
<i>systems thinking</i>	an ability to see the 'bigger picture', to understand a larger context and recognise the relationships between different processes and parts

## **Acronyms**

CES	Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
NZPCE	New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
SoE	State of Environment
SV	Sustainability Victoria
TAFE	Technical and Further Education institute
VAEE	Victorian Association for Environmental Education
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> DSE (2005b:15).
- <sup>2</sup> See for example DSE (2005b and 2005c). DSE (2005b) provides an overview of the major environmental challenges facing Victorians.
- <sup>3</sup> The Commissioner is independent of government agencies, and reports directly to the Minister for Environment.
- <sup>4</sup> This is a summarised version of the objectives in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, section 7. Further information on the role and objectives of the Commissioner can be found at [www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au).
- <sup>5</sup> *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, section 4. Guiding principles of ecologically sustainable development are identified in this Act and are included in Appendix 1. This framework uses the term “environmental sustainability” because it is more commonly used than “ecological sustainability”. The two terms are closely related and their relationship is discussed in a paper called ‘*A Perspective on Environmental Sustainability*’ that is available on the Commissioner’s website at [www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au).
- <sup>6</sup> *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, section 8(c).
- <sup>7</sup> *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, section 10(1).
- <sup>8</sup> ‘Value’, in this context, needs to be carefully interpreted. The value of any education program should always be judged, or evaluated, against a broad set of criteria that recognise the complexity of education as part of a process for achieving social change. For example, an evaluation could measure observable changes (e.g. water saved, per dollar invested in that program) and / or more qualitative aspects (e.g. the contribution a program has made to greater community involvement in resolving environmental problems).
- <sup>9</sup> The Commissioner’s Reference Group provides advice to the Commissioner. They meet quarterly and provide insight into a range of sustainability issues. Further information on the Reference Group, as well as biographies of current members, are available at [www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au).
- <sup>10</sup> Copies of the work plan are available at [www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au) or can be requested from the Commissioner’s office by calling (03) 9637 8173.
- <sup>11</sup> There is no commonly agreed definition of education for sustainability. However, as UNESCO (2002: 43) notes, “at its heart is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come...”. The terms ‘environmental education’ and ‘education for sustainability’ are sometimes used synonymously, but see Appendix 2 for more discussion.
- <sup>12</sup> As noted in NZPCE (2004: 14), “Like other important concepts such as equity and justice, sustainability can be thought of as both a journey (something worth aiming for) and a destination (that has no pre-ordained route).” To “achieve” sustainability, the ecological processes that support life need to be maintained. These processes provide people (and other species) with good quality air, water, soil, marine life and a viable climate in which to live and to be part of.
- <sup>13</sup> The Commissioner’s assessments will not initially cover programs that are delivered through the formal education sector (i.e. schools, universities or TAFEs). However, the Commissioner may extend the scope over time to investigate this sector. It is also important to recognise that some community education programs may include a formal education component. In instances where this is the case, the Commissioner will initially focus on the non-formal aspects of community education programs.
- <sup>14</sup> There is currently no commonly used definition of ‘community education for sustainability’. This list draws on examples provided in NSW EPA (2003).
- <sup>15</sup> Although universities and TAFEs are part of the formal education system, ‘community education’ in this context refers to their engagement with local communities – not the delivery of formal education programs to students within their institutions. This can be a fluid boundary, however, as students can also be involved in community engagement during their learning (e.g. conducting action research projects with local communities).
- <sup>16</sup> Education programs often have a mix of these characteristics. For example, education programs that promote individual changes can contribute to wider community benefits. Similarly, structural changes can make it easier for individuals to change their lifestyles.
- <sup>17</sup> Social marketing is often described as a form of communication (instead of education), but for the purposes of simplicity it is included as a form of community education here.
- <sup>18</sup> The term ‘extension’ was first used to describe adult education programs that reached out from universities into local communities. Over the last 50 years, extension services

- have been provided in a variety of sectors, such as agriculture and health. Extension services range from simply providing advice to more participatory approaches, which are more focused on building capacity within communities. See Coutts *et al.* (2005) for more discussion on the meaning of extension.
- <sup>19</sup> Judgements about effectiveness are always values-based, as they are based on criteria that will include and exclude different elements. For example, an education program may be ineffective at reducing human impact on the environment (at least initially), but very effective at developing social cohesion (which may provide a foundation for further changes in the future).
- <sup>20</sup> The principles in the literature tend to be derived from the experiences of educators, evaluations of education programs, and national and international case studies. See the list of references and [www.aries.mq.edu.au/portal/index.htm](http://www.aries.mq.edu.au/portal/index.htm) for examples or reports that draw on this work.
- <sup>21</sup> See for example McKenzie-Mohr & Associates (2006); Coutts *et al.* (2005); DSE (2005c); Tilbury and Cooke (2005); Jackson (2005); UK Government (2005, Chapter 2); UNEP/Futerra (2005); Voronoff (2005); NZPCE (2004); House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (2003). See also NSW EPA (2003).
- <sup>22</sup> As they become increasingly reflective, people can also develop their ability to think critically about information and ideas, and their ability to think about their own thinking.
- <sup>23</sup> This is also consistent with the principle in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003* that the Commissioner is required to consider "the effective integration of economic, social and environmental considerations with the need to improve community well-being and the benefit of future generations."
- <sup>24</sup> Jackson (2005) makes this point in detail.
- <sup>25</sup> For example, as UNEP/Futerra (2005:14) suggest, "it is not necessary to communicate the entire concept of sustainable development in order to bring about change. Often it is more effective to focus on a single issue, such as energy efficiency or buying ethical products." These individual actions may be communicated through an overarching brand, such as New South Wales *Our Environment: It's a living thing* campaign (see [www.livingthing.net.au](http://www.livingthing.net.au)) or Auckland Regional Councils' *Big Clean Up* campaign (see [www.arc.govt.nz/arc/big-clean-up/](http://www.arc.govt.nz/arc/big-clean-up/)).
- <sup>26</sup> This is often highlighted by environmental and sustainability educators. See for example Environment Victoria (2005) and Sustainable Consumption Roundtable (2006).
- <sup>27</sup> See for example McKenzie-Mohr & Associates (2006) and UNEP/Futerra (2005).
- <sup>28</sup> Regulatory, infrastructure and economic changes are also important for enhancing public perceptions of credibility when government-led education programs are delivered. As Jackson (2004:117) notes, "government policies send important signals to consumers about institutional goals and national priorities. They indicate in sometimes subtle but very powerful ways the kinds of behaviours that are rewarded in society, the kinds of attitudes that are valued, the goals and aspirations that are regarded as appropriate, what success means and the worldview under which consumers are expected to act. Policy signals have a major influence on social norms, ethical codes and cultural expectations."
- <sup>29</sup> DSE (2005a); Tilbury and Cooke (2005).
- <sup>30</sup> See for example Tilbury and Cooke (2005); NZPCE (2004); Tilbury and Wortman (2004). These principles are discussed in much more detail in these texts.
- <sup>31</sup> For a good introduction to systems thinking, see Sterling (2004).
- <sup>32</sup> Sustainable Consumption Roundtable (2006: 52).
- <sup>33</sup> Fien *et al.* (1999).
- <sup>34</sup> This does not limit the Commissioner from working alongside education providers to undertake the assessments.
- <sup>35</sup> DSE (2005c: 7).
- <sup>36</sup> See KPMG (2004); Sharpley and Richards (2004); Environment and Natural Resources Committee (2005); and Sustainability Education Roundtable Working Group (2005). See also the priority needs and opportunities highlighted in DSE (2005c).
- <sup>37</sup> See for example NSW Council on Environmental Education (2002); NZPCE (2004); Department of Environment (Western Australia) (2004).
- <sup>38</sup> DSE (2005c: 8).
- <sup>39</sup> However, section 13.1 of DSE (2006) noted that \$5.9 million would be invested in a package of state-wide actions to deliver on the strategy. It also identifies key initiatives that form an essential part of this strategy.
- <sup>40</sup> SV also provides some services previously delivered by Melbourne Water.

- <sup>41</sup> See section 1.2 for the precise wording in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*.
- <sup>42</sup> DSE (2005c: 13). Although “integration of education with other tools and strategies” was not identified as a priority need in *Learning to Live Sustainably*, it was highlighted as a critical feature of an effective system.
- <sup>43</sup> There are seven proposed strategies for the Decade, which collectively aim to increase the promotion and implementation of education for sustainability. These include vision building; partnerships and networks; capacity building and training; research and innovation; and monitoring and evaluation. See <http://www.aries.mq.edu.au/portal/decade/aim.htm> for more information.
- <sup>44</sup> See for example Environment Victoria (2005).
- <sup>45</sup> As highlighted in section 2.2, most research on education for sustainability has focused on the formal education system. Community education has received comparatively less attention and there is little consensus on what makes programs effective.
- <sup>46</sup> See endnote 9 for more details on the Commissioner’s Reference Group.
- <sup>47</sup> This role will not be undertaken by the Commissioner if another government agency takes the lead for collating or publishing this information.
- <sup>48</sup> Some of this research may not be easily comparable over time if consistent methodologies are not being used. However, the data should provide useful snapshots of community views at different points in time.
- <sup>49</sup> For more information on the Commissioner’s SoE report, see CES (2005).
- <sup>50</sup> This is also linked to a key objective of the SOE reports, which is to “evaluate the effectiveness of current management responses to environmental issues” (CES, 2005: 3).
- <sup>51</sup> CES (2005: 10).
- <sup>52</sup> This was a responsibility given to the Commissioner through government policy. It is not a specific function in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, although the Act does provide for the Commissioner to provide advice to the Minister in relation to any matter referred to him under section 10(2) of the Act.

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## Appendix 1: Definition of ecologically sustainable development

### *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act, section 4:*

- (1) Ecologically sustainable development is development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.
- (2) The objectives of ecologically sustainable development are—
  - (a) to enhance individual and community wellbeing and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations
  - (b) to provide for equity within and between generations
  - (c) to protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems.
- (3) The following are to be considered as guiding principles of ecologically sustainable development—
  - (a) that decision making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations
  - (b) if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation
  - (c) the need to consider the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies
  - (d) the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environment protection
  - (e) the need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner
  - (f) the need to adopt cost effective and flexible policy instruments such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms
  - (g) the need to facilitate community involvement in decisions and actions on issues that affect the community.

## Appendix 2: Environmental and sustainability education terminology

This appendix discusses the relationship between the terms 'environmental education', 'education for sustainability' and 'community education for sustainability'. There has been significant debate in recent years about the most appropriate language to use in this area. The intention of this Appendix is to provide clarity on the terminology used in this framework rather than contribute to this larger debate.

### **Environmental education**

*The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.*

– The Belgrade Charter (1976)

Environmental education first gained prominence at an international level during the early 1970s. Dialogue during this decade, which produced documents such as the *Belgrade Charter* quoted above, established internationally accepted goals of environmental education and its guiding principles. Most writings on environmental education since that time have reiterated, critiqued and expanded on these founding principles and ideas. There has always been a rich diversity of approaches within the environmental education community, but environmental educators have shared a common concern to resolve and prevent problems caused by the impact of human activities on ecological systems.

### **Education for sustainability**

Education for sustainability is usually characterised as a broader concept than environmental education. Advocates of this term highlight the need to make strong connections between environmental, social and economic concerns (such as social justice, peace, equality, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the development of secure and enriching livelihoods). The literature on education for sustainability also emphasises the need to go beyond individual behaviour change and to empower people to make collective changes to social structures and institutions. The founding principles of environmental education also shared these aspirations, although educators often struggle to implement these ideals in practice.

Over the last decade, 'education for sustainability' and similar terms, such as 'sustainability education' and 'education for sustainable development', have become widely used. This framework uses the terms 'education for sustainability' and 'sustainability education' because they are now commonly used in Victoria. Furthermore, many education programs provided by government are not solely 'environmental' in their focus – they aim to achieve a range of environmental, social and economic outcomes.

### **Community education for sustainability**

The term 'community education for sustainability' is used throughout this document. This is to signify that the Commissioner's assessments will (at least initially) only focus on sustainability education programs that are not primarily delivered through the formal education system. The scope of the assessments has been kept broad intentionally so as to include communities defined geographically, culturally, socio-economically, professionally, etc.

### **Further reading on distinctions in terminology**

For more discussion see for example Tilbury and Cooke (2005) and Sauv  (1998).