



The Earth Charter and Natural Resource Management in Australia

January 2007

This updated briefing note “The Earth Charter and Natural Resource Management in Australia” is based on a discussion forum and the proceedings of the National Natural Resource Management Facilitators Forum, 25-27 October 2005, which was held in Melbourne, Australia. The theme of the forum was *“Innovation in partnerships – creating dynamic connections and alliances”*.

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Purpose of Discussion Forum

- To raise awareness within the National NRM Facilitators Network of the Earth Charter, its sustainability principles, and opportunities the Earth Charter presents for use within Natural Resource Management in Australia.
- To brief the network regarding the Australian Government Senate motion (21st June 2005) and support of the Earth Charter.

National Natural Resource Management Facilitators Forum

The National Natural Resource Management (NRM) Facilitators Forum was held in Melbourne (25th – 27th October 2005), and was hosted by the Australian Government. The forum brings together a national network of environmental, sustainability and natural resource management (NRM) professionals. The Australian Government funds the national facilitator network to support the regional delivery of NRM under the Natural Heritage Trust Extension and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The facilitators work in a variety of roles, facilitating the exchange of, and access to, information and advice on NRM policy, planning and technical innovation, between governments, regional NRM bodies, research organisations, community groups and individuals, and other stakeholders.

The theme of the forum was “Innovations in Partnerships, Creating Dynamic Connections and Alliances”. The forum attracted almost 180 participants including representatives from the 56 NRM regions from across Australia.

The Earth Charter discussion forum provided a briefing on the Earth Charter, including the Senate outcome, key Earth Charter resources and publications, examples of the Earth Charter in Australia and opportunities the Earth Charter presents.

Senate, Commonwealth of Australia, and the Earth Charter

On 21 June 2005, the following motion was put to and agreed by the Senate, Commonwealth of Australia Parliament, regarding the Earth Charter.

That the Senate—

- (a) recognises and supports the Earth Charter as an important civil society contribution to our understanding of sustainable development and the ethics and principles needed to promote a more just, sustainable and peaceful world;
- (b) notes the endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations (UN) Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; and
- (c) encourages:
 - (i) the use of the Earth Charter by federal and state educational authorities during the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and
 - (ii) the further endorsement and use by state and local government authorities of the Earth Charter as an ethical framework for more sustainable ways of living.

Source: Official Hansard, No 9, 2005, Tuesday 21 June 2005. Web link; <http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/>

Based on the Senate outcome, it is apparent there are opportunities to use the Earth Charter as a framework to enhance sustainable ways of living, and for educational purposes during the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

A brief summary is presented here to introduce the Earth Charter to the National NRM Facilitators Network, and to consider the opportunities it presents to Natural Resource Management in Australia.

About the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter was first noted as an important concept at the Brundtland Commission in the late 1980's. The Earth Charter was further developed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit where the Summit's Secretary-General, Maurice Strong, together with Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated a global non-government movement to foster and promote the Earth Charter. Since then, thousands of diverse groups and individuals around the world have debated the principles and wording that now forms the inspiring document that is the Earth Charter.

Development of the Earth Charter has included input from six international summits on related topics such as population, women and habitat held after the Rio Summit. Based on the extensive consultation process, the Earth Charter has articulated a set of important community values and a shared community vision on a global scale. The Earth Charter provides an ethical foundation from which sustainability decisions can be based upon. The Earth Charter principles give guidance for both individuals and also organisations and has considerable application for helping communities and organisations establish and determine their strategic direction.

The Earth Charter is based on four major themes, namely

1. respect and care for the community of life,
2. ecological integrity,
3. social and economic justice and
4. democracy, non-violence and peace.

The four major themes are presented as sixteen key principles which are summarised as follows:

1. Respect for the Earth
2. Care for life
3. Democratic societies
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations
5. Protect and restore ecological systems
6. Prevent environment harm and apply the precautionary principle
7. Safeguard regenerative capacities of the Earth
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability
9. Eradicate poverty
10. Ensure economic development is equitable and sustainable
11. Affirm gender equality
12. Uphold the right of all to a supportive natural and social environment
13. Strengthen democratic institutions
14. Integrate sustainability into lifelong learning
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence and peace

The full version of the Earth Charter is available at www.earthcharter.org

The Earth Charter and Natural Resource Management

The Earth Charter can offer several opportunities and benefits for use in Natural Resource Management, including:

- It can encourage an integrated approach for environmental, social and economic sustainability.
- The Earth Charter is educational for staff and the broader community.
- It can assist with cultural change within organisations.
- It can add value and quality to strategy development and investment planning processes.
- It provides an opportunity to adopt and endorse the Earth Charter as core values and principles.

Earth Charter resources

There are many useful online Earth Charter resources, which can be sourced at <http://www.earthcharter.org/> and also <http://www.earthcharter.org.au>.

Examples are provided below;

Key Resources

- [Earth Charter Handbook](#)
- [Earth Charter Workshop Tool Kit](#)
- [The Earth Charter and Strategic Planning at the City of Joondalup \(Australia\)](#)
- [Earth Charter Brochure](#)
- [Applying the principles of the Earth Charter in NGOs](#)
- [What can I do with the Earth Charter?](#)

General Information - Essays, Papers and Articles

- ["A Call for the Earth Charter" - Canada](#)
- ["The Earth Charter as a Global Ethic" - United Kingdom](#)
- ["Earth Charter Study Materials". 1998. – Netherlands](#)
- ["Earth Charter Seeks to Provide Blueprint for Sustainable Future". 2003. - United States](#)
- ["The Earth Charter and Development Ethics" - United Kingdom](#)
- [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: The UN Conference on Environment and Development. - Brazil](#)
- [The Earth Charter and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development](#)

- [The Earth Charter: A Study Book Of Reflection For Action - United States](#)
- [The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development - United States](#)

There are many examples of various governments and organisations which have formally endorsed the Earth Charter. A summary is provided below;

- [City of Berkeley, California - United States](#)
- [City of Burlington, Vermont - United States](#)
- [City of Urbino - Italy](#)

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- Florida League of Cities - United States.
 - Municipalities of Peru – Peru "...twenty four municipalities democratically elected by universal vote endorsed the Earth Charter, with the purpose of building consensus about the values and principles that should be the base for the construction of harmonious relations between society and our planet."
 - Seattle City Council - United States
 - Senate of Puerto Rico - Puerto Rico
 - The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) - Their membership is made of up to 350 cities, towns and counties around the world, which have formally endorsed the Earth Charter during its tenth anniversary World Congress in Wittenberg, Germany.
 - University for Peace - The Council of the University for Peace, meeting in San José, Costa Rica, passed a resolution endorsing the Earth Charter.
 - US Conference of Mayors - United States. Resolution of endorsement to the Earth Charter on behalf of the US Conference of Mayors.

Examples of Earth Charter Activities in Australia.

- December 2005. International publication released "**Charting the Way Forward, Cases of the Earth Charter in Motion**". This publication features 20 case studies from around the world. The publication features an Australian case study of the Earth Charter at the City of Joondalup. Refer to <http://www.earthcharter.org/files/resources/Cases.pdf>
- December 2005. The National Environmental Education Statement for Australian Schools "**Educating for a Sustainable Future**" is issued by the Australian Government. It includes two references to the Earth Charter. Refer to <http://www.deh.gov.au/minister/env/2005/mr14dec305.html>
- Clem Campbell (Queensland Earth Charter Committee) attends the Earth Charter + 5 forum in Amsterdam.
- October 2005. **National NRM Forum Earth Charter Briefing** and discussion forum held at the National NRM Facilitators Forum, Melbourne, October 2005. Discussion forum proceeding distributed to all 57 NRM regions in Australia.
- **Commonwealth of Australia Senate Parliamentary Debates**; Earth Charter motion on 21 June 2005.
- **Earth Charter Youth Leaders' Conference in Queensland**, 3 October 2005.
- **UNAA Resolution on the Earth Charter** United Nations Association of Australia passed a resolution on 30 November, 2003 in Canberra at the National Council of UNAA.
- **Special Exhibition** - Brisbane City Council Central Library and Wesley Hospital - Artistic Interpretations of the Principles of the Earth Charter, by Graeme Payne.
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The **City of Joondalup** (WA) applied the Earth Charter as part of its Strategic Planning process in 2002. A comparison between Council policies and the Earth Charter demonstrates significant common ground between the two and the value of the Earth Charter as a tool in local government strategic planning.

- Earth Charter representative Clem Campbell spoke at the **Cubberla-Witton Catchment Network** meeting in Brisbane.
- In February 1999, the inaugural **Australian National Earth Charter Forum** was held. Proceedings are available on the Australian National Committee's website, at <http://www.earthcharter.org.au/home>

Opportunities identified

The Earth Charter Discussion Forum identified and discussed (at a preliminary or conceptual level) several opportunities, such as;

- Including Earth Charter principles in NRM strategy development.
- Applying the Earth Charter at different scales (ie. regional, sub-regional, property and individual level).
- A National pilot project, for the use of the Earth Charter by Regional NRM Bodies/Catchment Management Authorities, particularly for the review and development of NRM Strategies.
- Possible applications of the Earth Charter to major issues such as climate change/greenhouse gas emissions.
- Opportunities for corporate adoption of Earth Charter principles by mid sized corporations and business organisations.

Outcomes

The proceedings of the National Natural Resource Management Facilitators Forum, 25-27 October 2005, included the Earth Charter briefing note. In this way, the 56 NRM Regions from across Australia have been provided with a preliminary briefing of the Earth Charter.

Information Credits

The information contained within this summary is sourced from the following Earth Charter web sites;

- International; <http://www.earthcharter.org>
- Australia; <http://www.earthcharter.org.au>