

ANNUAL CONSULTANTS REVIEW

Shaking up a conservative crew

Environmental consulting urgently needs new passion and new business models, argues an veteran industry watcher. Richard Collins reports.

John Cole has always had a knack for asking the awkward question that reveals the heart of an issue. After a 20-year career in sustainability circles – inaugural CEO of the now-Sustainable Business Australia, a founding executive director of the Queensland EPA and now director of the Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development – he brings the perspective of those years but has never lost the ability to question the orthodoxy.

“The fundamental question is this: We have been in the environmental business for about 50 years, since Rachel Carson wrote her book *Silent Spring*, and we must ask ourselves, are we winning,” Cole said.

“By any performance measure at a macro level, you’d have to say the human quest for sustainable development has failed on all major counts.”

Cole has been invited to focus his contrarian sights on the environmental consulting sector as chair of the upcoming EIANZ national conference. He’s promising some probing questions.

“In that [macro] context, how does the environmental management profession stack up? Are we just bar stewards on

the Titanic or are we really making a strategic impact through our work?”

“Are we using our expertise and science and insight to make a difference positively, equipping our clients to be proactive and problem solving in this space, rather than simply providing us with a lucrative ongoing retainer because the environmental problems are intractable?”

The questions are rhetorical. Cole argues too many in the profession have settled for the comfortable status quo. He is not suggesting solutions – it is up to the EIANZ and individuals to decide what the profession wants to be – but is keen to spark some soul searching.

“What I want the older aspects of the association to hear from the younger ones is passion, enthusiasm and a sense of end game, because I think we lose a little bit in our managerialist approach to things,” he said.

“We tend to put things into a holding pattern and account for projects such that they conform with the law, that they are in compliance. This is understandable because that is part of the system, but culturally as a profession we need to invigorate ourselves every now and then.”

““

Are we just bar stewards on the Titanic or are we really making a strategic impact through our work?

– John Cole

The art of collaboration

Climate change. Population growth. Resource peaks. Biodiversity extinction. Society is tentatively starting to grapple with these big-picture, systemic issues, so where do environmental consultants fit in the conversation?

Cole believes too many are dabbling at the margins and, as a result, risk marginalising themselves.

“It is not that the industry has to be activist; it just has to be more proactive,” Cole said.

The pragmatic response is to wonder how to make a dollar out of tackling systemic issues with no clear client and possibly no clear recognition of the presenting problem.

“You would only do it if you could make it work, but you may have to experiment a bit, you might have to evolve in your processes and internal discussions, to loosen up your thinking,” Cole said.

One pitch is for a new model of collaboration. ClimateWorks Australia executive director Anna Skarbek is a keynote speaker at the conference. She sees the need for innovative new delivery models.

“What I mean by delivery models is getting these solutions to the market, getting clients to undertake the solutions. Where I see the need for innovation is in one-stop shop solutions, in making it easy for clients,” she told WME.

ClimateWorks partners widely to research opportunities in carbon abatement, but it doesn’t leave the issue there. It drills down to the specific barriers for each sector.

“We hope to provide a framework, a lense through which sector experts can look at this and apply their creativity and innovation to unlocking the barrier that is most prevalent in their sector,” Skarbek said.

Still, she acknowledges the difficulty



in working out the commercial model in such work. The London investment bank she worked for did a lot of work in “market development” to bring down barriers and unlock capital around clean energy, but it is a long-term play and requires deep pockets.

“The challenge for consultancies is that it takes time and effort to do that sort of policy work and there is not necessarily any money in it. So creativity in who might support that work, or fund it, is going to be required,” she said.

Cole urged the EIANZ to take up the mantle of bringing the consulting sector together around broader projects. It could engage other industries with a stake in an issue, approach government in a more sophisticated way and establish a leadership position.

Skarbek adds two other models. Consultants with different skill sets could come together to tackle holistic problems, while partnering with independent groups such as ClimateWorks is useful in helping avoid accusations of commercial interest.

Developing holistic perspective

Cole expects consultants to become more “systems-capable”, with a broader, multi-disciplinary capacity evolving over time in response to broader issues.

“We are seeing this systems focus now in the concept of cumulative impact. Well I’d like to see it turned into this concept; cumulative possibility. Turn it on its head and think about what are the alternatives rather than the narrow technical solution,” he said.

“Coal seam gas is a good example. At the moment they are talking about either reinjecting the water into the ground or beneficial reuse, which has got people talking about ways to get rid of large volumes of water cheaply and quickly.



Professional contrarian: John Cole says consultants need to cut to the chase.

“What I think we should be doing, and what I’d like to see a consultancy doing, is looking at the region 30 years out and thinking how can this resource be used most effectively to enable the long-term sustainability of the region.

“One idea I’ve heard of is growing particular crops that would be pyrolysed and used for biochar, and for the output of the water being used for the long-term productivity of soils in the region.

“That is not the kind of thinking you get from a commercial consultant looking for an expedient, short-term fix.”

Cole has brought in some heavyweight speakers to illustrate the key challenges he sees for environmental consultants. Former Brisbane City Council CEO Jude Munro knows something about negotiating complex outcomes and dealing with conflicting aims and people

having worked for a Liberal mayor with a Labor majority.

Dr Jamie Pittcock is director of international programs for the Australian National University’s UNESCO Chair in Water Economics and Transboundary Water Governance. He’s all about holistic *and* deliverable solutions.

And Ellen Sandall, the national director of the Australian Youth Coalition for Climate Change, will provide some insights into a key cultural challenge for what Cole considers a conservative industry – engaging and enthusing Generation Y.

It promises to be one of the most interesting conferences for a long time.

‘Facing the future – Actions for the Environment Profession’ is on the Sunshine Coast on September 28-30. www.wme.org.au

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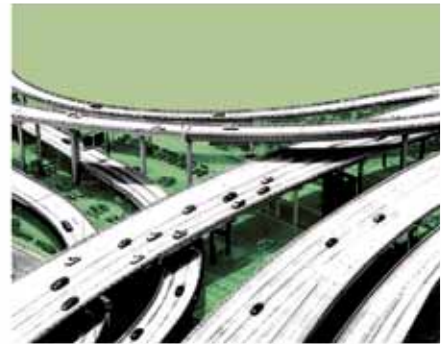
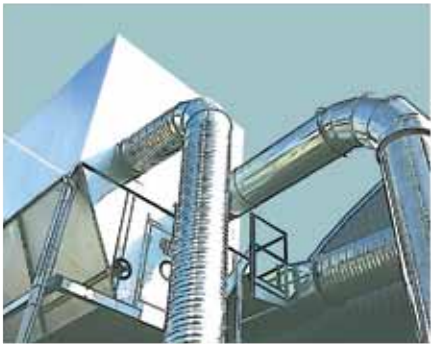
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FINDING OUR WAY

EIANZ is reviewing its codes to ensure its principles, shared values and guidelines for ethical decision-making can be put into practice. By Alan Chenoweth.

Ethics are personal, even where codes of practice have been institutionalised with risk management measures and corporate accountability. When a choice is required between alternative courses of action, and the choice has a moral dimension, our individual responses are based on values and experience.

A Code of Ethics, such as that of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ), provides a concise framework that represents the shared values of environment professionals. These values are a combination of environmental ethics – our responsibility to act and advise in ways that benefit the environment – and professional ethics to use our skills in ways that maintain the trust placed in trained professionals by the community.

The shared values of the environment professions, which form the basis for a common code, have some overlap with other disciplines and institutions, including science, public service, business, law and medicine. Despite that, there are different perspectives in culture, in due process and what constitutes ethical behaviour.

We share with science and law a fundamental reliance on truthfulness and genuine opinions in reporting.

A great deal of community and government agency trust depends on maintenance of these standards. Environment practitioners also promote and achieve responsible environmental management, conservation and sustainability and, in this respect, combine their professional and environmental ethics.

However, this balance is not always appreciated by advocates of environmental action, nor of clients and colleagues presented with environmental constraints.

The media presents simplified and sometimes contradictory community standards of ethics.

Nonetheless, it does provide a useful test when deciding between how options might be perceived: could I explain my actions if they were highlighted in the newspaper?

Another benchmark is the test provided by legal proceedings: could my advice withstand scrutiny in court?



Options, impacts and benefits

One of the strengths of environmental practice is its multi-disciplinary approach to resolving complex problems, involving a range of options, impacts and benefits. However, this also creates ethical dilemmas associated with team collaboration and the commitment to project outcomes, especially where issues are identified after key decisions have been made.

“ Early identification of potential dilemmas, guidelines for ethical decision-making, regular workplace discussion and mentoring are all part of good practice

Environmental experts are highly valued by clients and agencies when their assessments and reputation support prior decisions, gain approvals or facilitate development, but not when they identify problems. However, avoidance of difficult issues or obfuscation in reporting (greenwash) can be counter-productive for clients and projects in the long term.

False and misleading information is both unethical and unlawful and among its consequences are loss of reputation and certification. Corporate risk management procedures, a robust code of ethics and a strong professional association provide support in dealing with such situations, but decisions are ultimately personal.

Early identification of potential dilemmas, guidelines for ethical decision-

making, regular workplace discussion and mentoring are all part of good environmental practice. Young practitioners in particular will benefit from opportunities to seek guidance from more senior mentors, both within and outside the workplace.

Hypothetical scenarios are valuable training tools that help break the barriers to conversations about ethics and provide essential practice for the analysis and personal reflection required in decision-making. Errors in judgment are less likely to occur if we have had practice in recognising and resolving ethical dilemmas.

The Certified Environmental Practitioner scheme, an initiative of the EIANZ, places considerable emphasis on ethical understanding and conduct in its certification process. EIANZ has also embarked on a comprehensive review of its Code of Ethics, with a new draft Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct currently under consideration by members.

It expands the previous one-page code into a supportive document with principles, shared values and guidelines for ethical decision-making as a framework for addressing the dilemmas often faced in practice. The draft code will be put to the institute's AGM at the 'Facing the Future Conference' in late September.

Alan Chenoweth is on the EIANZ Working Group on the Code of Ethics and doing a PHD on environmental ethics at Griffith University. This is based on a paper to an EIANZ (SEQ) forum on ethics.

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Keynote Plenary 1: At the crossroads: the great lessons of environmental protection and conservation since 1960 and the challenges to be addressed by the environmental profession in the decades ahead

Dr Barry Carbon FEIANZ: Former head of Commonwealth, QLD and WA EPA
Dr Peter Ellyard FEIANZ: Chairman, Preferred Futures Institute

Keynote Plenary 2: Environmental Professionals: Dealing with Complexity in Translating Policy into Practice

Ellen Sandell: National Director, Australian Youth Climate Coalition
Dr Morgan Williams HFEIANZ: Former New Zealand Commissioner for the Environment

Keynote Plenary 3: Low Carbon Future – making economics & technology work for effective transformation

Anna Skarbek: National Director - Climateworks
Matthew Wright: Executive Director, Beyond Zero Emissions
Dr Jamie Pittock: Australian National University

Keynote Plenary 4: Environmental Professionals – Taking Science into Practice through Community Engagement

Dr Linda Selvey: CEO Greenpeace
Jude Munro AO: Former Chief Executive, Brisbane City Council

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LOCK, STOCK AND BARREL LIABILITY

Consultant WSP is changing the risk relationship with clients by offering to assume all liability for site remediation projects. Richard Collins reports.

Companies often use consultants to cover their bases: look Mr Regulator, we brought in an independent expert and everything. But there is nothing just-for-show about the environmental liability solutions being touted by WSP Environment & Energy. The global consultancy firm is offering to assume all the liability for a site remediation project, letting the client off risk-free – in perpetuity.

Called Active Transfer, the mechanism was developed in the US in the mid-1990s but has rarely been used outside the country. In the past two years, WSP has worked up several projects in the UK and has been laying the groundwork in Australia.

Paul Burke, WSP's principal director for land restoration and planning in Australia, sees it as a potential game-changer here.

"In terms of WSP, it is a big differentiator in terms of how we behave as a company and our ability and desire to share in the risks with our clients," he said.

In a sign of how seriously the company is taking the product, the sales job is being spearheaded by WSP's global MD, Stuart McLachlan. He said the financial robustness of the concept delivers certainty to the often uncertain quantification of contamination liabilities.

"We are the acknowledged experts in this subject, so why should we ask our clients to take the risk?" he told *WME*.

For a fixed upfront price, the environmental risk and obligation for all known and unknown liabilities are transferred to WSP. It holds the funds in trust and takes out an "insurance wrap" through a US broker to defray the risks, including long-term contamination exposure, short-term clean-up costs, regulatory reform and more.

It comes at a cost, of course. McLachlan



WSP reckons it can help unlock contaminated sites for new uses.

puts it at a 10–20 per cent premium, but against this he makes two points. One is an interesting "claw back" provision in the mechanism, where if the project comes in below cost then WSP shares any savings. He says Kodak got back a swag of money after the clean-up of a site in Liverpool, UK came in well under budget.

The other point is broadening the definition of value, because up-front project costs are just part of the package. There is also value in certainty, in being able to focus on core business and in a consultant with some skin in the game.

Familiarity breeds understanding

According to Burke, the environmental liability solutions (ELS) concept alters the relationship between companies and their consultants.

"It really does change the nature of discussion with clients and also the individuals within client organisations who you have conversations with," he said.

"In the past, you would typically expect

““ It really does change the nature of discussion with clients and also the individuals within client organisations who you have conversations with

– Paul Burke, WSP

individuals from our contaminated sites team to talk to similar people within client organisations, such as the environmental manager. With this, it might be myself or other commercial managers talking with CFOs and risk and compliance people, really understanding the commercial drivers.

"There are no new technologies here. It is all about the mechanism you set up and the risk sharing that goes on."

That mechanism also contractually ties the parties together for a long time, while the potential profit share for a project coming in beneath the cost cap further meshes the commercial interests.

"It really brings together the client, the prospective [property] buyer even, and WSP, all aligned to achieve the same outcome, which, to be frank, is an interesting and different scenario than we are used to," said Burke.

It is also seeing WSP establish an internal team for the ELS section, both to ensure they have the right skills but also to ensure it is set up commercially independent of WSP's profit and loss sheet.

Active Transfer in action

Active Transfer has potential benefits for anyone involved in the supply chain for cleaning up contaminated land, including sectors such as manufacturing, property development, finance, local planning and state government.

Burke has been talking to them all and hopes to have the first project signed in the next six to 12 months.

"We are talking to [an industrial] company at the moment who has a large portfolio of potentially contaminated sites. They are in the process of acquiring or divesting of sites at any one time," he said.

"The concept we have put to them is we can use an ELS approach and create

a vehicle to initially address the environmental liabilities around their existing redundant sites and potentially leave that vehicle in place to feed redundant sites in and out as they hit the radar."

He's also talking to property developers. "For developers, a real key is it provides certainty and timing to a project. But more importantly, it allows them to put forward a proposition to a lender, which

“ There needs to be the right criteria in terms of size and complexity, but also the risk appetite of the client

can facilitate them getting debt funding for the contamination clean-up," he said, noting the tight lending market in recent years added to the attractiveness of Active Transfer.

While a clean-up liability of more than \$2 million is probably the minimum for the full Active Transfer model, other factors come into play if a property transaction is involved. WSP is developing a proposal for a \$1 million project but rolling in fewer bells and whistles.

"We're working on a proposal that caps the cost and provides some limited insurance, not around the project costs but around the unknowns, so some [Pollution Legal Liability] insurance to cover potential groundwater issues and also any legislative changes moving forward."

Burke is also talking to private equity players about ways to take environmental liabilities off the table when they are trying to buy and flip companies.

"The big challenge for us is just around visibility and understanding. The concept is well proven and there are no legal or legislative barriers that would stop us doing it," he said, though they've had to develop a variation of the mechanism for jurisdictions with polluter pays models, such as NSW.

"This is not a solution for everyone. There needs to be the right criteria in terms of size and complexity, but also the risk appetite of the client... This is for companies who really don't see this as core business, who don't want to invest the time and effort."

More from Paul Burke at Paul.Burke@WSPGroup.com



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SKM has launched an internal Carbon Fund, where staff can nominate projects worthy of investment. By Richard Collins.

SKM SETS CARBON PRICE



Having already cut its carbon emissions by 35 per cent per capita, Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) has launched its own Carbon Fund to invest in innovative solutions to further reduce or offset its remaining carbon emissions.

In February, the company decided to apply an internal price to its carbon emissions and looked to the international Clean Development Mechanism as the benchmark. At \$15/tonne of CO₂-e, it expects to accumulate \$320,000 this financial year.

SKM has invited staff to identify projects worthy of investment by the fund. It sees three main avenues: capital investments in client projects, provision of consulting and advice in return for a capital or carbon reduction stake in a client project, and

investing directly in carbon credits.

Renewable energy initiatives, such as biomass, wind and solar power projects in developing countries are expected to be high on the list.

According to its managing director Paul Douglas, the launch of the Carbon Fund is the next phase in SKM's ongoing commitment to sustainability.

"We want to be a proactive party in this, not just to continue to buy green energy but to go further and proactively develop clean energy sources and sustainable solutions that have widespread benefits," he said.

The company is expecting collateral benefits, such as strengthening client ties by taking an equity stake in projects and also using any insights from the fund for

the benefit of clients.

SKM chief sustainability officer Nick Fleming added, "we are looking for ways where we can make investments in emissions reduction that may also generate revenue, so the Carbon Fund could become self-sustaining".

In 2008, the firm committed to cutting its emissions by 30 per cent per capita in three years. It has passed the goal, cutting carbon emissions from some 5.7 tonnes per person to 3.7 tonnes.

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PLANNING MAKES PERFECT

Unusually, the award-winning Logan Water Alliance covers everything from planning to project delivery. By Richard Collins.

Amid the confusion surrounding the structure of water retailing in south east Queensland was a ray of light last month – Allconnex Water's Logan Water Alliance took out the Infrastructure Project Innovation Award at the Queensland Water Awards.

The alliance of Allconnex and engineering services providers Tenix, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Cardno is one of the largest water infrastructure delivery programs of its type in Australia.

"What is novel about our alliance, what sets us apart from others, is that planning is included in the scope of works," said alliance manager Christian Truscott.

While the top level strategic planning remains with Allconnex and the State Government, the alliance handles everything under that, from master-planning down through to catchment planning, from project identification to capital delivery.

"We swim a lot further upstream than most program alliances around the place. Our ability to work in the planning space and collectively use the knowledge of all the partners of the alliance



The planning team did a detailed audit of the regions planning needs and identified priority tasks.

in planning lets us deliver some really good value for money solutions," Truscott told *WME*.

In fact, 'Unlocking value through planning' is a mantra around the place. As an example, Truscott points to the Slacks Creek to Loganholme Wastewater Trunk Main project. The original plan had been for a major pump station at the WWTP, but the alliance team took a step back and adopted a whole-of-catchment approach. The solution, which involves the delivery of wastewater using 7km of pressurised rising mains, is expected to halve whole-of-life costs.



We sat down with each person and asked them their aspirations and what they wanted out of the alliance

Shared risks and rewards

The rate of growth in the corridor south of Brisbane, combined with council amalgamations in 2008, saw Allconnex Water's projected capital investment in the Logan district jump from about \$30 million a year towards \$100 million.

In addition, the scope of works was complex and uncertain, making an integrated alliance that shared the risks and rewards the preferred option.

That required building a culture pretty well from scratch. The first year of the alliance saw a significant investment in human resources management, relationship development and culture building activities to bind the 110 staff.

"We had a focus on change management and building the team at the start of the alliance," Truscott said.

"We sat down with each person and asked them their aspirations and what they wanted out of the alliance. That allowed us to structure the team so they would be able to add most value."

After a few months, they ran a two-day foundation workshop to develop the alliance values and charter. The value around program delivery, for example, was "deliver the right projects for the right costs in the right timeframes".

There has been a suite of culture building efforts, including regular internal communications, the Icebreakers social committee and quarterly "health check surveys" on the culture. The Australian Water Association award suggests they've got it right.

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**IOLAR Pty Ltd
Waste and Resource
Management
Consultants**

IOLAR Pty Ltd is a firm specialising in providing waste and resource management consultancy services to private and government organisations. The company is founded upon extensive experience in the waste management industry across all sectors, including consultancy services, waste and resource recovery facility management and contracting within private and local government entities. This also includes international experience from Europe.

IOLAR provides a wide range of waste and resource management services including:

- Waste Strategy development and implementation
- Tender, Contract and Specification development, management and negotiation
- Levy Implementation and systems advice
- Landfill management services and operational advice
- Equipment selection and resource recovery process development
- Project management and superintendent services
- Auditing including waste audits, resource audits and compliance audits
- Regulatory authority liaison

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ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

MDW Environmental Services was formed to provide better advice and service to the Western Australian construction, mining and industrial sectors. Western Australian owned and operated, MDW Environmental Services offers a broad range of services in monitoring and management of WATER, LAND and AIR in both the built and natural environment.

Based around a capable and experienced team of innovative, practical and multidisciplinary environmental practitioners MDW Environmental Services provides strategic, practical, cost effective and timely solutions to environmental issues. Our continued growth has allowed the company to attract capable and experienced staff from government and industry. Not content to rely solely on in house expertise MDW Environmental Services has developed a number of strategic alliances with other experts and leaders in their field to provide accurate and up to date advice.

MDW Environmental Services is proud of its reputation for delivering strategic guidance and “hands on” services in a holistic manner throughout the full life of projects. Collectively the vast knowledge base of our staff and associated network enables us to successfully deliver a broad array of environmental services in a cost effective and timely manner.

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total earth care

Environmental Consulting

Total Earth Care's (TEC) Environmental Consulting Division provides experience ranging from single allotment residential development to assessments for proposed land use changes associated with residential and industrial subdivisions, assessments & plans of management for parks and reserves.

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- Flora and Fauna Surveys and Assessments (including 7-part Tests)
- Advice on threatened species issues
- Bushland and Vegetation Management Plans
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- Data capture and analysis using the latest GPS and Geographic Information Systems
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- Monitoring programmes and project management of bushland works
- Pest Species Management Plans
- Bushfire Management Recovery
- Geographic Information Systems

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