

PRESS RELEASE

## **Tertiary Sector Needs Major Overhaul Say Sustainability Educators**

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**Auckland** – New Zealand's leading sustainability education advisers, including Professor Klaus Bosselmann of the University of Auckland and Pam Williams of Victoria University, have agreed that the tertiary education sector is in urgent need of a major overhaul if it is to usefully contribute to the vital task of transforming New Zealand into a sustainable society.

On Wednesday 7 November, the day after the Government announced its new school curriculum, 65 education for sustainable development (ESD) stakeholders met in Auckland for a national strategy forum to identify New Zealand's deliverables for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDES), which runs from 2005 to 2014.

Convened by the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO and its UNDES partner, Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand Inc. (SANZ), this year's forum was addressed by Ministry for the Environment Chief Executive, Hugh Logan, and was attended by key representatives from national government\*, local government\*\*, business, and a cross-section of sustainability, cultural, and youth organisations.

The group also included eminent scientists such as NIWA's Dr Jim Salinger (of the Nobel Peace Prize winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and ZESPRI International's Dr Jane Adams (MNZM), who is an expert in the field of food science and technology, agriculture, and ESD.

In a powerful illustration of the universality and growing coherence of sustainability issues, the stakeholders unanimously agreed that the tertiary sector must lead by example in a wave of ESD that needs to cascade through to the secondary and primary education sectors, and also through to all areas of community education, vocational training and professional development.

The stakeholders specifically want to see sustainability concepts integrated into all aspects of university learning, as is beginning to happen in the primary and secondary sectors. There was wide support for core ESD material being taught to all New Zealand tertiary students. Further, the stakeholders see it as essential that all tertiary institutions "walk the talk" by operating their campuses sustainably. For students to learn by example, they say, institutions must do more than just achieve isolated goals such as carbon neutrality. Instead, they need to show how sustainability affects every aspect of life including non-physical factors such as social justice and ethical investment.

Dr Wayne Cartwright, Chairperson of SANZ and Adjunct Professor of Strategic Management in the Department of International Business at the University of Auckland, says, "We still need to teach all the core competencies, but there's not much point educating people for a way of life and an economic system that simply won't exist by the time students are in positions of responsibility. The changes ahead of us – that have already begun – are of a radical nature that requires a radical and urgent response. Our education should equip us with a resilience and adaptability for the crises ahead, not simply plod along as if it is business as usual."

The stakeholders discussed a sea change in the culture of the tertiary sector, away from an individualistic, competitive framework and toward a much more interdependent framework – a paradigm shift they say is needed in society as well.

Dr Adams, former Dean of the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at UNITEC, addressed the forum with a salient reminder of the ongoing lack of science and technology graduates. “Escalating energy costs will force us to produce more and more of our own food and we simply don’t have enough expertise to meet that need. A crisis is looming,” she said.

Dr Adams suggested that significant value may be added to New Zealand goods and services by demonstrating they are generated using sustainable systems. However, she cautioned that “the greatest threat to our realisation of sustainable production systems is the lack of graduates, particularly with science and technology qualifications, to implement the changes that will be required.”

This lack of preparedness, along with a lack of future visioning and the persistent dearth of meaningful sustainability measurements and progress indicators, were other key concerns for the delegates.

Ends.

\* Ministry of Education, Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, Department of Labour, Tertiary Education Commission, Education Review Office.

\*\* Auckland Regional Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, North Shore City Council, Rodney District Council, Far North District Council.

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