

An Engineer's Contribution to Sustainability

Engineer's Australia (EA) has had a sustainability policy for a number of years now. Through the Environmental Engineering Society and College (EES and EEC), EA has also published manuals, papers and has delivered conferences and seminars on sustainability. However, more recently, outgoing president Doug Jones has made sustainability one of his priority areas, and at the last Engineering Excellence Awards announced the formation of a President's Task Force on Sustainability to better understand, and respond to, the growing sustainability debate, and our position as engineers.

I've often discussed and defined sustainability in these columns. But, one of the more interesting dialogues I had early last year was with John Elkington, respected author and a UN Global 500 Roll of Honour for his 'outstanding environmental achievements'. When asked about his thoughts on contribution by engineers towards a sustainable future, he commented that "it's often said that the best way to predict the future is to help create it. Engineers need to be involved - and to be seen to be involved - in working through some of the great challenges we will all face in the 21st century. A world of 8-9 billion people is going to be interesting, hopefully not in the sense of the old Chinese curse, but if it is to be even moderately sustainable into the 22nd century it is going to have to be phenomenally well-engineered."

Elkington coined the phrase 'triple bottom line', and has seen and contributed to much of the modern day sustainability movement. If his sense of direction is anything to go by, our contribution as a profession towards the risks and opportunities posed by sustainability will emerge as one of the more important. Jones has given a certain level of impetus to sustainability within EA, which needs to continue. The EES and EEC are well-placed to contribute to this whole of EA initiative. Indeed, the EES 2005 Conference in Sydney is, to take Elkington's words literally, on creating sustainable engineering solutions, to which I encourage each one of you to look to contribute (see <http://www.iceaustralia.com/ees2005>). The EES is also considering a name change, to incorporate sustainability, to better reflect our increasing role as providers of sustainability knowledge and solutions. I welcome your thoughts and comments on this exciting proposition.

Previously published in an edited format in Engineers Australia – June 2003

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