

Benchmarking Sustainability Reporting in Australia/ New Zealand (2002)

Public environmental/sustainability reporting is a tool that organisations are increasingly using to communicate some or all of their triple bottom line (social, financial, environmental components) to the public and their key stakeholders.

The Sustainable Investment Research Institute (SIRIS), together with the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC), recently undertook to evaluate trends in public sustainability and environmental reporting within Australian and New Zealand organisations, releasing their final report in December 2002. This report, titled Sustainability and Environmental Reporters Benchmarking Program 2001/02, is the third in a series of Australian benchmarking studies (using the UNEP/SustainAbility Standards) to assess public environmental reporting and the first comprehensive survey of corporate sustainability reporting in Australia. The previous studies, 'Public Environmental Reporting: Where Does Australia Stand?' (Jeyaretnam, 1999) and Public Environmental Reporting: Have we Improved?' (Jeyaretnam, 2000) were instrumental in catalysing discussion and debate on the increased need for non-financial disclosure by business in Australia.

Twenty-four of some of the largest private and public sector organisations participated in this study with fifteen sustainability reports and nine environment reports being benchmarked. The scores and rankings for each of the organisations are tabled below.

The report shows that the reporting standard in Australia and New Zealand compares well with that of international reporting organisations. It also discusses trends in sustainability reporting and the reasons for the recent increase in business transparency. The report closes with a discussion on global standards and possible future directions in sustainability reporting. The executive summary of the report can be downloaded from the news section of <http://www.sirisdata.com> which is a public website dedicated to sustainability reporting by companies.

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Written by Terence Jeyaretnam,
Director, Net Balance Management Group
Director, Net Balance Foundation