

Chapter Four: The Career Advice...

This section provides advice on how to secure employment within the environmental industry. The advice is compiled from the results and comments made within the two surveys that were completed by environmental professionals and environmental recruitment specialists. This information builds on the career advice presented in the previous guide, *The Guide to Environmental Careers within Australia 2004*. The 2004 guide contains information on education for an environmental career and work experience opportunities to equip and prepare you to enter the environmental workforce. This career advice section builds on that information and should be read along side the career advice section of the 2004 edition. This career advice section details ways in which to increase your employability by:

- knowing the sector you want to enter
- knowing the roles that interest, and are open, to you
- knowing and selling yourself
- how to apply for roles
- identifying general and environmental specific skills required
- identifying education patterns of existing professionals

It also provides some background information for career changers. It details information on how career changers have moved into the environmental industry, with some tips on how you could do it yourself. Finally this section provides information that was identified as a priority by the respondents of the survey. The survey results showed that information on career pathways, industry development and trends, environmental career networks and events and jobs opportunities was needed. So this section finishes with an outline on where to go to get this information and support when seeking a career within the environmental profession.

Generally, opportunities are increasing within the sector, but the number of people wanting to enter the industry is growing too, making it competitive. Developing a plan of action which details the area in which you want to work, in terms of sector and job type, the skills you have and the skills you need to develop, will help you identify steps you need to take to secure suitable employment within the industry. Whether you're a recent graduate or a career changer, keep in mind that it will not happen overnight. You need to be proactive, persistent, patient and positive.

Know the Industry

As previously described, the environmental industry is large, diverse and is growing and changing at a rapid rate in comparison to other industries. It is impossible to describe the environmental industry in detail within this guide. This guide provides an overview of the industry and its structure, helping you to find a starting point in which to research and explore sectors and types of roles that interest you.

The industry is about 30 years old and contains a vibrant mix of experienced and highly skilled professionals. The environmental professionals surveyed showed that a third of the respondents were aged over 41. In several sectors, such as water conservation, quality and protection, waste management and conservation of biodiversity, the imminent retirement of experienced professionals is a looming problem. Further, of the responses of professionals completing the survey, 16% were aged 36 – 41 years and 25% aged 31 – 35 years. Very few respondents were aged 31 and under. The most common length of time within the industry was 5 – 10 years (27%), suggesting that the sector is fairly mature in terms of both age of professionals and length of service.

Of the respondents:

- 61% are environmental professionals working for an environmental organisation
- 18% are non environmental professionals working for an environmental organisation
- 14% are environmental professionals working for non environmental organisation

This gives an indication of how the industry looks when broken down into the three types of green collar workers outlined in chapter two.

The environmental industry can also be viewed in terms of sectors and their size. The top 5 sectors in which the respondents worked are outlined below:

- conservation and management of biodiversity
- environmental consultancy
- environmental policy, legislation, protection and enforcement
- environmental education and training
- water quality and protection

In terms of organisation type, the majority of the survey respondents worked for government (57%), with 25% for corporates or private businesses, 13% for not for profit organisations. Four percent had their own business and 4% worked for academia.

With a survey base of 432, these statistics give an indication of how the industry is made up in terms of career types, sector size and organisation types, giving scale to the Environmental Industry Matrix, detailed in chapter two.

This section has provided some very top level information to outline the environmental industry, providing a bit of scale and scope to the environmental industry matrix. What is paramount and very clear, is to be successful in securing employment within the environmental industry you need to use this outlined structure to take the next step and:

- research and identify where you want to go within the environmental industry (sector)
- undertake further research into that sector, and understand it in terms of structure, issues, policy and networks
- develop networks within that sector
- build your own profile in the sector you want to work in.

An overwhelming number of survey respondents commented that networks are essential in securing and developing a career within the sector. Networks. Networks. Networks. Networks.....

Know the Roles

Due to the diversity of the environmental industry, the breadth of jobs within it is colossal. This research contained a survey which listed 73 job titles, most of which were selected by one or more respondents. Added to that, a further 131 'other' job titles were provided. As the Environmental Industry Matrix shows, within each sector of the environmental industry, there are essentially the following job types:

- Environmental monitoring and assessment
- Environmental resource management and protection
- Environmental research (into sustainability issues and solutions)
- Legal (development and enforcement of laws, restrictions and fines)
- Policy formation and implementation (rebates / charges / campaign and lobbying)
- Environmental management of products, services and organisations (that are currently non sustainable)
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Educational and training
- Technology research
- Technological development and design roles (products and services)
- Manufacture of sustainable products and services
- Eco - accounting / financial
- Marketing and public awareness raising

The best way to understand what these roles mean on a day to day basis and whether you have the skills set, the personality traits to successfully undertake the role, as well as to ascertain whether you would enjoy such a role, is to speak to a person(s) who actually works in the role. A written document, such as a job description and position outline, are open to interpretation, so jobs can be very different

from what you imagine. So use the networks you have developed whilst researching the industry to really find out what that job entails. Use this to decide whether this role is for you and what your strengths and weaknesses are in securing such a role. Jobs with similar job titles will differ within different types of organisations and within different industries, so you may need to speak to several individuals.

Know Yourself

You wouldn't sell a product without knowing what it is and what it's capable of. You therefore need to really know and understand yourself, to know what you're offering. So do research, get to know yourself and be confident and ready to 'sell' yourself. You will need strong communication skills, lots of energy and a well researched and compelling argument to engage and convince others that you are part of the way forward. To fully understand yourself, you will need to know the following and the positive implications these have on the position you are applying for:

- likes / dislikes – What do you enjoy about life? How do you feel about the outdoors / commuting?
- strength / weakness – What are you good at, is this the same as what you enjoy?
- skills / attributes – What skills do you like to use?
- personal beliefs – What ethics / beliefs do you have and how could that influence the workplace?
- interests / passions – Is the environment an interest for you or something you want to do for a living?
- goals / motivations - What would you like to change in your life? More satisfying job / learning new skills / gaining a better or different education / starting your own business?

Applying for Roles

It's a well known fact that only a small percentage (around 30%) of jobs actually get advertised, the rest are described as the 'hidden job market'. The survey showed that many had secured employment through an advert on a job website, however many used other ways to secure work:

- advert on job website (22%)
- through previous role (17%)
- through word of mouth - professional networks (16%)
- advert in newspaper or magazine (15%)

What the survey highlighted was that the smaller and newer sectors within the industry (climate change and carbon trading for example) tended to fill their positions through word of mouth and professional networks, whilst the larger sectors tended to fill their position through job adverts on the internet. There is an increasing number of environmental specific job websites and several sectors have their own specific job sites (natural resource management and water sectors for example). A list of these websites can be found in the 'where to go' section. The larger sectors, with a community of professionals which have a strong network (such as environmental education sector) tend to fill their positions through word of mouth and their networks. Other popular ways to source roles is to check individual organisation's websites. Again this emphasises the importance to be clear on what you want to do and identify potential avenues (in this case organisations) that will allow you to do that.

Another major finding of the research was the need to be proactive. Undertaking the following actions will improve the potential of securing a position within the industry:

- identify organisations you want to work for, approach them directly, send in your CV and follow up with phone calls
- approach people at meetings and functions about opportunities within their organisations.
- consider a company who is just starting up and approach them about developing a stand alone green role that you can add value to in a different capacity
- talk to people. Be a voice, a person on the telephone. Do not rely on emails alone.
- talk to the right people about the role (people in the same department as the role, not HR people)
- create the role within your existing organisation or even set up a business

The key message from the research was that having and using networks is essential in securing employment. There is a hidden job market and that job adverts should be treated the same as carbon offsetting, the last action to undertake to ensure all avenues have been covered.

Using your Skill Base

As mentioned the environmental job market is extremely competitive and it's really important to be prepared, well skilled and have some experience in the area you are applying for. Education may provide you with the knowledge required and some skills, but will not equip you with all the general skills needed to undertake the role and be successful in developing your environmental career. The survey highlighted that general career experience and an environmental qualification were the two most popular attributes required when applying for environmental roles. The most important generic skills enabling effective working in existing roles were identified as:

- communication - spoken/verbal
- communication - written
- critical thinking
- team work - co-ordination
- identifying complex problems and providing solutions

When asked what the most helpful generic skills were throughout the early days of their career in the environmental industry, the respondents identified:

- communication - spoken/verbal
- communication – writing
- ability to get along with others
- initiative and enterprise
- learning skills
- critical thinking

Environmental specific skills differ greatly from one sector to another, so for information on the most important environmental specific skills please refer to the specific sector in which you are interested in.

The Complete Guide to Environmental Careers in the 21st Century (Doyle et al 1999) identifies that employers foremost want people with good written and verbal communication skills. This research confirms this. When environmental recruitment specialists were asked to identify the top three generic skills employers ask for when recruiting environmental professionals, they identified communication as the top skills required. Negotiation / persuasion / argument building skills and problem solving skills were the other two skill sets identified as important.

Negotiation and argument building is all about knowing your position, understanding what your bottom line and bargaining power is and taking action from there. Assertiveness and listening is essential for effective negotiation. The former helps other people to understand your needs and enables you to effectively pursue problem solving and explore solutions. The latter is a skill that enables you to understand the other party's needs, explore ideas, identify possible options for an agreement and avoid misunderstanding. Achieving a mutual, workable and achievable agreement with others is a fine skill to have and one that employers desire. Similarly creative problem solving skills are considered to be most desirable. Creative problem solving skills involve the ability to find alternative solutions to existing problems through lateral thinking, which is more about how you think, rather than what you think.

Knowing what skills you need is just as important as knowing what skills you have and can use. Recognising the skills that you require is the first step you need to take to overcome that barrier. Many general skills can be picked up by undertaking a variety of work experience. Information on the different types of work experience can be found in the first edition of the Guide to Environmental Careers in Australia 2004.

Many alluded to a skills shortage within the industry, where there is a lack of experienced and skilled professionals compared to the demand created by the rapid growth of the industry. Due to the problems

defining the sector and identifying green collar workers as previously highlighted, detailed information on the skills gap is not known. But generally, this problem seems to more of an issue as the positions needed to be filled become more technical.

Another issue that the research highlighted is the lack of knowledge in regards to the skills needed from the employer side when recruiting environmental professionals. Recruitment specialists are having to educate organisations about what they actually need rather than what they think sounds good. This scenario can be used to your, the applicant's, advantage, as you can help organisations shape the skill set that they need and then show them how you meet that need. Recent research undertaken by Monash GreenSteps program found that most workplaces offer no green skills or sustainability training for staff and did not review staff on environmental performance, but see themselves as being "environmentally aware" and favour green-skilled candidates when hiring.

Educational Requirements

Environmental education is clearly one key requirement when trying to secure employment within the environmental sector. In the survey, 70% of respondents stated that education was fundamental to their existing role, with 74% of them having studied an environmental focused course. As with any career, choosing a course of study is a strategic decision which will act as a gateway to your desired career. However, the importance of an environmental qualification differs greatly depending on the type of role you wish to secure. For example, if you wish to be an environmental engineer, you need a degree in environmental engineering. If you want to be a marketing specialist for environmental products, then an environmental qualification may not be necessary, but to have studied some environmental electives would be an advantage.

It is therefore essential for you to understand the education requirements of your chosen role / career and choose an appropriate qualification that lays the foundations for that to happen. For information on the types of qualifications and how they help lay the foundations for entry into the environmental industry, please refer to the first edition of the Guide to Environmental Careers in Australia 2004.

What was clear from the results of the survey is that certain knowledge is essential. This knowledge can be gained in a number of ways, and doesn't necessary mean undertaking a formal qualification. However, recruitment specialists highly recommend having an environmental qualification. Having an environmental qualification makes it easier to document and display the knowledge you have. Regardless of the sector in which you want to enter, the basic knowledge required includes:

- understanding of ecological systems (hydrology, geology, biodiversity, botany, landscape ecology)
- environmental issues and implications these have on your sector
- impacts of pollution and development on the natural environment
- basic understanding of environmental law, policy and regulation

Other general education patterns identified from the research was that the vast majority of respondents are educated to a degree level or above with:

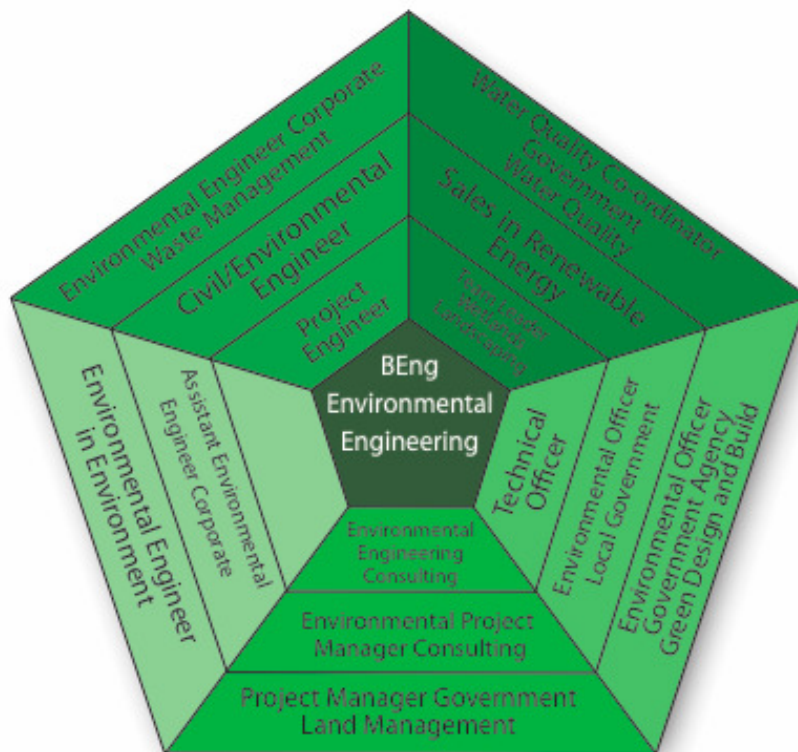
- 48% to post graduate level
- 44% to graduate level
- 6% TAFE level
- 2% high school level

Broad undergraduate degrees are suitable for a range of environmental positions and are used to get 'a foot in the door', allowing you to learn the required specific skills on the job. However, a few positions require applicants who have undertaken an honours year or a post graduate qualification. Post graduate qualifications tend to be undertaken to gain more specific knowledge and skills in a particular field of study and is used to advance career potential and employment prospects. The most common focus of the courses that they had studied at an undergraduate level was environmental science (37%), environmental management (16%) and natural resource management (12%).

The qualification you undertake may focus you toward certain areas within the industry. Our research showed that respondents who studied environmental science and environmental engineering have commonly moved into the environmental consulting field or roles that are directly involved with the environment. Those who studied environmental studies have moved into the conservation and management of biodiversity and sustainable living fields, whilst environmental health graduates have gone into local government. Those studying environmental management have gone into environmental policy, legislation, protection and enforcement, and those studying natural resource management into conservation and management of biodiversity. Those studying environmental law and sustainable development went mainly into those respective sectors. This does not mean that if you study a certain course you will go into the subsequent sector. However certain professions require certain qualifications. So you need to do careful research. This information is meant to provide food for thought and some key considerations for you to take on board.

Five Ways from BEng Environmental Engineering

To be an environmental engineer you need an engineering qualification, preferably environmental engineering. However, if you studying this course, it doesn't mean that you have to go into that profession. The diagram below shows five different career paths from studying an BEng in Environmental Engineering.



Career Changers

This research has identified that a large percentage of survey respondents (42%) had changed careers to move into their current environmental role. An increasing number of career changers are accessing environmental career services and this survey confirms that a large number of professionals working in the environment industry are career changers. The main reasons for undertaking this career change was to find a more rewarding role (62%), but other reasons included working with liked minded people, working in an emerging field and taking on a challenge.

Research has shown that the average number of career changes a person will go through is 5-7 changes and the average number of job changes is 29 (Dwyer, P., and Wyn, J. 2001) Today, the median

age of an Australian is nearly 37 and is set to get older. By the year 2016, people aged 45 and over will account for more than 80% of growth in Australia's labour force (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Additionally, older workers are reassessing their need to work longer, with increased pension age and life expectancy. The population bubble brings huge implications to the environmental industry if it's set to grow and meet the challenges of living and working in a sustainable world. With an increasing percentage of older aged people looking to the environmental industry as a potential career option, matched with the need to grow the industry to enable societal change, it's becoming readily accepted that recruiting career changers provides the industry with a real solution.

So how do career changers get into the industry? The research identified that the majority (65%) used transferable skills and networks (30%) to secure their current role. General career experience, life skills, environmental qualification and general transferable skills helped a lot in making this move.

The most popular positions in which career changers moved into are:

- environmental officer
- project officer
- project manager
- manager
- roles in education, training and human resources.

A larger percentage of career changers (26%) had non environmental professional roles within the environmental sector compared to the percentage of total respondents (18%) generally. This highlights that career changers use transferable skills and knowledge to get non environmental professional roles within environmental organisations as a first step into the sector. Knowledge gained in this role as well as further education is then used to move into environmental roles.

Conversely, you can use your desire for an environmental career to work for organisations that have a desire to improve their environmental performance, but don't have the resources to fully invest in that development. Research undertaken by Monash GreenSteps program found that most organisations surveyed favour green-skilled candidates when hiring. So using your current experience and skill base to change work places rather than role, to move to an organisation who is primarily looking for your skills base (i.e. Marketing) but is also going to support your interest (or existing re- training / education) in moving into a more environmental role is a very good option. To recruit a marketing professional with environmental knowledge, is a very favourable starting point for many businesses stepping into environmental management for the first time.

Other ways in which career changers have moved into the environmental industry were identified as secondment and undertaking contract and temporary work.

Where to go for further information and support

As part of the survey we asked environmental professionals the type of information they need to help further develop their career. The results identified four areas in which advice and information was required. Information about environmental courses has also been provided.

Information on career paths

Several career profiles and pathways are featured in this guide. Other career profiles can be found in The 'Careers in the Environment' publication written by Graduate Careers Australia, available on the Environmental Jobs Network website (www.environmentaljobs.com.au). For more specific individual guidance on potential career paths, a visit to a career counsellor is often very useful. For a list of accredited career advisors you should contact the Career Development Association of Australia. Their website is www.cdaa.org.au

Information on the industry and its trends

As this guide clearly shows, the environmental industry is vast, grey around the edges and rapidly growing. This makes it very difficult to measure and identify patterns in growth and areas of change.

In terms of employment, the industry is affected by two factors, which in themselves are linked:

- introduction of new laws and regulation
- public pressure and demand

Increasingly, the 'Green Collar' movement is being covered and commented on within the media. Internet searches on this subject will provide a list of up to date publications. For statistics, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au) provides several reports that may be of interest, but aren't environmental career specific.

- Australia's Environment: Issues and Trends published annually
- Australia at a Glance
- Australian Economic Indicators
- Labour Force Projections, Australia, 1999 - 2016

Another way to get information on industry issues and trends is to contact the sector professional association. Most of the sectors outlined in this guide have a professional association who will be up to date with policy developments, technological advancements and latest theories and methods within that specific area. Becoming a member, getting involved and attending events is a great way to find out what is going on and what that means in terms of employment opportunities. Many of these associations are listed in the appendices.

Most environmental job websites have a news page in which they list recent research, publications and news about environmental careers and education. For a list of these, please see information on jobs section below.

Information on environmental career networks and events

Although the need for this is growing alongside the industry, the number of services offering this is very limited. Listed below are some career networks and events that you could try to further your knowledge about the sector, the latest changes in terms of law and impacts on business and ways to make your own networks.

The Environmental Jobs Network lists events on their event page that focus on environmental employment, education, training and networking, for job seekers, students and professionals interested in relevant career-building opportunities. This includes industry conferences, seminars, training events and social networks. www.environmentaljobs.com.au/event

The Australian Environment Business Network runs forums and events for organisations and professionals on environmental issues that may impact your business and your operations. www.aebn.com.au

Australian Network of Environmental Defenders Offices Inc (ANEDO) organises forums and workshops designed to facilitate public participation in environmental decision making through its network of nine community environmental law centres. www.edo.org.au/

There are two social 'drink' based networks, greendrinks and Sustainability Drinks. Most are run bi-monthly in most major cities with the aim to connect passionate professionals within the environmental industry. www.greendrinks.org/Australia/clist www.sustainabilitydrinks.com/

Information on jobs

An increasing number of environmental job websites are being set up as the number of employment opportunities increase. The most popular environmental job websites include:

- Environmental Jobs Network www.environmentaljobs.com.au
- NRM Jobs www.nrmjobs.com.au
- Cooe Ads www.cooeads.com.au
- Hallmark Enviro jobs www.envirojobs.com.au/home
- Waterjobs www.waterjobs.com.au/
- The Greenpages www.thegreenpages.com.au/Green-Jobs/

General job websites that list environmental positions include:

- Career One www.careerone.com.au
- Seek www.seek.com.au
- MyCareer www.mycareer.com.au
- Australian Public Service (APS) jobs www.apsjobs.gov.au/
- Government job websites www.jobsearch.gov.au/default.aspx
- State government job websites www.careers.vic.gov.au www.jobs.qld.gov.au/
www.jobs.wa.gov.au www.jobs.nsw.gov.au www.vacancies.sa.gov.au www.nt.gov.au
www.jobs.tas.gov.au www.gazettes.act.gov.au
- Local government jobs www.lgjobs.com.au
- Jobs in Planning www.jobsinplanning.com
- Plan Jobs www.planjobs.com.au/
- Engineering Jobs www.engineeringjobs.net.au
- Engineering Jobs Australasia www.engjobs.net.au/
- GIS Jobs www.gisjobs.com.au
- Ethical Jobs www.ethicaljobs.com.au

Other sites or networks to check on the Internet:

- Check individual company/organisation/ local council web pages
- Join online networks: yahoo groups, www.sustainable.net.org.au LinkedIn

Join email alerts to be sent lists and be alerted to new positions

- State government email alerts often called Gazettes
- Environmental Jobs Network Weekly Email Bulletin
- NRM Jobs Email Bulletin

As emphasised in this research using networks and contacts is required to access the hidden job market, so develop and use networks in the following areas:

- your professional networks and contacts in your sector and organisation (colleagues and peers)
- your personal networks (family and friends)
- university clubs
- professional / Industry Associations (e.g. AWA, EDO, VPELA, Environmental Health, Australia ACEA, ACLCA, Planning Institute)
- attend events: greendrinks, careers fairs, industry conferences

Other sources to look for employment include, newspaper and industry magazines, university careers departments.

As there are an increasing number of environmental job websites, there are an increasing number of recruitment agencies specialising in the environmental industry. For a list of these visit the Environmental Jobs Network website at www.environmentaljobs.com.au/jobs/recruitment

Information on environmental courses

There are very few Australia wide resources detailing information on environmental courses. Non are comprehensive and up to date, so you will need to look at a number of sources which list different courses. For formal qualifications (undergraduate and postgraduate) the following website are a very useful place to start your research and can save you a bit of time going to and thro between educational institutions:

Environmental Jobs Network <http://www.environmentaljobs.com.au/education>

Eco-Shout www.ecoshout.org

Hot Courses www.hotcourses.com.au (type environmental in search engine)

EDUCAEDU (Environmental Management) www.educaedu.com.au/environmental-management

The Green Directory www.thegreendirectory.com.au/green-business/education-and-training.html

Greenpages www.thegreenpages.com.au/Green-Eco-Directory/Education+Short_Courses

Or you can visit the individual university / tafe website and type in environment into the search engine. Always double check the information on the course provider website for up to date details.

Information on short courses and workshops are not listed in one central place and are therefore more difficult to research. Not for profit organisations offer short courses and workshops, so you should look at organisations websites who work in the area you are interested in. For example if you're interested in campaigning and social movement, visit The Change Agency website www.thechangeagency.org. Professional Associations also offer training and workshops. Many of these are listed in Appendix 1. Training and professional development organisations also deliver short courses and workshops. You can find out about these by asking professionals in your networks or doing an internet search (environmental training / environmental short courses etc).