

- [Home](#) >
- [Curriculum resources](#) >
- [Education for sustainability](#) >
- [Tools and resources](#) >
- Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools

# Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools

This is the online version of *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools*, published in 1999 for the Ministry of Education by Learning Media Limited. All sections that reference old curriculum documents have been removed.

The current curriculum documents for education for sustainability are [The New Zealand Curriculum, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa](#), and the [Education for Sustainability Teaching and Learning Guidelines \(years 11-13\)](#).

The development of these curriculum documents was informed by the *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools*. The Guidelines will continue to provide useful information for planning education for sustainability teaching and learning programmes.

The illustration for the aims of environmental education is modified from an original diagram that is copyright © Barry Law and Robert McConnell.

## Foreword

Environmental education is an investment in our future. If New Zealand is to have a sustainable future, increased understanding of the environment and environmental decisions is essential. The New Zealand Government has recognised this through the development of a national strategy for environmental education entitled *Learning to Care for Our Environment: Me Ako ki te Tiaki Taiao: A National Strategy for Environmental Education*. To support this strategy in schools, the Ministry of Education has produced *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools*.

*The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* details the essential learning areas, skills, and attitudes and values that will enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed in a modern, changing world. It provides a framework that links learning experiences within the total school curriculum in a coherent and balanced way. *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools* links with *Learning to Care for Our Environment* to show how the environment is a theme in all seven learning areas that make up *The New Zealand Curriculum*. The requirements of *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools* do not add to the curriculum requirements of schools. Instead, they will assist teachers to identify opportunities within existing national curriculum statements to plan and provide education about, for, and within the environment. The extent to which environmental education is incorporated within the curriculum will continue to be determined by the board of trustees of each school.

I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who gave their time and advice in the development of this publication. In particular, I would like to record my appreciation of the efforts of the

writers of the initial draft, Robyn Baker and Barry Law, and also those of Barbara Collins and Pauline Waiti, who revised the draft after extensive consultation. The advice and support of the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation, and Te Puni Kokiri throughout the project are also gratefully acknowledged.

Howard Fancy  
**Secretary for Education**

## **Introduction**

New Zealand's natural and social environment is unique. A mild climate, cultural diversity, a small population with high levels of participation in outdoor activities, extensive marine resources, relatively clean air and water, a variety of national parks, and distinctive plants and animals all contribute to the special nature of the environment. As New Zealanders, we value our environment for recreational, aesthetic, economic, cultural, and spiritual reasons.

New Zealand's future as a nation relies on our maintaining a quality environment. This environment includes its natural and built elements as well as its social and cultural aspects. It is air, water, and land. It is plants and animals. It is people, their communities, and their social and cultural values.

An understanding of the many factors that influence the environment, particularly the impact of people, is critical to maintaining and improving environmental quality. People have modified the land, introduced plants and animals, and utilised both renewable and finite resources. Understanding and responding to people's impact on the environment therefore requires a multifaceted approach.

In response to growing awareness of the importance of the environment, the New Zealand Government has taken action in both international and national contexts. It has signed international agreements on climate change, biodiversity, protection of the ozone layer, and sustainability. In the local context, international concern about sustainability has been reflected in the Resource Management Act 1991. This Act provides the legislative framework within which New Zealand's natural and physical resources are sustainably managed. The Act also highlights the unique position of Māori by ensuring their right to exercise rangatiratanga (authority) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) in managing natural resources and the environment.

The Government's *Environment 2010 Strategy* takes the goal of sustainability and translates it into practical terms within the New Zealand context. The strategy's vision for the New Zealand environment is:

A clean, healthy, and unique environment, sustaining nature and people's needs and aspirations. This vision is for an environment where:

- the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems is safeguarded
- biological diversity and spectacular scenery are conserved
- the basis is provided for sustainable development that meets the needs of present and future generations
- people are able to meet their needs, especially for employment, food, clothing, shelter, and education
- it is safe and healthy
- natural, renewable resources are not consumed faster than they can regenerate
- the natural treasures or taonga of Māori are protected, and the cultural practices of Māori associated with the environment are provided for
- leisure and recreational opportunities are provided for those who enjoy the outdoors.

This vision for the environment is holistic. It recognises the interdependence and interaction of people and the natural and physical environment. It is consistent with a Māori world view. It respects and supports the core values of a democratic, free, and responsible society including "voice", "choice", and "personal security".

Ministry for the Environment, *Environment 2010 Strategy: A Statement of the Government's Strategy on the*

*Environment*, page 9.

A key factor in achieving this environmental vision is education. A major outcome of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was to advocate for environmental education to be available to people of all ages. Education, training, and public awareness were identified as key factors in responding to global concern about the state of the environment.

Education can give people the environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviours needed for sustainable development. To do this, education needs to explain not only the physical and biological environment, but the socio-economic environment and human development.

Keating, *The Earth Summit's Agenda for Change: A Plain Language Version of Agenda 21 and the Other Rio Agreements*, page 57.

These ideas are reflected in the *Environment 2010 Strategy*, where the goal of environmental education is seen to be:

To encourage environmentally responsible behaviour and informed participation in decision-making by promoting environmental education throughout the community.

*Environment 2010 Strategy*, page 57.

This goal is further elaborated in *Learning to Care for Our Environment: Me Ako ki te Tiaki Taiao: A National Strategy for Environmental Education* (Ministry for the Environment, 1998).

Environmental education is a lifelong process. The focus of these guidelines, however, is on planning and implementing environmental education programmes as part of the *New Zealand Curriculum* in primary and secondary schools. *The New Zealand Curriculum* details the essential learning areas, essential skills, and attitudes and values that will enable students to develop the qualities needed to successfully create, contribute to, and participate in a sustainable future. Together with consistent policies and practices, the framework provides a means of meeting the aims of environmental education.

The Government's educational goals require programmes that enable students to realise their full potential as individuals and to develop a sense of the shared values that are integral to New Zealand society. An essential component of these shared values is respect for the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of New Zealand people, with acknowledgment of the special place of Māori and of New Zealand's role in the Pacific and as a member of the international community of nations.

Environmental education provides an effective means of achieving the Government's goals for both education and the environment.

## **The importance of environmental education**

There is now a wide appreciation of the damage being done to the environment through human activity. This damage is sometimes global, as in the case of the depletion of the ozone layer and of the increase in greenhouse gas emissions. Often the damage is regional, as with pest degradation of native forests, or the erosion of river catchments. Often too, the damage is local. Pollution from motor vehicles, contamination of soil by chemicals, sewage discharges; these and hundreds of other human activities stress the environment.

*Learning to Care for Our Environment: Me Ako ki te Tiaki Taiao: A National Strategy for Environmental Education*, page 9.

Environmental education, together with sound legislation, sustainable management, and responsible actions by individuals and communities, is an important component of an effective policy framework for protecting and managing the environment.

Environmental education is a new focus for education. It is a way of helping individuals and societies to

resolve fundamental issues relating to the current and future use of the world's resources. However, simply raising awareness of these issues is insufficient to bring about change. Environmental education must strongly promote the need for personal initiatives and social participation to achieve sustainability.

## The aims of environmental education

Environmental education is:

a multi-disciplinary approach to learning that develops the knowledge, awareness, attitudes, values, and skills that will enable individuals and the community to contribute towards maintaining and improving the quality of the environment.

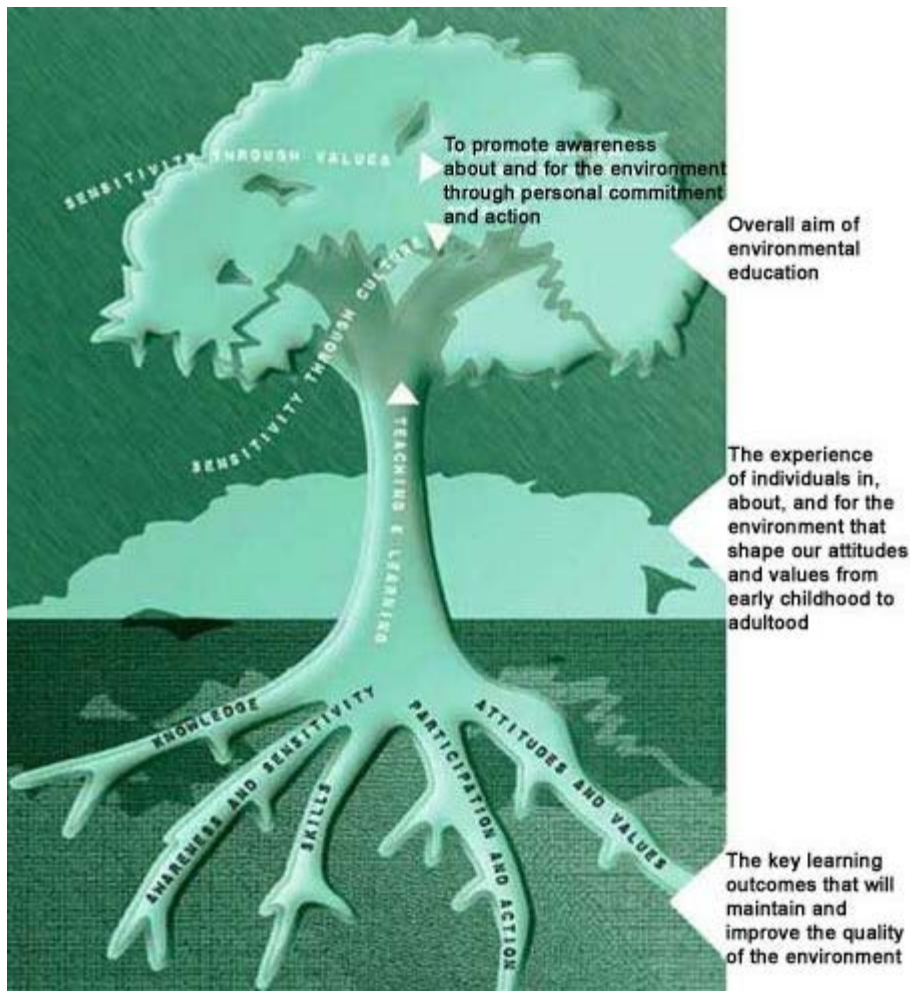
*Learning to Care for Our Environment: Me Ako ki te Tiaki Taiao: A National Strategy for Environmental Education*, page 9.

The aims of Environmental education are for students to develop:

- **Aim 1: awareness and sensitivity** to the environment and related issues
- **Aim 2: knowledge and understanding of the environment and the impact of people on it**
- **Aim 3: attitudes and values** that reflect feelings of concern for the environment
- **Aim 4: skills** involved in identifying, investigating, and problem solving associated with environmental issues
- **Aim 5:** a sense of responsibility through **participation and action** as individuals, or members of groups, whānau, or iwi, in addressing environmental issues.

Environmental issues related to a sustainable future are often complex. Multidisciplinary holistic teaching and learning approaches are therefore appropriate for meeting the aims of environmental education.

The aims and their interactive nature are illustrated below.



## The key concepts underlying environmental education

Four key concepts in environmental education are:

- interdependence
- sustainability
- biodiversity
- personal and social responsibility for action.

New Zealand has made a commitment to these concepts as a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi and to both the 1992 Earth Summit and the International Convention on Global Biodiversity in 1992. These concepts are reflected in the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Environment 2010 Strategy.

Māori views of the world are also embodied in these concepts. Environmental education provides a context for learning about:

- the partnership established by the Treaty of Waitangi for managing New Zealand's natural resources
- the special position of the Māori people in relation to the natural resources of New Zealand
- the cultural heritage of New Zealand
- the significance of this heritage to present and future generations.

### Interdependence

The environmental concept of interdependence highlights the relationships between all living things (including people) and their physical environment. A useful way of looking at the environment is to view it as a set of interrelated systems – the biophysical, social, economic, and political systems (Fien and Gough, 1996). The biophysical system provides life-support systems for all life. A social system provides rules and

structures that enable people to live together. An economic system provides ways of producing and exchanging goods and services. Through a political system, people make decisions about how social and economic systems use the biophysical environment.

The concept of interdependence is also reflected in the Māori world view. Māori regard themselves as a product of the union of Ranginui, the Sky Father, and Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother. The Māori word "whenua", which means both "land" and "placenta", provides an example of this link between people and land. Māori belong to the land as tangata whenua, the people of the land. All things are united through mauri, the life force.

The concept of interdependence emphasises the links between cultural, social, economic, and biophysical concerns that provide:

- a viable natural environment capable of supporting life, now and in the future
- a sufficient economy that provides sustainable livelihoods for all
- nurturing communities that provide opportunities for meeting social, cultural, and spiritual needs
- an equitable system of governance that ensures all citizens have fair access to levels of income and political power which allow them to participate fully as members of society.

Ministry for the Environment and the New Zealand Local Government Association Inc.

*Taking up the Challenge of Agenda 21: A Guide for Local Government*, page 5.

Environmental education provides a context for learning about these interdependent relationships and people's effect on them.

## **Sustainability**

There are many different views on what sustainability means and how it affects individuals and groups around the world. The concept of sustainability is linked to the concept of sustainable resource management, which deals with the use of both renewable and non-renewable resources. The use of these resources is influenced by lifestyle choices as well as by personal and social values. Resources must be shared and managed equitably in order to maintain and improve the quality of the environment.

The concept of sustainability is reflected in the Māori notions of hauora (total well-being and balance with nature) and rāhui tapu (conservation). The 1992 Earth Summit argued that governments should recognise the need for indigenous lands to be protected from activities that are environmentally unsound and those that people consider to be socially and culturally inappropriate. In New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process is a major means by which these issues are being addressed.

Ensuring a sustainable future means considering the impact of increasing population on the environment and its finite resources by examining ways to reduce the effects of economic development on natural resources, and it relies on people who are ecologically literate. Sustainability is the concept behind the *Government's Environment 2010 Strategy*, which is based on ways of protecting and enhancing the environment and reducing the adverse effects of human activity.

Sustainability is at the heart of the Resource Management Act 1991. This Act provides a legal framework for making decisions about the use, development, and protection of renewable and non-renewable resources. It defines its purpose as promoting the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. Sustainable management involves using natural resources in ways that safeguard the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems and that sustain resources to meet the reasonable demands of future generations.

The Treaty of Waitangi recognises the special relationship of Māori with the environment. It guarantees Māori undisturbed possession of their lands, forests, rivers and seas, fisheries, and possessions, and promises that the Crown will uphold the rangatiratanga of tribes over their lands and taonga (treasures). Many Māori grievances regarding the Treaty of Waitangi are about possession of and authority over natural resources.

The spirit of partnership that the Treaty of Waitangi established for managing New Zealand's natural resources needs to be incorporated into environmental educational programmes. A critical aspect of this spirit is appreciating the natural world's spiritual and economic significance and its importance for maintaining cultural identity.

Ko te whenua te wai ū mō ngā uri whakatipu.  
*The land provides the sustenance for the coming generations.*

## **Biodiversity**

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth – plants, animals, and micro-organisms, the genes they contain, and the ecosystems they form. A focus on biodiversity recognises the interrelatedness of all parts of the biological world and the impact that people have had on living systems. People have reduced the diversity of life by modifying many natural environments and exploiting many plants and animals.

In New Zealand, maintaining biodiversity is particularly important because of the unique nature of our island environment. New Zealand has a large number of endemic plants and animals, and many of these are vulnerable in an environment modified by people and introduced species. Four hundred species of indigenous plants and animals in New Zealand are now listed as threatened.

The impact of human settlement and introduced animals and plants on New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity and the ongoing threat of extinction facing many species today are part of the country's environmental history. An understanding of past events in relation to biodiversity conservation is informing present and future conservation work.

The Government has made a commitment to protecting indigenous habitats and biological diversity. *The Environment 2010 Strategy* states, on page 34, that this will be achieved by:

- maintaining and enhancing the net area of New Zealand's remaining indigenous forests and enhancing the ecological integrity of other remaining indigenous ecosystems
- promoting the conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity so that the quality of our indigenous and productive ecosystems is maintained or enhanced.

## **Personal and social responsibility for action**

Environmental quality relies on the everyday actions of individuals. Lifestyle choices and demands can limit resources and impact on the quality of our social and natural environments. The quality of the environment depends, to a large extent, on people taking positive action to help resolve environmental problems.

The notion of responsibility is reflected in the Māori concept of kaitiakitanga. Kaitiakitanga is a Māori environmental management system developed to protect the mauri of the taonga and hence ensure the sustainable use and management of natural and physical resources. Kaitiakitanga involves not only the right to use and manage taonga but also the responsibility and obligation to sustainably use and manage them.

The Resource Management Act 1991 has incorporated the rights of Māori to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga in managing natural resources and the environment. The Act requires decision makers to recognise and provide for the relationship of Māori, their culture, and their traditions with their ancestral lands, waters, wāhi tapu sites, and other taonga.

Environmental education programmes should provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills as they decide what actions could be taken on a range of environmental issues and problems.

## **The key dimensions of environmental education**

Environmental education involves the integration of three key dimensions:

- education in the environment

- education about the environment
- education for the environment

A balanced environmental education programme addresses all three dimensions.

### **Education *in* the environment**

Experiences beyond the classroom in both natural and built environments not only provide opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience in the environment but also enhance classroom-based work. These opportunities can be used to develop skills in observation, data collection, practical inquiry and investigation, and the use of specialist technology. Such situations can also require social and co-operative skills, group-work skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills.

Opportunities for such experiences will vary, depending on the local environment, but all national curriculum statements provide opportunities for learning experiences outside the classroom.

The [Education Outside the Classroom \(EOTC\) website](#) provides guidelines for education in the environment. Quality outdoor experiences that have a clear sense of purpose and are well managed can help students to develop an appreciation of and a concern for the environment.

### **Education *about* the environment**

Knowing about and understanding the natural and built environments and appreciating the key social, political, ecological, and economic factors that influence decision making on local, national, and global issues is critical if students are to meet the aims of environmental education.

Cultural awareness, economic activities, political decisions, ecological understandings, and health and safety issues are all factors that influence education about the environment. The national curriculum statements provide frameworks for knowing about and considering these factors, which will help students to establish their own environmental values and attitudes.

### **Education *for* the environment**

Education for the environment is intrinsically linked to the "affective" aspects of environmental education as it deals with people's emotions and their willingness to make lifestyle choices that help maintain and improve the quality of the environment.

Education for the environment is based on students' knowledge and understanding about the environment and their practical experiences in the environment. All three aspects are interdependent.

Education for the environment seeks ways in which people can minimise their impact on the environment. In a society that values freedom and choice and where resources are finite, it is important to develop a sense of responsibility about the social and natural environments of local, national, and international communities. Environmental education promotes informed concern that enables individuals and groups to take effective action on environmental issues.

## **Environmental issues (appendix one)**

A wide range of issues can be included in Environmental Education programmes. When selecting issues to study, schools should consider school, local, national, and global contexts. The range of environmental issues arising at a **school** level may include:

- enhancing the school environment
- conserving energy
- establishing environmentally friendly practices
- preserving local ecosystems and historical landmarks
- reducing solid waste and litter.

Within the **local** environment, these issues may be more specific. For example:

- residents of cities may be concerned about motorway developments, smog, or the use of landfills
- rural residents may be affected by deforestation, the siting of wind farms, the availability of suitable housing, or the effects of mining
- people who live near water may have concerns about water quality, commercial fishing, or the development of marine reserves
- groups of Māori may be concerned with the preservation of urupā, the return of Māori land, or the use of pounamu
- other groups may take up such issues as the eradication of predators or the protection of such endangered species as kākāpō, Hector's dolphin, tuatara, or kauri.

**National** environmental priorities in New Zealand are outlined on page 8 of the Government's *Environment 2010 Strategy*. They are:

- managing our land resources
- managing our water resources
- maintaining clear, clean, breathable air
- protecting indigenous habitats and biological diversity
- managing pests, weeds, and diseases
- maintaining sustainable fisheries
- managing the environmental impacts of energy services
- managing the environmental effects of transport services
- managing waste, contaminated sites, and hazardous substances
- reducing the risk of climate change
- restoring the ozone layer.

Environmental Education issues in a **global** context include:

- population control
- climate change
- energy consumption
- the sustainability of resources
- ozone depletion
- war
- famine
- disease
- water quality
- the maintenance of biodiversity
- whaling
- rainforests
- equitable access to resources
- the rights of indigenous peoples
- the use of fossil fuels
- international fishing agreements.

The relative importance of these issues for each region will vary, depending on their environmental priorities. For example, in some regions of the world, the primary focuses for Environmental Education are population control, famine, disease, water quality, and literacy.

## **Useful organisations (appendix three)**

The following organisations are active in the environmental area and may provide either advice or resources to support Environmental Education programmes.

### **Government agencies**

- [Department of Conservation](#)
- [Ministry for Primary Industries](#)
- [Ministry of Economic Development](#)
- [Ministry of Education](#)
- [Ministry for the Environment](#)
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)
- [Ministry of Health](#)
- [Ministry of Māori Development Te Puni Kokiri](#)

## Groups and clubs

- [Kiwi Conservation Club](#)
- [Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust](#)

## Crown research institutes

- [Industrial Research Limited](#)
- [Institute of Environmental Science and Research Ltd \(ESR\)](#)
- [Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Ltd](#)
- [Landcare Research New Zealand Ltd](#)
- [National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research Ltd \(NIWA\)](#)
- [New Zealand Forest Research Institute Ltd \(NZFRI\)](#)
- [New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Ltd](#)
- [New Zealand Pastoral Agriculture Research Institute Ltd \(AgResearch\)](#)

## Other organisations

### [NZAEE – Educating for sustainability](#)

The New Zealand Association for Environmental Education is a national, non-profit organisation that promotes and supports lifelong learning and encourages behaviours that lead to sustainability for New Zealand/Aotearoa. NZAEE is an independent voice for environmental education, empowering people to respect and nurture the environment, recognising its link with the social, cultural, and economic aspects of sustainability.

### [Greenpeace](#)

This worldwide organisation campaigns for the environment by undertaking direct action, providing public education and information, and lobbying governments and industries. Greenpeace provides resource information on a range of current environmental issues.

### [New Zealand Marine Studies Centre and Aquarium](#)

This organisation runs programmes about New Zealand's marine environment for students from early childhood through to senior secondary school level. These programmes and related activities are closely linked to the curriculum and include guided shore walks, laboratory investigations, boat trips, and discovery sessions. A variety of educational resources is available.

### [New Zealand Association for Environmental Education](#)

This association promotes environmental education initiatives and professional development opportunities for both formal and non-formal educators in New Zealand and supports a network of educators.

### [New Zealand Conservation Authority](#)

This authority is a national citizen body standing alongside the Department of Conservation. Its role is to promote the public interest in conservation policy and management and to provide innovative solutions.

### [New Zealand Glass Environmental Fund](#)

This organisation provides grants to schools to fund projects related to the environment.

### [The Environmental Education Centre of New Zealand](#)

The centre is situated in a unique alpine environment one and a half hours from Christchurch on State Highway 73. The area is covered in mountain beech and backed by the Craigieburn Range. The centre consists of a six-bed cottage and a twenty-seven-bed lodge. The lodge contains a laboratory where teachers and students can conduct a number of fieldwork studies. Environmental education resource materials are also available to groups using the centre.

### **The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**

The Commissioner works independently of the Government to ensure that planning and management by public authorities improve the quality of the environment.

The Commissioner does this by:

- reviewing legislation that may affect the environment
- investigating the performance of public authorities
- providing advice on better environmental management.

### **The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society**

This New Zealand-based conservation organisation protects and promotes the New Zealand environment. The organisation has been involved in a range of conservation projects and takes an active role by encouraging public debate and lobbying decision makers on issues associated with the environment.

### **The Royal Society of New Zealand**

The society aims to promote and advance science, mathematics, social sciences, and technology in New Zealand. Its educational activities include programmes for pupils such as the CREST Awards, BP Challenge and science and technology fairs, the National Waterways Project, the NZ Science Mathematics and Technology Teacher Fellowship (which includes teachers of social sciences), the production of resources (such as the ALPHA and GAMMA series), and the distribution of Helix and Scientriffic magazines. A number of the Royal Society's activities have a strong element of education about, in, and for the environment.

### **World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature New Zealand**

This international conservation organisation aims to raise people's awareness of threats to nature and attract support for safeguarding the natural world. WWF for Nature New Zealand is an independent part of the WWF international network. It is involved in research programmes and environmental education programmes for children. The education section provides a range of resources and information.

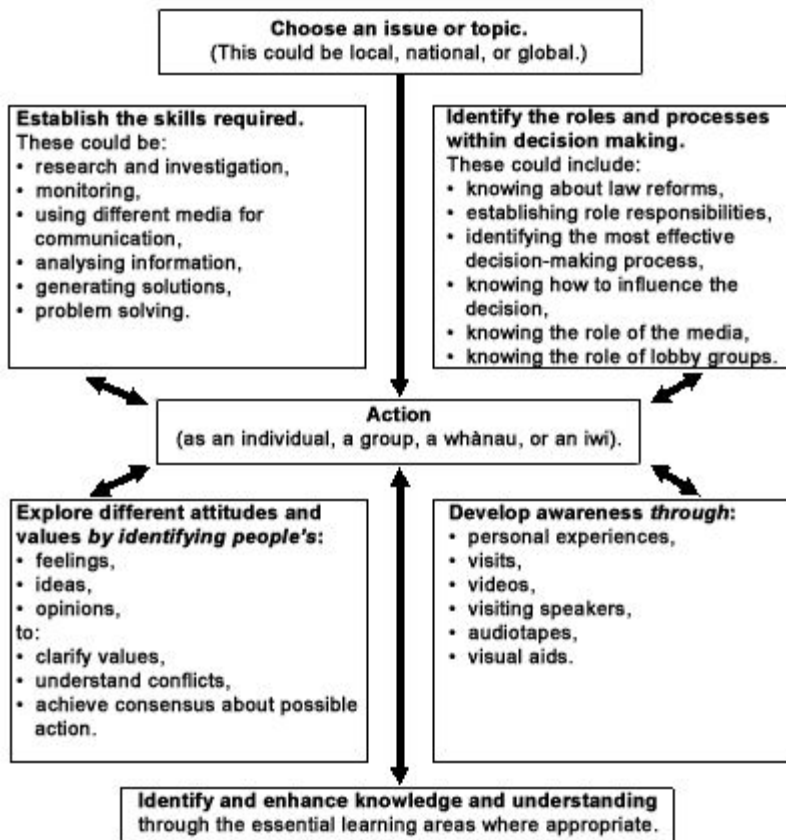
Many other organisations, places, and resources throughout the country can also contribute to the diverse components of environmental education.

Such contributors include zoos, parks, nature reserves, research stations, historical sites, prominent landmarks, industrial sites, and water treatment stations. Making contact with people who run these organisations or who care for the places and resources can be very useful.

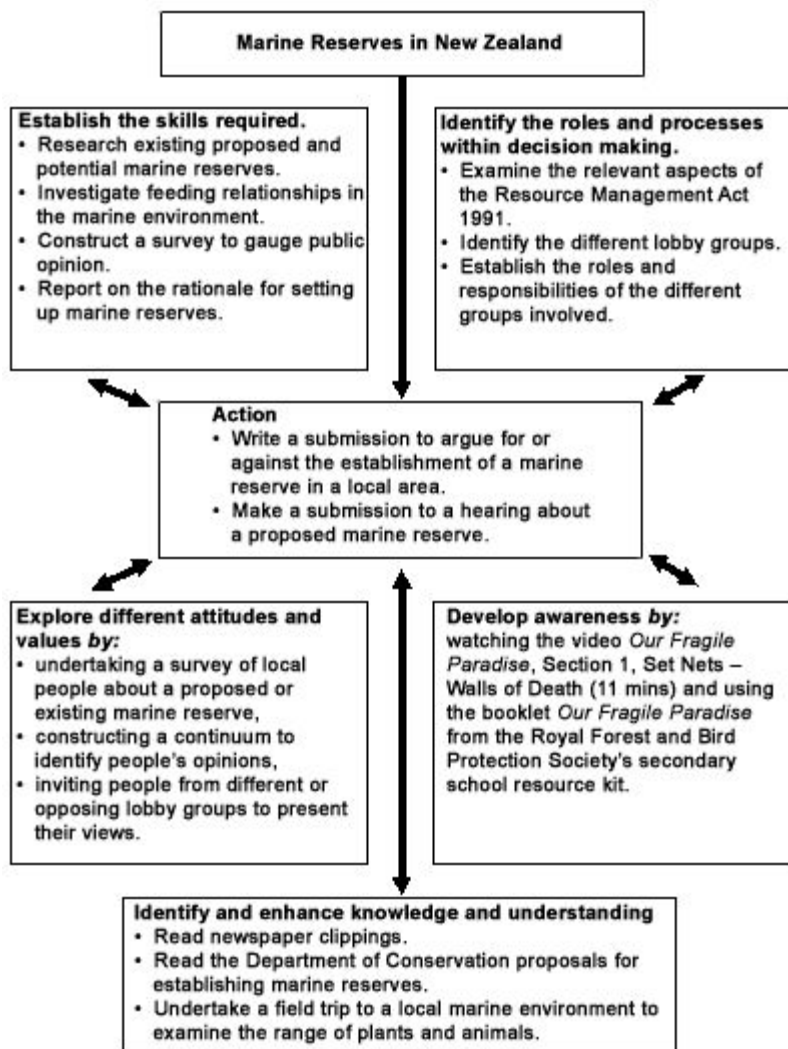
Councils around New Zealand also produce numerous environment-related information packages that are available to schools and community groups.

## **An Action-oriented Approach (Appendix Five)**

The following diagram describes an action-oriented approach to environmental education.



Using an action-oriented approach, the level 5 topic Marine Reserves could be developed as illustrated below.



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[Return to top](#)

## [Sitemap](#)

- [The New Zealand Curriculum](#)
  - [Foreword](#)
  - [Purpose and scope](#)
  - [Vision](#)
  - [Principles](#)
  - [Values](#)
  - [Key competencies](#)
  - [Official languages](#)
  - [Learning areas](#)
  - [Effective pedagogy](#)
  - [The school curriculum: Design and review](#)
  - [The Education Act and the curriculum](#)
  - [Requirements for boards of trustees](#)
  - [Years and curriculum levels](#)
  - [Glossary and whakatauki](#)
  - [Acknowledgments](#)
- [Reviewing your curriculum](#)
  - [About](#)
  - [Setting the direction](#)
  - [Possible pathways](#)
  - [Examples and inspiration](#)
- [National Standards](#)
  - [Professional development](#)
  - [Tools](#)
  - [Supporting parents and whānau](#)
  - [From great to excellent](#)
  - [Key information](#)
  - [Reading and writing standards](#)

## [Mathematics standards](#)

- [National Standards archives](#)
- [Principles](#)
  - [High expectations](#)
  - [Treaty of Waitangi](#)
  - [Cultural diversity](#)
  - [Inclusion](#)
  - [Learning to learn](#)
  - [Community engagement](#)
  - [Coherence](#)
  - [Future focus](#)
- [Key competencies](#)
  - [About](#)
  - [Tools](#)
  - [Examples](#)
  - [Resources](#)
  - [Key competencies and effective pedagogy](#)
- [System of support \(incl. PLD\)](#)
  - [Background](#)
  - [Triggers](#)
  - [Learning needs](#)
  - [Resource selector](#)
  - [Designing learning for school context](#)
  - [Impact of changed practices](#)
  - [Learner-initiated supports](#)
  - [School-initiated supports \(Incl. PLD\)](#)
  - [NCEA L2 toolbox](#)
- [Secondary middle leaders](#)
- [Middle schooling](#)
- [Curriculum resources](#)
- [Curriculum stories](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Contact New Zealand Curriculum](#)
- 

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- [About this site](#) |
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- [Help](#) |
- [Feedback](#)
  
- [Accessibility](#) |
- [Copyright and privacy](#) |
- [Copyright in Schools](#) |
- [Search](#)

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