



Environment Institute of
Australia and New Zealand Inc.

ABSTRACT SPECIFICATIONS

Title: Codes of ethics – do they protect the professions, the public or the environment?

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Abstract:

Professionals have a role to contribute specialist knowledge and skills which can be trusted by clients, agencies and the community. In complex and controversial environmental issues, where specialists work together as multi-disciplinary teams, effective collaboration requires mutual understanding of the basis for value judgments. Environmental practitioners work closely with planners, scientists, engineers and others to analyse technical risks and evaluate impacts, taking into account (and sometimes trading off) economic and political factors. This process involves values, world-views and perspectives which may be drawn from various sources: educational training, group socialization processes within professions and organizations, professional codes of ethics, environmental activism, role models and personal morality. For professions with 'gate-keeper' control over educational qualifications (through accreditation of University courses), career paths can reflect a consistency of values from training, group socialization, professional codes, role models and mentoring. However for more diverse professions, such as that of environmental practice, groups typically go through a 'professionalisation' process at some stage, where development of a code of ethics has helped define their area of practice and identify shared values, as occurred within EIANZ when the Codes were revised in 2012.

As part of research into the ethics of professional environmental practice, the codes of ethics of several professional institutes have been compared, with particular emphasis on the extent to which they reflect emphasis on protecting the reputation and credibility of their own members, on benefitting the community or on maintaining/enhancing the environment. This comparison challenges two preconceptions: (a) that ethical responsibilities towards the natural environment are unique to the environmental profession; and (b) that professional codes per se provide effective guidance regarding moral responsibilities regarding long-term environmental sustainability.