

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

On 25 February 1992, it was announced that an Intergovernmental agreement on the environment had been reached between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

The agreement is a complex document and will be the subject of an article in the next edition of the AELN.

The agreement is the culmination of a process which commenced in October 1990 when heads of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and representatives of Local Government met at a special Premiers' conference in Brisbane and agreed to develop and conclude an Intergovernmental agreement on the environment to provide a mechanism by which to facilitate:

- a cooperative national approach to the environment;
- a better definition of the roles and the respective governments in respect of the environment;
- a reduction in the number of disputes between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories on environmental issues;
- greater certainty of government and business decision-making; and
- better environmental protection.

AUSTRALIA JOINS THE BASEL CONVENTION

On 17 February 1992, the federal government announced that Australia had joined the Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes.

One of the aims of the Convention is to prevent the practice of industrial countries shipping toxic waste to developing countries who do not have environmentally sound means to dispose of them. The Convention bans this type of trade in hazardous wastes, as well as strictly controlling the movement of such wastes. Hazardous wastes included PCB's and banned pesticides such as DDT.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ALLIANCE WORLDWIDE

The Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW) is a network of public interest environmental lawyers with offices in Australia, the United States, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Peru, Malaysia, Ecuador and Chile. It is likely that offices will soon be established in India and Japan.

The aim of E-LAW is to help develop and provide support for public interest environmental law and litigation around the world. As environmental law is an area of rapid change it is important that lawyers advocating environmental protection are able to learn from the knowledge and experience of those in other countries. Assistance provided by lawyers in different nations can be crucial to effective environmental advocacy.

The beginnings of E-LAW were in the meeting of public interest lawyers from all over the world at the 1989 and 1990 Public Interest Law Conferences at Oregon in the United States. At these conferences they discussed ways to facilitate and make more effective locally based public interest environmental law movements in various countries. Subsequent contacts with lawyers on every continent confirmed that no existing organisation served this role. No group actively promoted cooperation, training, information sharing and exchanges of experts among public interest lawyers and advocates.

E-LAW Australia was established in July 1991 and is based in Sydney. To date E-LAW Australia has principally responded to overseas requests from other E-LAW offices for information. Communication between E-LAW offices is facilitated by being linked to computer conferences which allow ongoing dialogues and information exchange.

Unlike North America, where the tradition of public interest environmental law has been established for over 20 years, in the Australian region it is still in its relative infancy. Because of this, one of the principal goals of E-LAW Australia is to help develop a network by establishing contacts between those working in the public interest environmental law area.

In order to do this E-LAW Australia is currently preparing a directory of public interest environmental lawyers, consultants and other contacts in Australia, the South Pacific and South