Whether you believe the scientific information and statistics from Al Gore’s recent film, An Inconvenient Truth, or not the film raises some interesting issues about global warming and human activity on planet Earth. It is a film that explores this complex topic of climate change with graphics, film images, cartoons and simple explanations. Al Gore states that people who make decisions in power only listen when people tell them often enough. “If an issue is not on the tips of their tongues they won’t listen to their constituents.” This quote resonates with the members of this newly formed special interest group and sets it apart from other early childhood environmental organisations.

The inaugural meeting took place at St Kilda/Balaclava Kindergarten with a small, but committed group of members. Jeanette Keser gave us a tour of the service which has a rich history of environmental education and sustainable practices. Current features include: vegetable and herb gardens, large waterwall water tanks, green cleaning methods, native trees and focus on connecting children with the natural world.

AIMS OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

- **ADVOCACY** ~ Advocate for children, families and issues that relate to environmental sustainability
- **EDUCATION** ~ Increase awareness and knowledge
- **NETWORKING** ~ Increase discussion on topics about sustainable education and development with key organisations

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**Inaugural Meeting Decisions**

**ADVOCACY**

- The aims of the group were outlined with the intention of not duplicating groups that are already conducting exemplary work with early childhood environmental education. This Special Interest Group will endeavour to work with the charter or ECA, with a strong focus on raising the profile of sustainability in early childhood and advocating for sustainability to be entrenched in programs, policies and practices that affect children and families in child care, kindergartens, schools and external education services.
  - Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC Vic Inc) provide membership with newsletters, professional development, service visits, sale of sustainable resources and an holistic approach to EE at an early childhood level. [www.vicnet.au/~eec/](http://www.vicnet.au/~eec/)
  - Sue Elliot convenes a Special Interest Group at a national level with the Australian Association for Environmental Education. (AAEE) This group communicates through a highly informative e-newsletter, gathers information, happenings and research from Australia and New Zealand [www.aaee.org.au](http://www.aaee.org.au)

- Suggestions at the inaugural meeting for advocacy projects included lobbying organisations such as The Gould Group/League and CERES to extend sustainable awards to the early childhood sector. Awards for sustainable practices and gardens are currently only available to primary and secondary school.
• Water companies also provide education officers but only two water companies in Australia provide early childhood water conservation programs. Water is a very tangible topic for young children as they use it in play and everyday life at home and the early childhood service.
• The Children’s services training package for child care educators is under review and work has already taken place to include a sustainable competency in the revised package. The SIG group will write a submission to the industry training board to support this inclusion.

EDUCATION

- Swinburne University’s National Centre for Sustainability has introduced a one year, part-time Diploma of Sustainability in 2006. The course introduces students to sustainability concepts and explores how they can be applied across a broad range of work and study areas. This course has been offered to final year students who can graduate with a double diploma that is linked to any diploma. The child and family studies department at Swinburne is considering offering a customised Diploma of Sustainability in 2007 to current and external applicants. Contact Tracy Young for further information.

- Tim Flannery’s book about global warming “The Weather makers” has been adapted for children (9 to 90) with a concise and revised addition that is also easier for adults to read (always a bonus) entitled “We are the Weather makers”

NETWORKING AND INFORMATION SHARING

• The group enjoyed the visit to a sustainable service and chose to conduct future meetings at services who are using sustainable practices at a beginning and more advanced level.
• City of Melbourne has completed a comparative study of the environmental impacts of cloth and disposable nappies. This will be reported in the next newsletter.
• A Victorian kindergarten has sought significant funding for sustainable practices and developed a program called “Empower.” This will also be reported in the next newsletter.
• “Green Canary” is an organisation that promotes eco-logical fundraising. What a refreshing change from chocolate drives and rampant consumerism of often meaningless products. Fair-trade coffee, plant based cleaners, compact fluorescent light bulbs and organic soaps are examples of products on offer. www.greencanary.com Tel: 039 486 1300
• Sustainable Gardens Victoria is an organisation that promotes healthy garden, healthy people and healthy environments. They provide free gardening sheets, newsletter and advice for the home gardener and will advise children services about sustainable gardening and practices. www.sgaonline.org.au
• The first early childhood environmental conference is taking place in New Zealand 24-26 November 2006. Hand-Hand conference. Pathways to a sustainable future in the early years through environmental education. http://ecteacher.interact.ac.nz

SIG Group members left to right
Kirsten Slifirski, Jeanette Keser, Denise Rado-lynch and Jason Crockett

FURTHER INFORMATION
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“A Small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”
Margaret Mead.