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Understanding the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA)

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Rethinking Humanity's Relationship with Nature

Across Australia and around the world, communities are facing growing environmental pressures. Climate change, biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, pollution, and increasing pressures on water and natural resources are affecting ecosystems and communities alike. While practical environmental action remains essential, many organisations are also asking deeper questions about how human societies relate to the natural world and whether current systems are equipped to support a sustainable future.

One Australian organisation contributing to these conversations is the [Australian Earth Laws Alliance \(AELA\)](#), a national not-for-profit organisation exploring the relationship between environmental stewardship, governance, law, economics, ethics, and culture.

Through education, research, collaboration, and public engagement, AELA encourages dialogue about how societies might live more responsibly within ecological limits while supporting the wellbeing of people, ecosystems, and future generations. Their work invites reflection on not only environmental outcomes, but also the systems and values that shape humanity's relationship with the Earth.

For organisations such as [Householders' Options to Protect the Environment \(HOPE\) Inc. \(Australia\)](#), which advocate for responsible and sustainable stewardship of the environment, these conversations offer valuable opportunities for learning and informed community engagement. Importantly, AELA moves beyond focusing solely on environmental problems and instead explores how communities might better understand and care for the living systems upon which all life depends.

Where Did AELA Come From?

The [Australian Earth Laws Alliance](#) emerged from growing international conversations around Earth jurisprudence and ecological governance. These ideas developed from concerns that many modern legal, economic, and governance systems often treat nature primarily as property or a resource for human use. While these systems have supported development and economic growth, critics argue they do not always recognise the interconnected nature of ecological systems or the long-term consequences of environmental degradation.

AELA was established to help bring these discussions into the Australian context through education, collaboration, and public dialogue. Their work has been influenced by ecological thinkers including Thomas Berry and legal scholar Cormac Cullinan, whose work explored how law and governance might better reflect humanity's relationship with the natural world.

At the centre of this philosophy is a simple but significant idea: humans are not separate from nature, but part of a *wider living Earth community*.

This perspective does not dismiss the importance of human needs or development. Instead, it encourages reflection on how environmental health, community wellbeing, and future resilience are closely connected. Over time, AELA has grown into a platform that brings together environmental advocates, researchers, legal professionals, educators, artists, Indigenous knowledge holders, and community members interested in exploring more regenerative and place-conscious ways of thinking about the future.

Understanding Earth Jurisprudence and Rights of Nature

One of the key ideas explored through AELA's work is Earth jurisprudence.

[Earth jurisprudence](#) is a philosophy of law and governance that recognises humans as only one part of a broader living system. Rather than assuming that nature exists solely to serve human interests, this perspective asks how societies can organise themselves in ways that respect ecological boundaries and support the flourishing of both people and the wider environment.

This approach draws attention to how laws, institutions, and economic systems interact with the natural world. It asks whether current governance structures adequately protect ecosystems and biodiversity, and whether alternative approaches may be needed to better support environmental resilience.

Earth jurisprudence also encourages people to think beyond immediate outcomes and consider **intergenerational responsibility**. Decisions made today can shape the wellbeing of future communities and ecosystems, making long-term care and stewardship an important part of the conversation. In many ways, these ideas invite reflection on a simple but meaningful question: what kind of relationship do we hope to build with the natural world and with those who come after us? These questions have helped shape evolving conversations about ecological responsibility and the ways societies understand and care for the living world.

One international discussion connected to Earth jurisprudence is the [Rights of Nature](#) movement. Rights of Nature recognises that ecosystems such as rivers, forests, and landscapes may possess inherent rights to exist, regenerate, and thrive. Rather than viewing nature solely as property or a resource for human use, this approach encourages recognition of the natural world as a living system with its own ecological value and importance.

Supporters of Rights of Nature argue that environmental protection should not depend only on human benefit or economic value, but should also recognise humanity's responsibility to care for and protect the ecosystems upon which life depends.

International examples have helped shape these conversations. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Whanganui River was granted legal recognition following agreements between Māori communities and the government. The river was recognised as an indivisible and living whole, reflecting both ecological and cultural relationships with the landscape.

Examples such as this are often discussed within Earth jurisprudence because they encourage broader thinking about stewardship, governance, and the ways communities value and care for the natural world.

While these ideas may sound philosophical, AELA works to make them practical and accessible through workshops, webinars, educational resources, public events, and collaborative learning opportunities. **Their goal is not simply to debate theory, but to encourage informed and constructive dialogue about humanity's relationship with nature and the responsibilities that come with environmental stewardship.**

Programs and Areas of Work

AELA's work spans several interconnected areas that explore how environmental stewardship, governance, and community resilience can be strengthened in a changing world.

A key focus is [Earth Laws](#), which examines ecological governance, environmental ethics, and legal frameworks that promote greater environmental responsibility. Through interdisciplinary learning, research, and public dialogue, this work invites people to consider how governance systems may evolve to better recognise ecological relationships and support environmental resilience.

AELA's [Future Dreaming](#) initiative was created to strengthen peoples' understanding of cross cultural ecological knowledge, with a strong focus on First Nations' Peoples' ancient law/lore and governance.

Rather than focusing solely on environmental decline, this work explores how creativity, collaboration, and future-focused thinking can help shape more sustainable pathways forward.

AELA also examines the relationship between economies and ecological limits through its [Earth Economies](#) work. This area explores ideas such as bioregional economies, wellbeing economies, regenerative approaches, circular systems, and Doughnut Economics. These conversations encourage broader reflection on how economic systems influence environmental and social outcomes, and how economies might better support both sustainability and community wellbeing.

[Bioregional Governance](#) is another important area of AELA's work. This approach encourages communities to better understand and respond to the unique ecological characteristics of their local landscapes, waterways, and regions. Rather than relying on one-size-fits-all solutions, bioregional governance recognises the value of place-based knowledge, local participation, and environmental decision-making informed by the ecosystems in which communities live. Strengthening connections between people and place can help support stewardship, resilience, and more sustainable approaches to governance. Bioregioning (Bioregional AU) encourages place-based approaches to stewardship and governance, helping communities better understand the environmental identity and relationships of the regions in which they live.

AELA also supports a range of initiatives that bring these ideas into everyday practice and create opportunities for participation, connection, and deeper ecological understanding.

For example, [AELA Earth Arts](#) highlights the role of creativity, storytelling, and culture in fostering ecological awareness and systems thinking.

AELA's [Grass Tree Fellowship Program](#) supports learning, leadership, and collaboration among individuals interested in ecological governance and Earth-centred thinking. The organisation also contributes to the [Ecologically Just Transitions Learning Network](#), which explores how communities and systems can transition toward environmentally and socially just futures while recognising the importance of equity, wellbeing, and shared responsibility.

Together, these initiatives reflect AELA's commitment to exploring ecological thinking not only through dialogue and research, but also through creativity, partnership, and practical community engagement.

Education and Community Learning

Education is central to AELA's mission.

The organisation offers workshops, webinars, online courses, public presentations, and collaborative learning opportunities designed to make complex environmental and governance ideas more accessible.

Participants come from a wide range of backgrounds, including environmental professionals, researchers, educators, artists, students, community organisations, and members of the public interested in sustainability and systems change.

Topics explored through AELA's educational work include ecological law, governance reform, environmental ethics, regenerative futures, decolonisation, and environmental responsibility.

One of the strengths of AELA's approach is its interdisciplinary nature. Rather than limiting discussions to a single profession or field of expertise, the organisation encourages collaboration across different perspectives and forms of knowledge.

AELA also recognises the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems and caring for Country practices, which offer valuable insights into long-standing relationships between people and the natural environment.

By encouraging learning and dialogue across communities, AELA helps create spaces where environmental conversations can become more informed, inclusive, and future-focused.

Why These Conversations Matter

Australia faces increasingly complex environmental challenges. Climate change, biodiversity decline, land degradation, pollution, and pressures on water systems require practical responses, sound policy, and community action.

Yet these challenges also raise broader questions.

How do societies define progress?

How can governance better recognise environmental limits?

What responsibilities do present generations hold toward those who come after us?

Amid these growing pressures, AELA's work highlights the growing need to consider not only environmental action, but also the systems and values that influence environmental outcomes. Their work emphasises the value of ecological awareness, collaboration, informed participation, and long-term thinking in shaping healthier relationships between people and the natural world.

Whether viewed through law, economics, education, or culture, these conversations are increasingly important as communities seek pathways toward more sustainable futures.

Looking Forward

Conversations about sustainability continue to evolve, and organisations such as the [Australian Earth Laws Alliance](#) encourage us to think more deeply about humanity's relationship with the living world.

Their work reminds us that environmental stewardship is not only about regulations or technological solutions. It is also about how societies understand responsibility, care, and our place within the broader community of life.

Whether or not readers agree with every perspective explored, these discussions invite thoughtful reflection on stewardship, responsibility, and the kind of future we hope to leave for generations to come.

At HOPE, we recognise the value of informed discussion, environmental stewardship, community participation, and thoughtful engagement in helping support healthier and more sustainable futures for all.

To learn more about AELA's programs, resources, and educational initiatives, visit: [Australian Earth Laws Alliance \(AELA\)](#)
