BEN BALLARAT ENVIRONMENT NETWORK Inc

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COPY FOR TIM for REFERENCE

to : Ms Sherryl Garbutt

15th June 1998

Shadow Minister for Environment, Conservation & Land Management
591 Grimshaw Street
BUNDOORA, 3083

Dear Ms Garbutt,

Following the meeting with the Shadow Cabinet at Ballarat Town Hall on Tuesday last, 8th June 1998, this letter is to continue the points I was trying to make before being cut-off at the premature end of the meeting.

Although B.E.N. has been successful in obtaining funding for several Environment and LandCare groups and projects (all of which are under way to varying extents), all of the member groups are community-based and operate on a voluntary basis; and all could undoubtedly use more funding if it were available. Thus there is an automatic limit to how much these groups can achieve, and to how much they should be expected to achieve. It must not be forgotten that many volunteers in many different groups are now doing, unpaid, jobs which Government Departments should be doing - and which were in many cases once performed by Government agencies.

Our constituent groups are generally making progress, and within this region there is both support and the opportunity to influence regional policies to suit our circumstances. The *Ballarat Conservation Strategy* (now being re-drafted) is a remarkable and visionary document, which gives hope for a viable future - within the limits of regional control. However there is a limit to the effectiveness of our member groups when consideration is given to regulatory aspects broader than regional and local issues. In terms of, say, catchment health and water quality, a considerable problem is that of litter. Voluntary efforts at local levels can eventually be seen by volunteers to be fruitless when they see Governments unwilling to seriously address the problems. The Labour Party could do well to develop some visionary policies to reduce such problems - for example the introduction of Deposit Legislation which imposes deposits on all disposable and Take-Away containers. Adventurous policies and courageous solutions are required to deal with many of the environmental problems which we face. Of course there are other issues of concern to our member groups, and we hope for the chance to discuss these further with you.

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Our member groups require at least two things from Government :

1. EXTENSION SERVICES, which link the active volunteer groups to the relevant programmes and information available from various Government Departments and Services. This requires in each District within each Region a staff of trained and experienced officers who are resourced with up-to-date information and advice, and equipped to dispense advice and to provide interpretive services to the on-ground volunteer groups. This implies a fully functioning and funded Government bureaucracy. Currently many departments seem unable to fulfil their basic responsibilities.

2. RELIABLE and CURRENT SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION relating to LandCare, Re-vegetation, Weed Control, Catchment-Care, etc.. Volunteer groups often require the services of remote institutions for identification of samples to enable problems to be accurately diagnosed. Many of the methods now recognised as the most effective or appropriate for the LandCare movement are the result of recent research work by many people in many different fields. Many private individuals have led the way, but their visionary ideas have only gained wide acceptance as a result of extensive investigation, and testing in academic institutions and Government Research Establishments. Academic thinking has directed investigation and research efforts, and the results have been tested in the field in co-operative endeavours between Government Agencies and

Research Establishments, Tertiary Education Institutions, and Private Land-holders, individuals or groups. Twenty years ago many current problems were either not recognised, or solutions recommended then would now be considered either inappropriate or ineffective.

Science has played a vital role in reaching the current state of understanding of environmental and ecological problems. Science is most useful when it exists as a continuum, adding to previously gathered data, extending the breadth of the fields covered, and incorporating existing knowledge with current research and thinking from external but related fields. This implies a suite of fully funded and staffed Scientific Research Establishments. There are fields of research required now which were not dreamt-of two generations ago, yet much current work relies on an information base commenced decades earlier. Now there can be no doubt that more - ***not less*** - scientific research is required than ever before. The importance of our PUBLIC Scientific Research Establishments cannot be over-emphasised; they provide a direction to our volunteer efforts, and certainty that our various endeavours are well-advised and have a chance of success. The current Government's policy of dismantling these services is mindless and counter-productive.

QUESTION -1. What is the Labour Party's policy on the Staffing Levels of the Government Departments relevant to Agriculture, LandCare and Catchment Protection ?

QUESTION -2. Which Departments and Institutions does the Labour Party see as being important to these fields ?

QUESTION -3. What is the Labour Party's policy on the funding allocations to Government Departments relevant to environmental anad ecological issues ?

If these questions are undefined within your party, we will be grateful if you can direct the Party to consider these matters and advise us of its policies accordingly.

In summary please consider these points :

- In future environmental problems are sure to surface which are not currently anticipated.
- Currently ecological problems (such as weeds) are increasing at rates faster than the ability of many community groups to contain them.
- Governments are now and will continue to be reliant on continuing volunteer efforts to redress environmental degradation - both past and future.
- Governments **must** supply funds and other resources, both material and intangible; to enable community and individual volunteer efforts to continue, and to achieve worthwhile results.
- To discontinue Scientific Research is to waste previously gathered, costly information and knowledge; and abandon chances for future improvements in our understanding of the environmental problems which many of us are trying to overcome.

We look forward to your reply, and for the chance to discuss these matters with you in greater depth.

Sincerely

John Endacott
Chairman,
Ballarat Environment Network
25th June 1998

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Copies to :
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