

Advice for Students and Graduates

Breaking into the Environment Industry

The environment industry is an exciting and rewarding industry to be a part of, but like many industries it can be difficult to get a foot in the door.

We get a lot of queries from both students and graduates seeking advice on best pathways for entering the environmental industry. Usually part-way through or having just completed a science degree, they are brimming with passion and eager for an opportunity that will kick-start their environmental career.

There's no denying the Australian job market is becoming increasingly competitive and the environment industry is no exception. With so many graduates vying for a limited number of entry level roles, graduates need to establish a competitive advantage that will make them stand out to employers.



A common barrier is that employers are seeking graduates with some form of relevant experience and skill level. Graduates who can demonstrate that they have gained experience and competencies complimentary to the environmental industry position themselves above other applicants. Recruiters receive hundreds of applications for an advertised role and are short listing only those with relevant experience and skill sets in addition to qualifications. For Graduates, this means seeking opportunities to be exposed to the industry and undertaking training courses that will compliment entry-level environmental roles.

“But how am I supposed to get experience and skills if no one will hire me?” many graduates will ask, and it's a valid question.

Seek out volunteering opportunities: Many valued skill sets are gained via experiences with various wildlife and ecology not for profit organisations which rely on volunteers to undertake pivotal duties required. Volunteering also provides a great opportunity to network with people in the industry.

Join industry associations: Experience comes from knowledge of current practices and research findings in the industry. Industry associations provide important updates and information to their members. Associations hold informative conferences and on-line hubs providing the prospects for networking with professionals working in the industry and mentorship opportunities. Most associations provide discounted membership for students.

Obtain relevant competencies: There are a number of complimentary training courses providing relevant skills such as first aid, 4 wheel driving, venomous snake handling, chain saw, chemical safety etc.

Cold calling companies and submitting expressions of interest: Many students and graduates send CVs through to the Human Resources department requesting they be kept in mind for any upcoming positions. Whilst this certainly is a proactive approach, recruiters receive several per day. These are often filed and forgotten. It's best to make yourself known to a company by calling or popping in and then following up with an email containing your CV. Keep in mind however Human Resources are busy and usually focussed on vacant positions. Often its best to regularly check company website's for potential vacancies and approach the business when it appears they are hiring.

Real life examples from our people

We asked a few of our Ecosure and Avisure (Ecosure's sister company) team members how they broke into the environment industry. This is what they told us:

Marianne Donoghue, GIS Analyst at Ecosure



"My entry into the environmental field was through a bit of (unintentional) networking and gaining administration experience which got my 'foot in the door'. I did a BSc in Ecology straight after school, then spent almost two years travelling (doing nothing related to the environmental field) before I returned home to the UK and ended up doing office temping. Through chatting to the company owner at one of my temp jobs I was introduced to the owner of an environmental consultancy who was looking for an administrator. I was offered the position of administrator/ecology intern and worked there for a year before emigrating to Australia.

Once in Australia I began doing temp work again, while also contacting environmental consultancies looking for work – any position. I did get very close to getting a job this way on a couple of occasions, however due to bad luck/timing none of the positions worked out. I then applied for an advertised receptionist position at Ecosure and was offered the job. I worked on reception for about a year before moving into a project administration role, and during this time developed an interest in GIS. I began studying a graduate diploma in GIS part time, started assisting the GIS analyst, and now GIS is my main role at Ecosure."

Nicola Head, Ecologist at Ecosure



"I was in my third year of completing my Bachelor of Science degree at Griffith University on the Gold Coast when Phill Shaw presented a lecture on Ecosure and Avisure. He discussed bird dispersal at airports as well as terrestrial and aquatic ecology, wildlife management, GIS, disease ecology and all the exciting projects Ecosure and Avisure have worked on over the years. It was really inspiring to know that there are companies out there that are passionate about the environment! I also hoped to do work experience there as part of an elective in my final semester.

I took one of Phil's business cards, prepped my CV and explained why I would love to do work experience there and how I hope to help them. A few weeks later the HR manager

called me regarding a quick interview. I was greeted by lovely team members and a pile of literature that I could start reading that day.

I worked really hard during this volunteering time and when an opportunity presented approximately six months later, I applied and got a position as a Graduate Ecologist!”

Emily Hatfield, Ecologist at Ecosure



“In my first year of Uni during my Associate Diploma of Applied Science, I volunteered at a zoo on the weekends and had a casual job by the end of semester.

During my Bachelor Degree in urban and environmental planning, I went to a community engagement event on Ecosystem Services and asked one the council staff there from the Environmental Management department if they needed any help with their projects. I basically sought my own work placement and was invited to come in two days a week for 18 months. At the end of uni – they gave me a 6 month contract in their department.”

Geoff Sinclair, Environmental Scientist at Ecosure



“After finishing university in 1993 in Melbourne, jobs were very scarce.

I heard about a job with the conservation section of National Parks in Rockhampton. After finding Rockhampton on a map, I rang the contact and he gave me an interview on the phone then and there. I had not heard after a few weeks, and gave him a ring back, at which time he gave me a temporary job for three months – asked me to start in 2 days. Packed up everything I owned in my car, drove to Rockhampton. I worked on three month contracts for about 4 years before I landed a permanent job with National Parks as a Conservation Officer.”

Contacts

Here are a few contacts to get you started. While the below represents just a fraction of what's out there they are a few of the more established environmental organisations that our scientists have had good experiences with. There are so many great groups out there so do your research and find one that's right for you.

Volunteer Resources

Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

EHP offers a variety of activities for volunteers and offer real insight into the types of work you can expect to be doing in an environmental role dependant on your chosen field. A few examples include:

- caring for and rehabilitate sick, injured or orphaned animals
- planting native trees along wildlife corridors

- helping monitor and relocate turtle nests as well as counting nests and hatchlings
- assisting in park related projects such as weed eradication or visitor infrastructure developments
- assisting with guided tours at historic sites such as Fort Lytton
- recording migratory wading birds along our coasts
- monitoring and collecting information on Johnstone River snapping turtles and yellow-bellied gliders.

Web: <https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/about/employment/volunteers.html>

University online bulletin boards

PHD students occasionally seek field assistants through their university bulletin board, while organisations may also recruit volunteers and casual staff through university bulletin boards. It pays to check your universities online notices and forums, and also ask your university lecturers to keep you in mind if they hear of any volunteer opportunities.



Bushcare

Bushcare coordinates volunteer work mostly on public land in bushland, wetlands and around waterways managed by local councils or NSW government agencies. Volunteer opportunities include:

- Bush regeneration, weed removal and habitat restoration
- Tree planting
- Monitoring and surveying of native wildlife
- Water quality monitoring
- Community education
- Growing native plants at community nurseries

Web: <http://www.bushcare.org.au/>

Landcare Australia

Landcare harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Go to the Landcare website and find your local Landcare group and sign up to the free Landcare email newsletter to see what's coming up.

Web: <http://www.landcareonline.com.au/>

Local Government

Most local government websites have a volunteer resource with details of volunteer opportunities and groups in your local area. Have a look and if you can't find what you are looking for, get in touch with your local council and ask to speak to a local bush care, catchment management or wildlife officer to find out about opportunities in your particular area of interest.

Birdlife Australia

Here's one for the bird lovers offering volunteer opportunities such as bird conservation surveys, tree planting or office duties such as data entry.

Web: <http://www.birdlife.org.au>

Professional Associations

Ecological Society of Australia

The Ecological Society of Australia is a well established industry association with an excellent online resource for environmental professionals and students alike. Well worth a look.

Web: <http://www.ecolsoc.org.au/>

Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ)

EIANZ is one of the pre-eminent bodies representing environmental professionals in Australia and New Zealand. They offer some great opportunities for environmental students and graduates including discounted membership, free speed networking events for students and early career professionals, discounted rates for EIANZ conferences and access to a variety of useful resources.

Web: <http://www.eianz.org/>

Australian Association of Bush Regenerators

AABR offers a number of events throughout the year including walks and talks, training lectures and seminars. It also publishes a quarterly newsletters per year, awards accreditation for bush regeneration practitioners, provides opportunities to network with others involved in natural area restoration and offers a number of online resources including case studies showcasing best practice and a job seeker board.

Web: <http://www.aabr.org.au/>

Australian Marine Sciences Association

Australia's major professional association for marine scientists from all disciplines. AMSA works to promote liaison and foster cooperation between the diverse organisations/institutions and workers across Australia in the many disciplines of marine

science, through:

- regular publication of a Bulletin;
- holding an annual conference and other specialist meetings; and
- its website and
- associated email discussion list.

Web: <http://www.amsa.asn.au/>

Other

Environmental job seeker websites

Aside from the usual job seeker websites such as Seek, CareerOne and jobsearch.gov.au, there are a number of job seeker sites that purely list environmental industry jobs.

Be sure to check these websites in your job searches.

- NRMjobs www.nrmjobs.com.au
- Enviro Jobs www.envirojobs.com.au
- Environment Jobs www.environmentjobs.com.au
- Environmental Jobs www.environmentaljobs.com.au

LinkedIn

LinkedIn provides access to a growing network of professionals and industry groups from around the world. Through your LinkedIn profile you can build your network of industry contacts, follow groups and interact with other environmental professionals in online forums. A linked in profile also acts as an online CV and job seeker network. Try posting a status update letting your network know you are seeking work experience - you never know what opportunities might come up!