

legislation to operate and deliver a curriculum consistent with Australian democratic principles? Should a common and flexible regulation and quality assurance be required to be established in all schools?

The difficulty for the independent sector is that on every issue the same requirements and the same accountability are required for all schools, independent and Catholic as well as state. Independent schools are already subject to a whole plethora of legislative requirements, which in many instances do not apply to government schools, to say nothing of contractual accountability to parents. If the pervading thrust of the Minister's discussion paper were to be implemented, the independence and the distinctiveness of independent schools would be eroded. It is the ability to be different, to develop unique programmes and a distinctive culture, which makes independent schools competitive in the market place. It is the existence of the market place, which ensures the high quality of independent schools.

The discussion paper contemplates minimum standards of registration for all schools. Despite the dangers for independent schools, there is no need to assume hidden agendas or foul intent. What is clear, however, is that a glorious opportunity for a major philosophical change in government education policy has been lost. Here was a superb opportunity to change the whole

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thrust of government sponsored education. State policy makers, absorbed by what happens in the classroom and with preparation for the workforce are diverted from the truth that successful education is about the development of the whole person, mentally and intellectually, physically and aesthetically, spiritually and morally. They talk of values, but do not appear to understand that values are caught out of a whole school experience, not just by being taught in the classroom, and that it is the kind of adult who

emerges from schooling that matters most, not his or her paper qualifications, important though these are.

Life outside the classroom started off as extra-school activities, and for many government schools that is where they still remain. They became extra-curricular and then co-curricular, and happily we are now moving to the point where we recognize them as curricular with an equal place alongside academic study. Each kind of learning experience – academic, physical, cultural, aesthetic, social, spiritual – is equally important and all intertwine to make a holistic education. Drama, music, dance, sport, the outdoors, school socials are all necessary core parts of a young person's educative experience.



Outdoor Education plays a major part in this. Yet along with other out of class activities it does not receive recognition as just as necessary as English or Mathematics. Only when government gives it this recognition and funds it accordingly, will young people's education move towards completeness. Surely a review of the Education Act was a superb opportunity to face this issue. It is not too late to influence government.

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A New Journal

Outdoor Outlook is a new journal, which will appear four times a year. It is published by The Outdoor Education Group, founded twenty years ago and the largest provider of outdoor education in Australia. OEG has 135 staff serving 20,000 students a year in partnership with 70 schools throughout Victoria and New South Wales. In addition OEG provides training for outdoor educators in conjunction with Swinburne University.

We are educators. We believe that education in and through the outdoors is a core component of a complete school education. Our aim in this journal is to promote discussion on educational issues, albeit sometimes from an outdoor educator's point of view. Our audience is the educational leadership of schools throughout Australia.

Content Editor:
Tony Hewison AM, FACE

Production Editor and Design:
Sandra Socol

The Outdoor Education Group

National Base
109 Goulburn Valley Highway
Eildon Victoria 3713
Phone: (03) 5774 2617
Email: oeg@oeg.vic.edu.au

Moss Vale Office
PO Box 682
Moss Vale NSW 2577
Phone: (02) 4869 6700
Email: oeg@oeg.nsw.edu.au

www.oeg.net.au



Outdoor Outlook

The Quarterly Journal of The Outdoor Education Group

Volume 1 Issue 1

Blast Bullying
Bullying in schools
- the role of Outdoor
Education

Plus:

Legislative Reform
Is it too late to influence
government?

Collapse
How Societies Choose
to Fail or Survive.

Tony Hewison reviews
Jared Diamond's latest book.

Until comparatively recently throughout all western societies bullying and harassment were accepted parts of life in schools, universities, the armed forces, workplaces, even many families - indeed in any situation where the strong could exercise power over the less strong.

BLAST BULLYING

The Role of Outdoor Education

The humanitarian movement, which had such a dramatic effect in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on issues such as the abolition of slavery, the reform of prisons, asylums and the army and navy, was slow to influence popular attitudes to bullying and harassment.

Bullying has always been endemic in schools. Certainly the bullying scenes in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and Rudyard Kipling's *Storky & Co* were replicated in hundreds of nineteenth and twentieth century works of fiction. They gave an accurate picture of bullying in English public schools and of the lack of entanglement and the absence of attempts at prevention on the part of school staff and indeed of senior students in position of authority. There was a ubiquitous view that in boys' schools such matters were best sorted out by the boys themselves. Those, who want evidence that this is a problem not confined to Anglo-Saxon Celtic influenced societies such as our own, should seek out Mikall Hasstrom's film, *Evil*, where the principal and staff of a Swedish boarding school refuse to interfere with a school culture, which was entirely centred on physical bullying. Their excuse was

If bullying exists in schools, it will exist also when schools take their students into the outdoors.

that this was the way boys became men. In girls' schools, of course, there was an assumption that physical bullying did not exist, although in literature there was some sympathy for the poor little girl, who was excluded by the others and persecuted by staff:

usually her main crime was that she had no living parents!

Even today these attitudes linger. Parents, especially those of the bullies, will sometimes declare that the victim "asks for it" or that "he can't take it". The fact is that bullying exists in otherwise good schools, and the existence of a bullying problem is a consequence both of the nature of schools as institutions and of the nature of childhood and adolescence.

If bullying exists in schools, it will exist also when schools take their students into the outdoors. The problem is thus one for outdoor educators as well as for school leaders. But just as bullying problems amongst students at school will be carried into the outdoors, so also the influence of the outdoors in combatting bullying can be carried back into the school.

What is the nature and the size of this problem, awareness of which over the past twenty years has swept through most schools and indeed the wider community, and which most educators are determined to eradicate?

Bullying occurs where individual bullies or groups are more powerful than the victims. They exercise power unjustly and repeatedly with a desire to hurt. They enjoy exercising their power, and the victim is actually hurt and has a sense of being oppressed. Each of these elements has to be present, if the behaviour is to be described as bullying. A single incident may be highly reprehensible, but it is not bullying.

Most bullying does not take the form of physical violence, even though physical violence is not rare. Any kind of violence, which is unwelcome and which causes the recipient distress, is unacceptable. Where this kind of bullying occurs it usually takes

the form at school of deliberately jostling a student at the lockers, deliberately lurching against somebody on the stairs, deliberately knocking another's books and possessions to the floor, deliberately colliding heavily with the victim in a "friendly" game at lunchtime, deliberately tearing another's shirt or hiding his bag or moving his bag to another peg. The ways, in which an adolescent can make a victim's life a constant misery by physical actions, are apparently endless.

There are plenty of parallel actions in the outdoors - knocking over a person's pack, accidentally "falling" on to another's tent, pulling out a tent peg, knocking the victim's food into the fire. Sometimes of course the actions can be extremely dangerous, such as during an abseiling session deliberately crowding the victim on top of the cliff.

Where there is actual injury, the bullying is much easier to identify, but even then physical bullying is difficult to separate from accidental harm or "having fun". The perpetrators are quick to explain away their actions, and the cardinal rule in schools is that everybody should be treated justly. The quickest and surest way for the school to do harm is by being perceived to have taken action unjustly against a student for bullying. Dealing with such dilemmas requires a Solomon-like wisdom on the part of teachers and outdoor educators, which not all have.

In a survey by Dr Ken Rigby of the University of South Australia, the leading researcher into bullying in Australian schools, 6.3% of boys and 2.2% of girls, aged thirteen to eighteen, reported being often kicked or hit: 21.3% of boys and 9.3% of girls reported being hit or kicked sometimes. A further 20.7% of boys and 12.2% of girls reported being threatened. One young person in six is bullied on at least a weekly basis. (i) 8.6% of boys and 8.4% of girls aged thirteen to eighteen reported being teased hurtfully at least once a week, 10.8% of boys and 10.1% of girls reported being called hurtful names and 5.5% of boys and 6.6% of girls reported being socially excluded. Another 18.8% of boys and 24.4% of girls reported being excluded less frequently than once a week. (ii)

The Gatehouse Project, conducted by the Centre for Adolescent Health attached to the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital and the University of Melbourne, in a survey of year 8 students came up with even more disturbing statistics for this age group. 58% of students reported having been recently victimized. The most common form of bullying was teasing, reported by 44%, followed by having rumours spread about them (21%), social exclusion (14.5%) and being regularly threatened or hurt (12.5%). An astonishing 16% reported that they experienced these behaviours on a daily basis. (iii)

Exclusion is much more than the normal friendship movements within a group. Adults, who work with adolescents, are only too aware of the mercurial changes in friendship groups, especially amongst girls. The telephone remains the most common means, by which young people keep up with the latest news as to who is in or out, although e-mail has caught up. The ubiquity of mobile telephones, and with them text messaging, means that this rumour mongering can occur all day

every day. Gossiping, which is a mark of the fluid nature of friendship groups, very easily becomes persecution of individual students. Indeed the mobile telephone is a ready made new bullying instrument. Notes passed in class have always been dominated by the denigration of particular students, and now in those schools where all students have laptop computers in class, vitriol spreading can go almost without break.

Exclusion and psychological bullying are often the cruellest and most prolonged forms of bullying. Adults are inclined to say that the victim should brazen it out and force her way in, in which case she is branded a "trier". Adults are also inclined to say she should ignore the group and find other friends, but she is a marked girl, and others, even those not themselves in the group, half believe the stories they hear about her and in any case are secretly terrified of joining her in her exclusion. A student, who is excluded from the group, often stays out permanently. A girl sits down in class, and the student next to her quietly moves her seat. The excluded girl attempts to join a group at lunchtime, and the group immediately falls silent. The desire for acceptability is so strong that students will join willingly the bullying, just to be accepted by the "in" group. The leaders of these groups exercise extraordinary power, not just over their victims, but over other members of the group, who do not need reminding that, if they do not join in the bullying, they will join the bullied. The bullying jumps from primary to secondary school, and where a student changes school, the bullies' influence is so strong that the bullying follows.

How serious is it? The research by the Gatehouse Project found that students, who reported being victimized, were three

23% of boy victims, aged thirteen to eighteen, and 40% of girl victims had wished that they were dead. 23% of the boys and 32% of the girls had had recurring thoughts of suicide.

times more likely to be at risk of having depressive symptoms (iv). Dr Rigby found that of those who took part in his research, 23% of boy victims, aged thirteen to eighteen, and 40% of girl victims had wished that they were dead. 23% of the boys and 32% of the girls had had recurring thoughts of suicide (v). There is a clear link between bullying and the physical and emotional health of individual young people, and depressive behaviour in men and women in their twenties is increasingly being sheeted home to victimization at school (vi).

Dealing with the problem has two sides to it - identifying the bullying and supporting the victim, and discovering the cause of the perpetrator's behaviour and helping him or her to change it. Especially in the case of exclusion or psychological bullying, the leader is often a charismatic figure, someone, whom other young people easily follow. He or she may be good at sport, a leader in outdoor education, often popular with his or her teachers as well as with his or her fellow students, but while conforming enough



It is in this environment that the circumstances at school, which enable bullying to flourish, are removed, and new relationships are developed.

to perhaps impress staff with his or her prefect potential, he or she claims to be too "cool" for school. He or she exercises great sway over his or her followers, instantly making a party a mecca for everyone, by deciding to attend. It is very difficult for adults to recognize the bully in this person, especially when he or she expresses utter offence and devastation, when accused, and returns to the group with stories of having being severely harassed by the school authorities. Victims not surprisingly are reluctant to identify their persecutors. Probably about 40% of boys and 25% of girls, who are bullied frequently, tell somebody, most likely their friends, and least likely the school authorities. About 50% of those, who do report the situation to someone, report later that it has not improved. Amongst boys, in 9% of cases it gets worse. (vii) Victims, especially boys, worry about being classed as "dobbers" or "wimps". They do not expect, often with justification, any positive outcomes of reporting the bullying.

Schools, however, over the past fifteen years have begun to have remarkable success in at least facing up to this problem in their midst. It is difficult to eradicate it: it is possible to recognize it and to fight against it. The battle is half won, where the school community is able to present itself as united in support of the

Outdoor Education plays an important role in all this, and the school's bullying and harassment policy must be integrated into the school's Outdoor Education programme.

victims. Bullying and harassment represent most clearly a breakdown of relationships within the school. Most schools now have bullying and harassment policies – policies, which are most successful when they emerge from ongoing consultation and discussion in depth amongst all members of the school community, including all students as well as parents, staff and governing bodies. Not only is awareness heightened by this approach, but an anti-bullying consensus develops in the school community. Even though there is something in human nature, especially before full emotional and intellectual maturity, which seems to encourage so many young people to torment others, most young people find bullying abhorrent. If they feel that there is unity of concern within the whole school community, they will join in isolating the bullies.

The leadership has to come from the top. The principal has to talk constantly about the issue and must be prepared to be seen to take firm action, when required. There is only one really successful answer to bullying and that is to stop it from happening in the first place and if it does occur to take immediate action. This is a tall order, but one that can be achieved, if a school environment is developed, where everybody from the cleaner to the principal and from the youngest kindergarten child to the captain of the school is aware and involved. Adolescents have a clear understanding of law and order, and will actively support it because they acknowledge that it creates harmony within the community and thus allows everybody to get on productively with their education. They will support policies if they understand them and observe that they are applied firmly and fairly.

Outdoor Education plays an important role in all this, and the school's bullying and harassment policy must be integrated into the school's Outdoor Education programme. If there is bullying at school it will emerge also in the outdoors, if only because the insecurity of the bully is heightened by being in a strange and sometimes challenging environment. He or she will need to cover up his or her own sense of inadequacy by taking

the opportunity of intensifying the campaign against the victim. This makes the bullying even more patent. But it is even more patent because a group isolated from other student contact on a journey adventure through the bush is also small with a high staff to student ratio. For school staff members there is no better opportunity to observe the behaviour of their students. The smallness of the group and its isolation also means that there are ample opportunities to counsel both bullies and victims individually or the whole group or small groups within the group. As with all deep problems, there is no better location or opportunity to help young people to face up to realities. The camp fire, although increasingly for environmental reasons replaced by other foci, represents a superb opportunity for young people to share with their peers and with their adult leaders their deepest feelings, spiritual longings, ambitions, insecurities and problems. Adult leaders are able to review the day, both with individuals and with the group, exploring how well they coped with the challenges they faced – relationship as well as physical and mental challenges.

The outdoors is also a great leveller. Students are forced to help one another and co-operation replaces competition and enmity. If you need help with your pack you are grateful to whomever it is, who comes forward to help. Everyone is reduced to the same level by the high ropes course. The tough and the strong are not necessarily the ones who have the mental strength to make the jump to the apparently distant rope. Indeed often the outdoors reverses roles. The "wimp" back at school turns out to have the endurance, the calm and the spirit to cope with the long hike in appalling weather, while the "heroic leader" falls behind. The important lesson is not that one proves unexpectedly to be better than the other, but that both are individual persons with their own dignity and needs and above all compelled by circumstances to rely upon each other.

It is in this environment that the circumstances at school, which enable bullying to flourish, are removed, and new relationships are developed. Above all the low self-esteem of the potential victims can be largely eliminated by their success in the wilderness.

The wilderness itself, however, plays its part. The very atmosphere of the bush, the stillness, the quiet, the grandeur, the divorce from all the support systems and distractions of urban life help to mould new patterns of behaviour.

Some leaders in the bush will be more skilled than others in identifying student problems and helping students to cope with them. Nor can all problems be solved by the experience of the bush. There is no doubt, however, that a well constructed outdoor education programme can play a significant complementary role in a school's bullying and harassment policy. We shall not succeed totally, but our common aim should be to eradicate all bullying. Unfortunately it will always be with us. But we can work together to create school communities, which face the problem squarely with at least some success. Outdoor Education has a major role to play in this.

i. Dr Ken Rigby, *What Children Tell Us About Bullying in Schools*, Children Australia 1997 pp.2-3..

ii. *Ibid.*

iii. *Bullying and Youth Society, Issues in Society*, Vol. 154.

iv. *Ibid.*

v. Dr Ken Rigby, *op.cit.*

vi. Dr Ken Rigby, *Does Bullying at School Really Do Children Any Harm?*, 17, 1, 13-17, 1998

vii. Dr Ken Rigby, *What Children Tell Us About Bullying in Schools*, *op.cit.* pp.5-6.

There now is greater diversity with different student expectations and needs, increased insistence by parents on the rights of choice, a huge enrolment growth in vocational education and training programmes plus a greatly augmented range of pathways, and an emphasis on lifelong education and multiple careers.

Legislative Reform

NEW EDUCATION ACTS FOR QUEENSLAND AND VICTORIA

It would not be a school year without a whirl of educational reform. South Australian schools are coming to grips with major changes proposed in the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education, set up last year by the Minister, Dr Jane Lomax-Smith. Driven by activist minister, Anna Bligh, Queensland has brought its school starting age into line with the southern states with the introduction of a Preparatory Grade in 2006 and at the other end of schooling has replaced the Senior Certificate with the Queensland Certificate of Education. This is to be a qualification with between 65% and 75% passing, as opposed to the present Senior Certificate, which is a record of learning without pass and fail. Most interestingly Year 10 students will be required to register a three year Study Plan with the Studies Authority.

The government is proposing to require young people to remain at school until they finish Year 10 or have turned 16, whichever comes first, and then remain for a further two years in education or until they have completed an end of school certificate, unless they are in full-time work. Common principles for effective reporting about students and schools are intended to drive Queensland's education system across all state, Catholic and independent schools. All schools are to be required to provide consistent, comprehensive and easy to understand written reports at least twice a year. Two parent/teacher interviews a year should be mandated in all schools, and schools should be obliged to provide Year 12 data annually. Schools should be required to record the participation and learning achievement of all students and to facilitate the exchange of this information with other schools. There are the even more radical proposals that the state might charge for the provision of specialized programmes and additional services in some specific situations in government schools and that state schools might refuse enrolments.

It is hardly surprising that the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland has opposed strongly most of these proposals on the grounds that they seriously interfere with the independence of their member schools, but also on the grounds of excessive regulation and invasions of personal privacy and the restriction of access for all to the government system.

In Victoria the approach of minister, Lynne Kosky, has been less confrontational, but there are still underlying dangers for

independent education. She has proposed a re-visit of the "whole suite of legislation" (her term) underpinning the delivery of education in the state. In particular there has been widespread consultation on a proposal for a total review of the Education Act 1958, which was itself a moderate revision of the original Education Act 1872.

Victorian education has changed extensively since 1958. There now is greater diversity with different student expectations and needs, increased insistence by parents on the rights of choice, a huge enrolment growth in vocational education and training programmes plus a greatly augmented range of pathways, and an emphasis on lifelong education and multiple careers. Classes are much smaller and pedagogic methods have changed radically. ICT did not exist in schools in 1958. Funding arrangements are now vastly more complex. In 1958 most students left school at the school leaving age to work, and only a privileged few went on to university. In the 1950's low fee, highly subsidized independent schools did not exist. Since the 1970's there has been growing financial support for non-government schools, and the independent sector has increased its market share.

Independent schools are already subject to a whole plethora of legislative requirements, which in many instances do not apply to government schools, to say nothing of contractual accountability to parents.

The Minister's Discussion Paper even invites reconsideration of the fundamental principle of the government's obligation to provide education for all, which is free, compulsory and secular. This has stood as the rock hard foundation of state education since 1872 but is now under scrutiny. Should people's right to choose between school education providers, registered or recognized by the Government, be established as a guiding principle in the new legislation? A corollary of the parental right of choice is seen to be the right to quality information about individual student performance and provider, that is usually school, performance. Should education and training providers be required through

continued page 8

Jared Diamond

Collapse - How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive.

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Author Jared Diamond



COLLAPSE

How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive.

What makes a writer a best seller? Jared Diamond's books are relatively easy to read, but they are in need of severe editing and he can be repetitive. Certainly his style at times offends the purist. First and foremost a writer becomes a best seller if people want to read what he has to say. Futurologists have a ready market, and Diamond more than most, because he links the future with the past. His book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, published in 1998, sought to look at history from the point of view of science. It sought an answer to the question why human development and history unfolded differently on different continents and in different places. It found the answer in the environment, in geography and biogeography. *Collapse – How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* is in some ways a sequel, but it stands up well in its own right.

A guest at the Sydney Writers' Festival in May, Jared Diamond is one of America's most remarkable scholars. He addressed some 2,000 people in Sydney, another 1,000 in Melbourne and large crowds in Brisbane and Canberra. He became Professor of Physiology at UCLA Medical School in his 'twenties. At the time he developed a parallel career as an ornithologist, specializing in the ecology and evolution of New Guinea birds, which led him to explore some of the remotest parts of that fascinating island on 17 expeditions. He rediscovered New Guinea's long lost goldenfronted bowerbird. In his 'fifties he developed a new career in environmental history, and is now Professor of Geography and of

Environmental Health Sciences at UCLA. He weaves together linguistics, genetics, animal behaviour, molecular biology and much more. He has won myriad prizes, including a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, known as the "genius prize".

The reviewer's alarm antennae went up, when he read the chapter on Australia. Diamond reveals a remarkably mistaken understanding of Australian history, politics, culture and constitutional practice, even though he has spent much time here over the years. He credits the Greens for leading a campaign against foxes in Tasmania, whereas in fact only one fox is credited for crossing Bass Strait. If he could be mistaken about us, perhaps he is mistaken about the rest of the world. In fact his analysis of Australia's environmental problems is chilling and easily recognizable as deadly accurate. It is almost certainly based in part on the work of Professor Tim Flannery, whose book *The Future Eaters* is compelling reading.

Collapse should be compulsory reading for all developers of school curriculum. It is also of special relevance to Outdoor Educators. As educators one of our major concerns is the education of the young on all the issues surrounding the future of our environment and consequently of the world. As lovers of the outdoors we must react strongly to the ongoing destruction of what is most precious to us.

Jared Diamond examines the collapse of six once vibrant societies and asks the question why these collapsed while others did not. Two of the most interesting are the Polynesian society on Easter Island and the Viking settlement on Greenland. The story of Easter Island is uncomplicated by contact with other peoples. From the time the Polynesians settled the island in about 800 AD until Europeans arrived in 1722 there was none.

Easter Island was entirely isolated, and so Easter Islanders rose and fell by themselves. At its maximum the population was about 10,000. By the time of the arrival of the Europeans there was only a handful of people left. When the Easter Islanders first arrived, the island was covered by a tropical forest, which included the world's largest palm tree and dandelions of tree height. By 1722 the island was barren and treeless. The islanders over the years had cleared the forests for their gardens, for firewood, for using as rollers and levers to raise the giant statues, which marked their civilization, and to build canoes from which to catch tuna and porpoises. They ate the land birds and the sea birds alike and both gradually became extinct. When by 1600 all the trees had been destroyed, it was no longer possible to build canoes from which to fish. They no longer had wood for fires, and there was appalling soil erosion, and so agricultural production declined. Driven by hunger Easter Island society disintegrated, and the inhabitants turned to cannibalism.

The Vikings settled six islands in the North Atlantic. Their settlements survived on the Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Faroes and, just, on Iceland. They settled Greenland in 984 AD and established a Norwegian pastoral economy and hunted caribou and seal. They carried on a lively trade with Scandinavia, in particular exporting walrus ivory. One settlement disappeared in about 1360 and the other a little after 1440. The Norse Greenlanders finished up dead. Deforestation again played a part, as it did in all the collapsed societies Diamond examines. Trees were very slow to regrow in such a cold climate, but the wood was necessary to smelt the iron they extracted from bogs. Without iron tools, farming was difficult. At the same time as the Vikings settled in Greenland, the Inuit also moved in, with whom they were constantly in conflict.

Then the Little Ice Age meant that the climate became colder, the growing season became shorter, hay production was less, and the increase of sea ice cut off trade with Norway. But adding to the causes of their destruction was the inability of the Norse Greenlanders to change culturally. While they declined, the Inuit flourished. The Norse refused to adopt Inuit technology such as the harpoon and the dog sleigh. They did not copy the Inuit's skin boats. They didn't fish at all! They clung to the Norwegian status symbol of calves, ignoring that sheep and goats were more suited to the environment.

When a society becomes increasingly unsustainable, social and political structures collapse and there is anarchy and violence.

Climate change cannot be stopped, even if in the twenty-first century we manage to eliminate man's contribution to it. In all the collapsed societies Diamond looks at there were some uncontrollable factors. But humans cut down the trees, ate up all the available resources without replacing them, destroyed fragile soils, and clung to outdated and irrelevant cultural shibboleths. When a society becomes increasingly unsustainable, social and political structures collapse and there is anarchy and violence. Human societies have committed self-inflicted ecological suicides. In contrast there are societies, which have gone on for thousands of years without any signs of collapse, such as Japan, Java and Tonga. Japan, a series of heavily populated small islands, has actually increased its areas under forest – some 80% of the country.

Diamond turns to contemporary societies. Montana used to be one of the most prosperous states in America; now it is one of the

very poorest, and would not exist if it were not part of the United States. 70% of the children are on government Food Aid. Its wealth was based on copper mining, forestry and agriculture. Mining has gone leaving appalling environmental damage. There are large areas of deforestation, erosion and soil decline. Logging and farming are on the way out. There is salinization, erosion, noxious weed plagues and animal diseases. Attempts to control forest fire have led to changes in the forest, which bring about forest fires more terrible and more destructive than before. Sounds familiar?

Australia's is an exceptionally fragile environment - rainfall is low and unpredictable and soil is generally poor - damaged in a multitude of ways incurring enormous economic costs.

Diamond's chapter on China is probably the most chilling, if only because of the effect of developments in such a large country on the rest of the world. His chapter on Australia is also disturbing. He explodes the myth of Australia as a big natural farm. He points out how marginal most of our rural industries are. While sheep farming is still engrained into Australia's rural cultural identity, it is unprofitable and its legacy is ruinous land degradation through overgrazing. Australia's is an exceptionally fragile environment – rainfall is low and unpredictable and soil is generally poor – damaged in a multitude of ways incurring enormous economic costs. The introduction of exotic pests, rabbits, foxes, buffalo, goats, cane toads, blowflies, ticks – the list seems endless – not only has led to the destruction of native flora and fauna, but also has increased the cost of agriculture enormously. Rabbit control costs a few hundred million dollars a year, flies and ticks \$600 million, pasture mites \$200 million, a further \$2.5 billion for other insects and \$3 billion for weeds. The fish in our seas have been driven out by exotic marine pests, to say nothing of the almost total destruction of our freshwater fisheries. The lack of nutrients carried into the sea has meant that Australia has naturally exceptionally low fish stocks. These now have been appallingly overfished. Salinization and the quality of water supplies are huge problems. Our forest destruction is ludicrous. Australian forests are being destroyed in order to send wood chips to Japan, with the result that Japan can retain its high level of forested mountains untouched! The return on this export is remarkably low; the value adding occurs in Japan and we buy back at high cost other goods in return.

Thus Diamond points to the possibility of rapidly accelerating environmental collapse in many parts of the world, indeed threatening the survival of the human race. Yet on balance he is cautiously optimistic. He believes that in Australia a growing awareness is leading to a slow turn around in attitudes, policies and practices. He thinks that the world as a whole can reverse the present disastrous decline, that our problems are not insoluble, that we can learn from the history of societies, which have collapsed and those which have thrived. Two things are necessary – long term planning and the ability to make hard decisions, and a willingness to re-examine our core values. There are also the consequences of the globalized world's interconnectedness. Earlier societies collapsed in circumstances, where they were unaware of what was happening in the rest of the world. Now we are aware and can learn.

It is better to be optimistic than pessimistic, but this reviewer is not at all sure that Professor Jared Diamond's cautious optimism is entirely justified. This is a book that everyone should read. It should have an impact on what we teach our young people. ■