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Amanda Lynch
Applications Manager
Australian WAS*IS Workshop
January 29-February 2, 2007

INTEREST STATEMENT

Dear Ms Lynch and colleagues,

My interest in attending the Australian WAS*IS workshop revolves around my PhD project and career aspirations.

I am entering the final year of my PhD project, titled 'The roles of reflexivity in social change for sustainability'. The topic investigates situations when scientist's learning and research motivates them to ask 'do I have knowledge worth acting upon' and they seek social change as a result. In particular, I am investigating if some fairly pessimistic theoretical predictions about the prospects of linking science and social change, from literature in the social studies of science and re-modernisation theory, are valid in my case studies. The two case studies are 1); the activities of Australia 21, a research think-tank composed of academic and CSIRO scientists, and, 2); the Green Steps program, a university youth environmental leadership program operating in several Australian universities. Both case studies are directly relevant to climate change science – Green Steps is funded from the Australian Greenhouse Office's Greenhouse Challenge Plus program to assist organisations to reduce emissions and focus on organisational environmental management and behaviour change. Australia 21's current program on 'Tipping Points towards a sustainable future' seeks to understand the integrated implications of biophysical, economic and social trends for anticipating and building resilience against non-gradual changes affecting Australian society in the near future, with climate change featuring heavily in their work. The PhD topic and cases studies reflect my deep interest in how scientists (current and future) understand and act upon their work, and particularly when the interest moves from working purely within academia to seeking broader social and political relevance.

The WAS*IS workshop also speaks directly to my broader career goal to be an applied social researcher helping to link knowledge and action between different disciplines and different sectors of the community, which I believe are currently far too fragmented. My education and professional activities so far have given me the opportunity to develop my skills for understanding and communicating within and between diverse academic and professional groups, and on this basis I feel that I both have a great deal to contribute and to learn from participating in the WAS*IS workshop. I am endlessly fascinated by challenges in integrating knowledge that is obvious and important to one community with that of another concerned with quite different things, and particularly how learning between both frequently reveals blank and blind spots in what we think we know. My work in applied social change for environmental outcomes also gives me a keen interest in the state of knowledge on climate change and particularly its relevance for the day to day decisions of people and organisations.

I appreciate the opportunity to apply for participation in this workshop, and look forward to hearing from you soon. Please note that my field work frequently takes me down to the Melbourne region (as you may know, Green Steps is based at the Monash Sustainability Institute), and so it would be relatively easy for me to combine trips and so pay for my own transport in getting to Melbourne if I am successful in applying for this workshop. That said, assistance in getting to the actual workshop site from the Melbourne metropolitan area would be appreciated if possible (i.e. sharing a ride!).

Sincerely,

Stefan Kaufman
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