

THE STUDENT AND SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP DECLARATION

**Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas
EMECS 7 / ECSA 40
*May 12, 2006***

Our Shared Responsibility

This declaration is the collective agreement of more than 25 students and their teachers who have participated in the second Students and Schools Partnership program at the EMECS 7 conference, May 9 through 12, 2006, in Caen, France. Our group includes students from the level of middle school 7th grade through college undergraduate and graduate students and represents the countries of France, Japan, Thailand, and the USA. We accept with great responsibility and humility the fact that we are representing the next generation of young people around the world who will inherit the results of the present generation's ability to meet the important goal of improving conditions on the world's coastal seas under the EMECS 7 conference theme, "Our Shared Responsibility."

We applaud all efforts and programs conducted by local and national governments and a great number of NGO's and private foundations to reach our generation through environmental education programs. The fact that we are actively participating in the EMECS 7 conference is testimony to the success of those programs. We are deeply grateful.

Even so, we must ask if environmental education, as currently practiced through formal programs in schools as well as in less formal programs in outdoor education centers, is making the difference you so desire to achieve. Are coastal seas really getting better as a result of environmental education? Around the world, the opportunity for young people to have meaningful and continuing outdoor experiences is decreasing. We are concerned that more and more students and their teachers are becoming involved in environmental programs without first-hand knowledge of the systems they would protect, restore, and conserve. We observe that many countries, in their desire to improve student learning, have adopted programs that de-emphasize environmental subjects as being less important than mathematics and science. We note with some concern EMECS' emphasis on environmental education largely as a means of transmitting information between generations for more effective future management of enclosed coastal seas.

We view environmental education differently. To those that teach about the environment, it is more than a subject – it is a passion. To those that learn about the environment, it is a door that opens to help us understand that we are part of the natural world. When we look out of that door, the first thing we should see is our school yard, our home, and our local community. But too often we are weighed down by world issues like tropical deforestation and global warming over which we have little local first-hand experience and even less power to correct. We learn to fear the environment as a threat to our well-being rather than to love it as part of life.

The best environmental education activities, which each of us has been very fortunate to experience in our respective countries, are connecting us with our local communities. We are using field trips, beach clean-up projects, recreation, and even language classes to connect us with the Somme and Orne estuaries; we are learning about local traditions through work to conserve tameike ponds; we are understanding how changes in land use are affecting local coastal seas by studying changes in bird populations; we are exploring chemical solutions to local water pollution problems; we are helping villages in our country recover from the tsunami disaster. Many of these experiences incorporate the use of authentic data, modern computer and geographic information systems technology, and mathematical analyses that are fully consistent with new student learning goals in science and mathematics.

Our generation has untapped energy. We have awesome commitment. We have ambitious dreams. Our declaration makes only one recommendation, but it is the one that is most important to us: Help us realize those dreams.

Help us by using your recognized influence with professional scientists and government officials to adopt education programs that encourage us experience our local environment. Help us by assisting our teachers to take advantage of the diversity of subjects in environmental education to use the natural world to teach about our history, culture, and economy as well as science and mathematics. Our experiences suggest that when we learn about our local environments we become more interested, more committed – and that we share these interests and commitments with our friends and take them home to our families. It does not matter that some of us live in cities and others in the countryside. Strongly support those environmental education programs that will enable us to appreciate and understand that we are part of the system where we live, not outside intruders and polluters. We will benefit greatly from your wisdom, experience, and technology. Please share them with us. Individually perhaps, we can do little to address such issues as global warming. But collectively, by changing the way each one of us personally interacts with our local coastal sea and watershed, we truly believe we can make a world-wide difference. We can help you achieve your goals.

We will inherit the coastal seas that you leave to our generation. Please do your best to minimize the environmental problems we will receive so we can enjoy and appreciate this legacy as a living tradition that will define our home as surely as it has defined yours. As we learned from the tsunami recovery, we can use our educational experiences help create an environment that gives life with hope again. If all of us work together, we can do it. The future of the world's coastal seas must be, above all, "Our Shared Responsibility."

Caen, France
May 12, 2006