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Dear Professor Newman,

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia study.

Because of the enormity and complexity of the problem and thus the broad range of expertise needed to address it, I am not able to offer many practical solutions in attempting to achieve true sustainability. I do however know that the resultant outcome of this study will not and cannot be taken seriously unless **the** major impact on sustainability, namely population numbers, is included as a sustainability component and is studied and reported. The Western Australian Premier in a Media Statement on the 26th of Feb 2002 indicated his support for a National Population Policy. His statement can be found at:
<http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/media/media.nsf/news/4B42482D20850DD248256B6B003CDFB4?opendocument>.

It was puzzling for me to learn that sustainability, as you express in your consultation paper, has more than one definition. It would appear that your definition has been created with the meaning manipulated to fulfil the role that you require. It is my belief that the true definition of sustainable and its derivatives should be adhered to, and should be simply those found in some of the English language dictionaries mentioned later. You should have called your study something else if it doesn't study sustainability as in the true definition of the word.

The Collins English Dictionary definition of **Sustainable** in terms of [economic development and energy sources] is:
 "Capable of being maintained at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage."

The Chambers dictionary definition of **Sustainability**, in ecology, is:
 "The amount or degree to which the earth's resources may be exploited without deleterious effects."

The Macquarie Dictionary, Federation Edition defines **Sustainable Development** as:
 "Economic development designed to meet present needs while also taking into account future costs, including costs to the environment and depletion of natural resources."

The producers of the before mentioned publications simply want to accurately articulate the English language meanings of the words and phrases.

How can one establish a universal benchmark for sustainability or sustainable development if the definitions are being manipulated? Your definition of sustainability, as you know, is:

"The simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals."

I have to wonder why your definition is also the triple bottom line often trotted out by "big business", many still with unsustainable growth for profit aspirations.

Dr John Cole, Director of the Sustainable Industries Unit at the QLD EPA, told a sustainability forum in July last year that "triple bottom line is nonsense - the economy is a subset of the society, and they are both contained within the environment. The environment is that which holds it all."

It must be recognised that it may never be possible to achieve environmental, economic and social goals simultaneously. In the long term, the needs of our economy and society must fit within the finite restrictions applied by the natural environment, both locally and globally. Anything else will not be sustainable.

To achieve true sustainability, quite simply a two pronged approach is needed.

We must adopt for the State that which Professor Tim Flannery advocated in his 2002 Australia Day address for the Country. For Western Australia we must establish just what is our sustainable population level giving consideration to our current consumption of the finite natural resource. This figure may change over time as we consume more or less. Right now we must take the conservative approach until we know the answer to this question.

Secondly, at the same time we must take whatever steps we can to ruthlessly limit/reduce our consumption, as your paper has suggested.

I believe that a great deal of steering legislation, no matter how politically unpalatable it may be, will be necessary to achieve both of the above outcomes.

Surely you must recognise that if it were possible to reduce our consumption 10 fold, as you have deemed necessary, in order to achieve sustainability, this reduced level of consumption would only be valid until the next population increase occurred. A further consumption reduction would then be needed. We can't continue to reduce our consumption as a result of population increase until we are consuming virtually nothing. Isn't this what you are proposing as a sustainability strategy?

Following are my answers to some of your key questions, not necessarily in the order or format you suggest. Some of my suggestions are elementary and may be under consideration already.

True sustainability is not only a worthwhile pursuit, it is vital for our survival. We can set a demonstrable and marketable example to the rest of the country and the world to follow if we are successful.

There would be many benefits. One that springs to mind would be the commercial opportunities stemming from truly sustainable developmental projects. You have mentioned many in your paper. The globe is crying out for solutions, and we can contribute. Let's not dilly dally and fall behind. We seem to be lagging because R & D is not being supported by large injections of public money, particularly into the education sector. Private sector funding is of dubious value because of the possibility of it having strings attached, obvious or subliminal. Perhaps some soul searching is warranted for the sustainability group, considering some of its funding entities.

Following are some suggested solutions and also an expression of some of the problems we are encountering in the Peel. Although not ground breaking in nature you may be able to draw from this local experience to help you understand the problems being encountered in the regions. Unsustainable development and growth is being encountered and often still promoted by boosters in many areas of the business community, news media and Local Governments.

The Policy unit should:

- Emphatically recommend to government the importance of establishing the truly sustainable population level for this state, taking into consideration our present rate of consumption of the finite natural resource.
- Establish the methodology required to achieve this population level.
- Recommend that government implement the required strategy to achieve this goal
- Recommend phasing out production of local and export revenue via our presently unsustainable agricultural methods, with a movement toward sustainable organically based food production. Organically based food production methods are comparatively labour intensive. That's what we need. Jobs. At the same time you should also widely and vigorously promulgate the need and wisdom of paying more for "clean green food." Food that will benefit public health and thus be likely to create savings in the future through resultant reduction in public health costs. Britain is recognising the need to produce food sustainably and is recommending a move in this direction at home and in the European Union. See transcript of a recent BBC news report which is at:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1787000/1787329.stm.
- Have the government recognise the limited future of many of our minerals extraction operations, particularly the fossil fuel extraction industries and other energy intensive industries.

- Recommend that we quickly move toward clean energy production technologies, as other progressive and innovative countries are doing, in an effort to achieve greenhouse gas reductions.
- Any industries that deplete the natural resource base should be discouraged.
- In light of the CSIRO's prediction of a 60% reduction in rainfall in S/W Western Australia in the next 40-70 years, recommend to government that legislation be introduced requiring water catchment and storage systems be introduced as a mandatory requirement for all new private, public and commercial buildings. Also recommend that incentives be given to retrofit existing buildings with water catchment and storage elements. Potable water could be collected and used locally, reducing transport/pumping/piping costs.

Vigorously encourage the further introduction of native garden or other water conservative features in all new real estate developments as opposed to European lawns, for obvious water saving reasons. Promote conversion of existing lawns to native or other water conservation style gardens. "Outlaw lawns"

- I believe you when say a 10 fold reduction in consumption is required in order to achieve sustainability. Of course this would have to be applicable to our current population level. An increase would need another assessment. In light of this reduction necessity, we can no longer afford the luxury of sewerage. It must be rapidly phased out and compulsory compostable toilets need to be introduced as an alternative. Obviously, massive savings would be effected in terms of potable water use [transporting poo], power [pumping poo] and valuable nutrient loss [treating and discarding poo]. The third world can't afford to waste their effluent. Nor can we. Drastic solutions are needed for drastic problems. Jobs could be created, collecting composted poo from those property owners who do not utilizes the product on site.
- Recommend that planning approvals be subject to passive design incorporation, both in site orientation and building plans. These principles are already being incorporated in other contemporary countries and in a limited application here in the West. Also recommend that incentives be made available for existing buildings to be retrofitted to incorporate elements of design passivity. Applause is deserved for the current policy encouraging solar hot water use by offering financial incentives. The Commonwealth's "Sustainable Housing" incentive is also worthy of merit but unless mandatory sustainable housing design legislation is introduced for site and building, the industry will be tardy in application of same. Liveable Neighbourhoods are a step in the right direction.
- Because of dwindling known fossil fuel reserves, increasing demand, and the present lack of suitable alternatives, including Hydrogen Cell technology, investigate the dubious benefit of constructing more major transport infrastructure. It may be of no use in the future in its present form. In addition, major highways often attract further development along their path. This exposes even more areas of remnant and pristine bush and wetlands to urban development with consequent biological diversity reduction.

A typical example of such a project is the proposed Peel Deviation Freeway. If traffic bypass of Mandurah is the goal, upgrading the existing South West Highway should be undertaken. Surely we must attempt to promote decentralization, as promulgated in the Premier's recent media release, previously referred to.

Populations must be encouraged to migrate to smaller regional centres like the ones along the existing S/W Highway route. Another benefit of upgrading the S/W Highway would be to take pressure off the already critically stressed Peel Harvey Estuary. This would be achieved by not delivering inevitable urbanisation close to the Eastern side of this threatened waterway as a result of the proposed new route. See below draft EDRMP report, clearly indicating the future threat to the health of the Peel Harvey Estuary as a result of anticipated Population growth.

- Although legislation already exists to discourage clearing of remnant and pristine bushland, ensuring that this legislation is adhered to/enforced is essential. Perhaps increasing penalties are needed to discourage offenders. Give the newly created Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection some teeth. Lamentably the State Government is a major clearing offender. Some, perhaps many, local governments deplorably do not enforce clearing legislation. This situation must be addressed.
- The State could assist in the diversion of the vast amount of money that is invested in superannuation products from damaging investment, into products that support ethical/sustainable projects.

Many self funded or semi funded retirees are presently interested in just two things: a small income derived from, and security for, their life savings. Surely if in addition to income and security they also believed that their investments would be helping to provide a sustainable future for their descendents, such investments would be even more attractive.

For this reason I believe that the state should give preferred treatment, promote and perhaps even underwrite, investment products that have a proven “ethical investment charter”. An example of this may be Australian Ethical Superannuation which I believe is filling part of this niche. Careful investigation of such Superannuation Funds would be needed before endorsement could be given, but redirection of such vast fiscal resource pools into sustainable/ethical projects is worthy of consideration.

- Recommend that the growing of industrial, non toxic cannabis be allowed, with supervision, in this state. The proponents are presenting very good supportive arguments. Cotton production should be vigorously discouraged.

I draw your attention to the recently released draft ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN for the PEEL WATERWAYS [EDRMP]. The Executive summary is at: http://www.ozgis.com.au/peel/pdf/exec_summ_draft.pdf and says in the highlighted findings box on page 3:

“The major finding of this report is that the Peel Waterways will not be able to sustain the increased recreational demands of expected population growth. Under such stress, the environment will decline further unless resources are found for action in the catchment to improve water quality throughout the system, and affirmative action to restore the environment and habitats of the rivers, particularly the Murray.

Surely you will acknowledge the findings in the draft of this \$84,000, year long study. It is my belief that State and Commonwealth resources, already stretched, will never be provided in sufficient quantities to overcome this local Peel degradation problem. Everall Consulting Biologist showed courage to articulate so clearly in the findings the relationship between the population impacts and resource application. Additionally, even if enough resources were forthcoming right now, soon, with continued population increase the degradation problems would just re-emerge. Surely you understand this undeniable corollary, applicable to the Peel, but also relevant for the State, the Country and the Globe?

Noosa Shire has recognised the problem and has capped its population. Busselton recently had a capping motion narrowly defeated. Mandurah City, in its Community Charter and Strategic Plan 2001-04 has committed to studying growth in 2003. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks stacked a Population Forum with growth proponents on the 25th of this month in Melbourne, at least recognising the need for a population policy. NSW premier Bob Carr has recognised the population growth problem and has expressed his views regarding this on many occasions. The late Jacques-Yves Cousteau has said that “Over consumption and overpopulation underlie every environmental problem we face today.” John Witheriff, President of the Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce, is calling for an examination of population levels on the Gold Coast. Even previous growth proponents, Gold Coast business owners, [although possibly with the wrong motives] are beginning to question the lunacy of allowing our populations to increase, no doubt unsustainably.

The momentum is gathering as some in the community recognise and try to articulate the problems being encountered by unsustainable population increase. Your study group has a crucial responsibility to do the same.

A massive “sea change” will be required over a relatively short period to achieve a goal for true Sustainability for Western Australia. I fear that a generally apathetic community will not recognise the seriousness of the problem until they perceive an imminent threat to their social and economic security. They will resist the necessary change to their lifestyles unless they can be made to understand this critical threat. You must make them aware of the crisis we are facing. I wish you good luck with what is probably the most important study yet undertaken in Western Australia. You must get it right.

**SUSTAINABILITY = POPULATION X CONSUMPTION OF THE FINITE
NATURAL RESOURCE.**

Yours faithfully,

B Bucktin

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G'day Professor Newman and team,

At the launch of your Focus on the Future: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia study, I understood that your view was that population would not be a major consideration when working on this study. I of course believe that population and consumption are "the" two major sustainability components. I thought you may be interested in these two pieces, one from the front page of today's "The Australian". It would seem that I am not the only one who regards unsustainable population growth as a major threat.

I may have also mentioned previously, the WA Premier's recent press release, in which he seems to be contradicting your view on the need to study population. I have pasted it in as the third item in this email.

Regards,

Brian Bucktin

www.theaustralian.news.com.au/opinion/
<<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/opinion/>>

I won't cop population growth: Carr
By George Megalogenis
18mar02

NSW Premier Bob Carr has warned Simon Crean he will lose Sydney Labor voters if the federal party supports large population growth.

"Any leader in federal politics who argues the case for rapid population build-up should prepare to lose votes in Sydney," Mr Carr writes in The Australian today.

"Nobody who lives in the nation's biggest city thinks his or her quality of life is going to improve if immigration is ramped up markedly."

The NSW leader suggests the east coast of Australia would eventually resemble an extended version of the Gold Coast, cluttered with its high-rise developments.

"Here is another truth about the effects of the rapid growth scenario: it means the total urbanisation of eastern Australia between the mountains and the sea."

In his Opinion article, Mr Carr does not directly criticise Mr Crean. The only politician Labor's senior premier targets is the federal Liberal Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Joe Hockey, who has called for a doubling of Sydney's 4 million-plus population.

But his reference to "any leader in federal politics" will be read as chiding Mr Crean, who has lent support to calls to increase population growth rate.

"I believe that Australia needs a population policy and that we should develop population targets," Mr Crean told a population summit last month.

Mr Carr argues on economic and environmental grounds that Sydney can't afford more people. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks, though, says Melbourne and regional Victoria stand ready to take more immigrants.

Opposition Deputy Leader Jenny Macklin says fertility, not immigration, may be the more important topic for the population discussion.

The Howard Government has rejected population targeting, which puts it at odds with federal and Victorian Labor, but in the same camp with NSW Labor.

However, Mr Hockey's attitude contrasts with that of fellow Sydneysider, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, who wrote in The Australian last week that "no democratic government in the world allows itself to be hogtied by a population target or a formal population program".

Bob Carr: Small and well formed . . . let's leave it that way

By Bob Carr

March 18, 2002

FACT No 1: to reach a population of 50 million, Australia would have to increase its annual migrant intake from about 90,000 to 450,000. And that means dropping entry standards.

Fact two: virtually nobody in Australia supports such a policy.

So while I applaud the holding of the recent Population Summit, I see no evidence that it has shifted opinion. I sense that the Australian people enjoy our cultural diversity and believe it has enriched our society. They want us to be, in Donald Horne's words, "an inclusive society of multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-racial origin".

More and more of them, I believe, understand that Australia has problems with water and soil. In other words, we have a limited carrying capacity. I sense Australians are smart enough to want to be one of those clever nations that creates wealth with a relatively small but highly educated population.

I oppose any overly ambitious targets for population growth. I do so on

economic, environmental and planning grounds.

I also oppose them because they would be bad for Sydney. Any leader in federal politics who argues the case for rapid population build-up should prepare to lose votes in Sydney. Nobody who lives in the nation's biggest city thinks his or her quality of life is going to improve if immigration is ramped up markedly.

Our planners advise that 50 million people in Australia would mean 10.7 million people in Sydney. All vacant land in the region not already constrained by national parks, state forests, water catchment areas and flood plains would be laid over with new multi-unit housing. This would dramatically change Sydney's urban landscape and character: high-rise from ocean to mountains; chronic congestion. More like a mega-city than the booming, liveable urban environment we have built in recent years. Here is another truth about the effects of the rapid growth scenario: it means the total urbanisation of eastern Australia between the mountains and the sea.

There will not be large cities in inland Australia, ever. Even if the bulk of people wanted to live there, the river systems would not support them. The truth is we are a coastal people. Hence, the 50 million option means a huge concentration on the east coast from north Queensland to southern Victoria. It's the narrow eastern coastal strip that would carry the imagined 50 million.

As the NSW environment minister (1984-1988) and as Premier since 1995, I have been active in closing off this option. On the south coast between the Bega Valley and Nowra, our Government has created about 100 new national parks and reserves. About 35 per cent of the coastline is now in national park. Further large areas are in other types of environment protection zones. Later this year, my Government will further protect the coastline through a new coastal protection policy. This will limit the land available for residential release. The urban sprawl cannot go on.

The advocates of massive population growth therefore are failing to answer a realistic question; namely, where will they settle the teeming millions of their imaginations? And here lies the fundamental truth about Australia's position described so brilliantly by people such as Eric Rolls and Tim Flannery: The central fact that our Australian land is not North America. All our rivers don't equal 10 per cent of the Mississippi River's water flow. No other continent is as encrusted with salt. We are more like North Africa than North America.

Arguments like these are not relevant for some economists and business leaders. They believe a significantly larger population is the only route to economic growth.

They are wrong. First, population size is not the determinant of economic prosperity. Think of Indonesia (212 million), and Bangladesh (137 million). Competitiveness is not determined by population size. Last October, the World Economic Forum rated Finland as the world's most competitive economy. With a population of 5 million, it is smaller than NSW.

Our flexible workforce, with its creativity and problem-solving capacity, and our highly developed political and institutional structure are greater assets than a larger population would have been.

Second, a population of 50 million would also widen the gap between regional Australia and our large cities. The growth of Sydney to mega status would require proportionately greater infrastructure spending at punitive cost, paid for with punitive tax rates.

Yes, new migrants could be encouraged to move to inland centres. But experience shows decentralisation policies have had limited success.

Third, a significantly larger population may threaten some of our greatest comparative advantages for export growth and competitiveness.

Our best prospect is with a comparatively small but highly skilled workforce exporting environmental, education, health and other services while being a leader in bio and information technology.

Fourth, even with a larger population, Australia could never hope to compete with our regional neighbours in terms of absolute size of production volume and labour force.

Five, the populationists argue that greater migration is the way to achieve the younger population needed to achieve a strong economy. The truth is our population is ageing at nowhere near the rate of other OECD countries such as Italy, Germany and Japan. On present median projections, Australia's age profile will mirror that of the US.

Even so, having an older population is not necessarily something to fear. Leading management theorists argue that people over 65 in 2050 will be very different from today's 65-year-olds. As well as being fitter and more active, they will have had careers where flexibility, knowledge and the ability to innovate were core skills.

FINALLY, more crucial than population size will be our future political and economic alliances.

More important in 2050 will not be whether we have the 50 million people dreamed of by Malcolm Fraser, Joe Hockey, Richard Pratt and others, but whether we have free trade agreements with the US and Singapore, and good market access to China.

For the Australian economy as a whole, it is not the domestic market but the world market that matters. There is a world of 6 billion customers. Great Australian companies such as Lend Lease and News Limited have built their strength on selling to the world.

Yes, we may need a nationally agreed population policy.

But we must not fall for the line that a larger population equals a stronger economy.

I just do not believe it.

26/2/02. Premier Geoff Gallop said today a national population policy was crucial but Australia's population must be maintained at ecologically sustainable levels.

Dr Gallop said any national population policy should be outward looking but Australia also has significant domestic population issues that could be addressed.

It should look at issues such as the population drift from country to city, particularly the concentration of population in our capital cities and pollution pressures on the environment.

"This is an opportunity to articulate a long-term vision for Australia," Dr Gallop said.

"A national population policy provides opportunities to advance and inform a diverse range of policy debates and processes in Australia.

"It is critical for the long-term future of Australia that we ensure population is maintained at ecologically sustainable levels.

"Population policy and sustainable natural resource management are intimately linked."

Premier's office: 9222 9475.