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Professor Peter Newman
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Dear Peter

I am pleased to provide the attached response to the consultation paper for the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia.

Sustainability lies at the heart of this Department's responsibilities and activities and is the core of the responsibilities of the statutory bodies with which the Department is associated: the Conservation Commission and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority.

The Department is therefore keen to play its part in the quest to integrate sustainability into all aspects of Government, industry and community activities. I would be pleased to provide further information, including case study examples, about any matter raised in the response, and to work with you and your unit to promote sustainability in Western Australia.

Yours sincerely

Keiran McNamara
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

30 April 2002

Att.

**Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management**

Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?

The consultation paper defines sustainability as "the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals". The paper highlights the role of innovation in identifying and developing new opportunities through which sustainable outcomes can resolve environmental, social and economic problems. Sustainable development challenges currently prevailing approaches to economic development, resource management, environmental protection and social development. In particular, sustainable development requires parties holding very different perspectives to collaborate on creative solutions to conflicting interests and values.

In raising such challenges, and by proposing ways of moving past existing processes and outcomes, which in themselves often generate environmental, social or economic harm, sustainability is, by definition, a worthwhile pursuit.

However, the complexity of sustainability as a concept requires that it be clearly defined in concrete and measurable terms for effective implementation to be successfully pursued across society. This need for clear communication of the practical meaning of sustainability in Western Australia remains a prime challenge for Government broadly and for agencies such as this Department, for whom sustainability is an essential focus.

What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?

Sustainability offers opportunities for society to benefit through creative approaches to a wide range of issues. Sustainable use of the biosphere would generate significant opportunities relating to the responsibilities of this Department.

The Sustainability Principles to which the Government is committed are encapsulated in the Department's Mission and Principles (see enclosed copy of the Department's Corporate Plan 2000-2005, which is currently being updated):

The Department's Mission is:

"In partnership with the community, we conserve Western Australia's biodiversity, and manage the lands and waters entrusted to us, for the appreciation and benefit of present and future generations."

Principles which guide Departmental decisions may be summarised as:

- *Maintain and restore diversity and health of ecological communities;*
- *Apply precautionary principle where biodiversity might be lost;*
- *Fair valuation and pricing for use of the environment and resources;*
- *Ecologically sustainable use of wildlife;*
- *Effective and efficient delivery of outcomes;*
- *Cooperative approach to resource and information use;*
- *Flexible and adaptive approach to management and operations.*

A more serious approach to sustainability across Government, society and industry would therefore facilitate the achievement of this Department's Mission, for the benefit of the people and the environment of the State.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

What opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?

Sustainability needs to be clearly defined and broadly communicated through specific examples of success. This would enable stakeholders to consider sustainability in terms of visible, measurable outcomes as well as goals, processes and indicators. The utility of this approach would be enhanced where the process and steps in defining and achieving the outcome were summarised, to allow other parties to consider how this approach might be adopted in their own initiatives.

Some of the options for sustainability relevant to the Department of Conservation and Land Management include:

- Revegetating significant areas in the wheatbelt to ameliorate salinity;
- Ensuring that there is no net loss of biodiversity during economic development;
- Recovering threatened species and threatened ecological communities;
- Ensuring that all lands and waters managed by the Department are managed according to sustainability criteria;
- The continuing evolution of forest management towards ecological sustainability;
- The use of lands reserved for environmental values to generate social and economic benefits through nature-based recreation and tourism;
- Joint land management with traditional owners;
- The use of indigenous biota for economic benefits, such as through bioprospecting and biotechnology;
- Reducing the Department's resource use and waste generation in its own operations.

Some more specific options or directions include:

- Effective management of on-farm conservation areas in the Wheatbelt, which would in many cases benefit the land holder as well as helping to protect biodiversity and other environmental values.
- Many areas in the pastoral regions can better contribute to the State and regional communities through being used for nature conservation, cultural tourism and ecotourism, than through traditional pastoral activities. Such changes will often help generate regional employment while helping to protect or improve the environment.
- Permitting the holders of pastoral leases, such as mining companies and private conservation organisations, to manage the areas concerned for conservation outcomes, would be of benefit. This would help resolve situations where a lessee is forced to operate a pastoral activity at a cost to the environment and perhaps at a financial loss to the lessee, without generating significant regional income or employment.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

What is the role of Government in facilitating a more sustainable society?

The State Government:

The Government has a primary role in promoting sustainability, first to define its meaning as a concept and a reality, then to determine ways it can be pursued, progressed and achieved, and finally to promote it broadly through the community and beyond: nationally, regionally and globally. This Governmental role has several elements.

Leadership:

- Identify the direction
 - Meaning of sustainability: concept and reality, including specific instances or examples of what is or is not sustainable
 - Indicators
- Demonstrate commitment:
 - Agency policy and strategy
 - Agency activity
- Demonstrate success
 - Process success; substantive achievement
 - Government sustainability achievements; performance measures
 - Reporting

Facilitation:

- Bring together parties interested in sustainability
- Build capacity for creative solution generation
- Provide venues and skilled practitioners for conflict and change management

Promotion

- Preferentially supporting initiatives which will act to move the State closer to sustainability, such as:
 - Nature-based tourism
 - Renewable or sustainable resource use and energy supply
 - Knowledge based service exports

Representation:

- Promote a national, regional and international sustainability agenda

Resourcing

- Funding social, economic and environmental activities commensurate with the importance of sustainability and the alignment of the initiatives with sustainability.
- Effective costing and payment for ecosystem services from beneficiaries of those services.

Regulation

- Legislative framework which promotes sustainability as a purpose.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
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What is the role of Government in facilitating a more sustainable society?

The Department of Conservation and Land Management:

Within this Department's responsibilities, this Government role should include the following broad initiative areas:

A. Biodiversity Conservation

1. To establish guidance for biodiversity conservation actions and improved legislation for achieving biodiversity outcomes in partnership with the community.
 - Develop and implement a WA Biodiversity Conservation Strategy that builds upon the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity.
 - Enact a Biodiversity Conservation Bill.
2. Expand and improve the marine and terrestrial conservation reserve system to achieve world's best standards.
 - Identify and acquire new conservation reserves to meet comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness criteria as well as protecting sites of special importance.
3. Promote off-reserve conservation that complements the reserve system.
 - Develop and implement programs and partnerships for off-reserve biodiversity conservation with community groups, landholders, industry and other agencies.
 - Participate in integrated approaches to improved natural resource management.
4. Recover threatened flora, fauna and ecological communities
 - Identify and specially protect threatened species and ecological communities.
 - Priority rank them for conservation action according to IUCN (World Conservation Union) criteria.
 - Prepare and implement recovery plans for the most threatened species and ecological communities.
5. Protect biodiversity from threatening processes, agents and activities, including feral animals, weeds, dieback and other exotic diseases, salinity and inappropriate fire regimes.
 - Implement the WA Salinity Strategy in partnership with landholders, the community and other agencies.
 - Maintain and expand Western Shield incorporating feral animal control, threatened species breeding and translocations, and associated management of threatening processes and species populations.
 - Use and manage fire to reduce fire hazards and damage to biodiversity and to regenerate and protect ecosystems.
 - Implement Western Everlasting to conserve the State's threatened plants.
 - Prepare management plans for all lands and waters managed by the Department.
 - Implement integrated management strategies to control dieback and other pests and diseases that threaten ecosystems.
6. Ensure that use of wildlife is sustainable.
 - Prepare, implement and continually improve management programs for major uses of wildlife.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

- Promote sustainable use programs as a means of improving biodiversity conservation.
- Maintain and enhance licensing and compliance operations covering access to and keeping of and release of wildlife.

B. Sustainable Community Benefits:

This department also has an important role in enabling the community to generate social, cultural and economic benefits through the provision of a range of services that are valued by the community and are consistent with the principles of ecological sustainability. These include:

1. Managing lands for which the Department is responsible so that their natural values are maintained and people are encouraged to enjoy nature and natural areas.
2. Providing a range of nature-based recreation opportunities and innovative facilities and services that are compatible with ecological sustainability.
3. Providing quality information and interpretive programs.
4. Form part of the State's fire management capacity.
5. Manage forests and woodlands on an ecologically sustainable basis.

C. Community Involvement and Support for Conservation

Maintaining community involvement and support for biodiversity protection is a key element to the Department's activities and is critical to moving towards sustainability. The Department therefore focusses on:

1. Improving community knowledge of biodiversity conservation issues through communication and advocacy programs.
2. Increasing the opportunities for youth to learn about and gain hands-on experience with conservation issues.
3. Responding to the community's desires to participate in Departmental activities.
4. Establishing partnerships with agencies and groups with similar interests.

D. Effective and efficient operations:

The Department also recognises the need to apply sustainability principles to its own operations and activities:

1. Developing effective internal communications.
2. Managing and supporting employees effectively.
3. Focussing scientific research programs on high priority issues.
4. Ensuring management is based on good science.
5. Focussing Departmental resources on strategically important areas.

Just as sustainability defines major challenges for Government and society, the specific sustainability directions noted above set ongoing and critical challenges for this Department. The Department is committed to continue pursuing the achievement of sustainability in all elements of its activities, and has some indications of progress and success, a selection of which are outlined in the next section.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

What best-practice examples exist to demonstrate how sustainability is being progressed?

In line with its core responsibility for biodiversity conservation throughout the State (ie regardless of land tenure) and the management of the State's formal conservation reserve system (both terrestrial and marine) as well as its State forests and timber reserves, the Department has developed a number of activities and processes that demonstrate progress towards sustainability.

These activities and initiatives indicate how sustainability objectives can be pursued by a Government agency. The following are a selected set of examples which describe success in pursuing sustainability to varying degrees. Further examples are available.

- Proposed drafting instructions have been developed for a new Biodiversity Conservation Bill. This would establish the legal basis for protecting Western Australia's high biodiversity values and be a critical building block in the State's move to sustainability.
- The expansion of the conservation reserve system is continuing, although it is not yet fully representative of the State's ecosystems and biota.
- Cooperative off-reserve conservation programs have been developed and promoted.
- The Western Shield initiative program has led to the recovery of three native mammal species to the extent that they have been removed from the threatened fauna list as a result of fox control, and progress in the recovery of many others.
- A key factor to the Department's success in its endeavours is its capacity to build relationships and establish partnerships with local residents and stakeholders, especially with people of Aboriginal descent and rural landholders.
- Public education to promote the conservation and sustainable use of Western Australia's natural environment has been a major focus and success of the Department's activities during the past decade. Public education is based on print and electronic media, options for involvement in a range of Departmental programs and on-site recreation and interpretation facilities.
- The Department produces *Landscape* magazine and a range of popular publications on aspects of the environment and how people can enjoy it without damaging it, as well as scientific publications. Naturebase, the Department's public website about the environment of Western Australia (<http://www.calm.wa.gov.au>) receives over 16 million hits per year and is a major factor in advocacy for conservation.
- The EcoEducation school programs, which had more than 40,000 student and teacher participants in the 2001 school year, and the Landscape Expeditions program are two of a range of opportunities for members of the public to take part in Departmental conservation activities.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

- The Department uses its extensive and popular natural area interpretation facilities to promote environmental values and conservation through on-site facilities. The development of bushwalking options in national parks and other Department managed lands has enhanced the capacity of residents and tourists to directly experience the state's natural environments.
- The Department has also sought to move towards sustainability in its operations. It has for many years established renewable energy systems in isolated locations wherever practicable, and has more recently committed to purchasing a portion of its electricity from renewable sources. Paper, plastic and metal recycling programs are active in most Departmental locations. These activities will be coordinated and enhanced through a "Cleaner Production Plan" which is currently in development.

In developing and implementing these initiatives, the Department consistently promotes social capital through using collaborative processes. Since the 1980s, the Department has continually improved its capacity to use public interests, views and values to inform resource management decisions. Since 2000, the Department has implemented a Public Participation program that has three main functions - (1) Creating public understanding, (2) Creating stakeholder dialogue, and (3) Creating stakeholder partnerships. The Department has developed policy, strategy, a staff training program and support system for this program, and believes that it is critical to achieving effective conservation outcomes in the long term.

The Department would be pleased to provide further information, including case studies, about any of these matters.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management***

What scientific research and development is needed to ensure sustainability outcomes can be achieved?

There are four main areas of research required to ensure sustainability outcomes can be achieved; these areas conform to the sustainability principles to which the Consultation Paper notes the Government is committed.

1. Research relating to the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity.

Australia's priorities for biodiversity conservation research were identified in a report issued under the authority of ANZECC in 2001¹. This report identified 15 priority research questions under five main research areas:

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|----|---|-----|--|
| A. | What is Australia's Biodiversity? | 1. | Identifying Australia's ecosystems and ecological communities. |
| | | 2. | Identifying Australia's species. |
| | | 3. | Monitoring changes in Australia's biodiversity. |
| | | 4. | Developing biodiversity data and information programs. |
| B. | How does our biodiversity function? | 5. | Identifying ecosystem processes. |
| C. | What is the value of biodiversity conservation? | 6. | Determining the value of biodiversity conservation. |
| | | 7. | Developing incentives to conserve biodiversity. |
| D. | What is changing and why? | 8. | Identifying threats to biodiversity conservation. |
| | | 9. | Determining the conservation status of biodiversity. |
| E. | What are the management options? | 10. | Identifying a system of conservation reserves. |
| | | 11. | Assessing preventable risks to biodiversity conservation. |
| | | 12. | Predicting effects on biodiversity conservation |
| | | 13. | Managing for biodiversity conservation. |
| | | 14. | Developing ecologically sustainable industry practices. |
| | | 15. | Developing educational materials and decision support systems. |

This Department's major roles are to protect Western Australia's natural environment: the State's biodiversity and the integrity of its environmental processes and systems. These roles are supported by an extensive scientific research program, which is largely congruent with the priorities defined in the ANZECC report. Our research therefore helps to provide a basis for identifying the broad parameters of the threats and opportunities related to sustainable use of the State's natural environments.

However, given the size and scope of the research required, increased research effort would enhance this knowledge, and would lead to more efficient and effect use and management of these environments. Within the scope of the identified national research priorities, several State priorities can be identified at this time:

¹ Biodiversity Conservation Research: Australia's Priorities, ANZECC and Biological Diversity Advisory Committee, Environment Australia, Canberra, 2001.

**Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
Department of Conservation and Land Management**

- Undertaking surveys to refine knowledge about the conservation status of the State's biota;
- Undertaking taxonomic research and describing new species – a high proportion of the State's flowering plants are undescribed and the proportion of most invertebrate and non-vascular plant groups that is undescribed is very high;
- Identifying and examining the biology of species known to be threatened and high risk and researching the dynamics of threatened ecological communities and the ecosystems they form;
- Identifying the issues associated with conserving invertebrate fauna;
- Identifying practical broadscale methods to manage or eradicate *Phytophthora* dieback in diverse natural areas;
- Identifying the environmental implications of climate variability and change and options to manage change;
- Identifying issues and options for nature-based tourism destination management;
- Identifying nature-based tourist needs, monitoring, management and education;
- Determining tourist carrying capacity in Western Australian environments and monitoring ecological impacts;
- Management of introduced biota in natural areas, including feral animals and weeds;
- Understanding the long-term impacts of disturbances such as fire and timber harvesting;
- Monitoring changes resulting from management activities and natural processes.

2. Research relating to the precautionary principle

The application of the precautionary principle to the use of uncertain or incomplete environmental, social and economic information and knowledge remains a challenge within most institutional situations. Research concentrating on the application of this principle to scientific information relating to environmental systems would aid decision makers and could provide a basis for its broader application to decision elements concerned with social and economic systems.

3. Research relating to inter- and intragenerational equity

Perceived and actual equity is critical to sustainability. Research directed to developing frameworks for establishing equitable mechanisms and objectives for achieving existing and future environmental objectives would help support sustainable development.

4. Research relating to better resource valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms.

Research focussed on identifying the most suitable and effective fiscal and economic options within the specific mix of resource opportunities and environmental challenges in Western Australia would enable Government and the community to better consider these policy alternatives.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
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What should Western Australia be doing to contribute nationally, regionally and globally to progress sustainability?

Western Australia can take two broad types of actions to contribute to national, regional and global sustainability: become an example of success, and promote the concept and reality.

Western Australia has a relatively rare opportunity to demonstrate sustainability on the national, regional and global scales, due to the State's unique combination of characteristics: well-developed scientific capacity, high biodiversity, relatively low level of environmental resilience, broad range of environmental types; extensive land management experience, multicultural society and communication. Ideas for establishing the State as a sustainability exemplar are to be found earlier in this response.

The State could help promote sustainability in other jurisdictions by:

- establishing education or exchange opportunities;
- promoting State capacity through trade or volunteer programs;
- establishing and maintaining a web site with a national, regional and / or global focus, featuring local initiatives and successes;
- establishing and hosting national, regional or global meetings, conferences or trade shows.

***Response to 'Focus on the Future' from the
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Conclusion.

There are several major commitments, within the responsibility of this Department, which would facilitate progress towards sustainability. These initiatives, which could be achieved by 2010, would demonstrate national and global leadership in sustainable development, and would lay the basis for the ongoing economic, social and environmental well-being of Western Australia:

- Fully engage in implementing within WA the international treaties concerned with environmental protection and biodiversity to which Australia is a signatory.
- Establish a long term biological monitoring and reporting program to demonstrate that the State is fulfilling its global biodiversity obligations.
- Prepare a WA Biodiversity Strategy.
- Seek World Heritage or other appropriate recognition for areas of the State which have recognised global environmental values.
- Promote WA as a centre for nature-based tourism, through site selection, design and management, appropriate accreditation of site management and service provision and the establishment of suitable training and auditing support.
- Establish a research consortium within relevant Government agencies to focus available research effort and capacity.
- Enhance the State's biological diversity survey program.
- Enact a Biodiversity Conservation Act.
- Establish a world class system of national parks, marine parks and other conservation reserves that fulfils the criteria of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness.
- Develop a WA bioprospecting policy to facilitate an ecologically sustainable biotechnology industry.