Submission to State Sustainability Strategy

Citizens and Civics Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Background

There are many issues that impact on the development and implementation of effective sustainability strategies. From a citizenship perspective these include:

Sustainable communities as a prerequisite for sustainable development

Western Australians are recognised as having one of the highest rates of resource consumption in the world. The evidence would suggest that there is limited understanding of, and interest in, the imperative of sustainability.

Coupled with this, there are a range of social issues that appear to be either intractable or worsening, for example; suicide, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, crime, illicit drug use and so on. Frequently, these issues are deemed more 'urgent' to the community than sustainability.

Government and approaches to decision-making

Over the last few decades government's have tended to reduce their regulation role, and government agencies have tended to become more specialised in their respective areas and less able to recognise, understand and address issues outside there own sphere. Along with government, other sectors of society such as academia and the media have also traditionally viewed the environment, economy and society as separate policy areas. This lack of integration often leads to ineffective policy outcomes.

Sustainability requires integrated (cross-sectoral) or over-arching decision-making, involving civil society, business, government and the non-government sector.

Aside from the issue of decision-making often being too sector specific and failing to take into account related issues, decision-making often focuses on the short-term impact of decisions. Effective sustainability strategies require decision-making processes that take into account the longer-term social, economic and environmental impact of decisions made today.

The Challenge

While there is clear evidence of greater awareness and support of the sustainability imperative, it is also true to say that it does not match the urgency of the problem. The issues that need to be addressed, such as our consumerist culture, approaches to decision-making and so on are deeply entrenched in our culture, practices and structures. Furthermore, a characteristic of Western society is its individualistic structure, which has a tendency to limit collective responses to major issues. The following points are made regarding specific areas that need to be addressed in a sustainability strategy.

A cultural shift

Convincing people to change behaviours and consumption patterns (and thus often lifestyles) is difficult, but fundamental to the State Sustainability Strategy. Strategies consistent with bringing about cultural change are required. The community needs to fully understand:

- the importance of sustainability issues and the consequences of inaction;
- that they, individually and collectively, are accountable and responsible for their actions (ie; cannot continue to defer responsibility to multinationals, government etc); and
- that 'quality of life' (or 'standards of living') need not be compromised by a focus on sustainability.

The Productivity Commission (quoted by ACF) notes that the few successful ESD initiatives in Australia "tend to offer a high degree of stakeholder involvement." Community (the consumers) ownership of the sustainability agenda is essential to gaining support and commitment to it.

Public ownership of the agenda leads to public support and commitment to sustainability strategies. Government, academics, business and civil society must all be involved. Success will, in part, be dependent on a 'one in - all in approach' - everyone has to be included.

Leadership and planning processes

Sustainability is a trans-generational, trans-national issue. Planning processes that adequately incorporate sustainable development need to be sustainable themselves – beyond the life of a government and beyond short-term economic or political interests. Decision-making processes must factor in the longer–term environmental outcomes.

Political leadership is also vital. There needs to be a renewed emphasis on the role of government in astute market intervention (eg: regulation, pricing etc) and recognition that political leadership is essential to 'keep the ball rolling'. This requires new forms of partnership between government, the community and business and recognition that GDP as a sole measure of progress is not appropriate. The 'free-market' is unlikely to deliver acceptable long-term outcomes.

Institutional Governance

There are sustainability and governance roles for all major institutions in our society. Corporate citizens can contribute skills, ideas, opportunities, resources and creativity. However, institutions are only likely to adopt socially and environmentally responsible approaches where they see them as being in their own interests, especially given current corporations laws and governance paradigms. The European 'license to operate' philosophy is of particular relevance here.

Achieving a cultural shift in corporate behaviour is difficult and will require a diverse range of strategies. While legislative or punitive measures have a role to play it is the power of the community to influence corporate behaviour that needs to be harnessed. Expressions of public concern do change corporate behaviour.

Partnerships between institutions should be encouraged as they promote the development of a shared understanding of common issues and, as a result, lead to more effective responses.

Education, research and development of best practice in governance, sustainability and democracy by governments, academia and others will assist institutions to be earlier adopters of best practice in these areas.

Structure of the Strategy

Aside from content, the way the strategy is structured and implemented are important considerations. The following points are made regarding possible approaches to this.

The strategy may benefit from being broken into two parts:

a) a conceptual paper that provides a long-term vision (where we want to go, what it will look like) and over-arching principles for achieving it (eg: a strategy for cultural change); and

b) a live (dynamic/evolving) paper-based and web-service that contains specific strategies and actions relating to each sector and how they relate between sectors. This will enable people to check progress on meeting targets and to provide input. It will also assist in coordination and information sharing.

This provides a mechanism for ensuring transparency, accountability, involvement, connection as well as the identification of new issues and innovative responses. Most Importantly, it is also a vehicle for maintaining motivation and commitment.

Similarly, the strategy cannot be an *ad hoc* collection of projects. A 'comprehensive' rather than 'compartmentalised' approach to assembling the strategy would assist the community understand how issues inter-relate. A good web site will greatly assist in the connection of related issues.

The Report's framework comprises Global Sustainability, Sustainability and Governance, Sustainability and Settlements, Sustainability and Land Management. It may be of value to include a category of 'Sustainability and People' which would include issues of individual, household and community responsibilities, research and ideas on sustainable consumption patterns, lessons from Indigenous Australians and so on.

Global sustainability is an issue for all citizens. It is important that the strategy's global connections be clearly established as full sustainability cannot be achieved in this State without it being satisfactorily addressed on the national, regional and international frontiers.

Related corporate citizenship developments

Significant developments have occurred in a range of areas related to corporate citizenship:

- Corporate social responsibility – eg: a WA chapter of the Australian Corporate Citizenship Alliance (ACCA), and Edith Cowan University's CSR network.
- Ethical or strategically responsible investment indices – eg: the SOCRATES index, *Good Reputation* index, etc.
- Triple Bottom Line accountability - eg: AccountAbility (UK)'s AA1000 series, and local interest by the Institute of Chartered Accountants (Geoff Brayshaw, National President).

Governance issues are also emerging in more specific areas of concern, such as:

- Bioscience – *Linking In, Linking Out, Linking Up: Exploring the Governance Challenges of Biotechnology* – Institute of Governance, Canada, February 2002.
- Local Government Waste Management – *Framework for Community Involvement in Waste Management Decision-Making* – a WALGA public education and communication project with Les Robinson (May 2002, Ongoing).
- Public Sector Management – *Working Together – Integrated Governance* – IPAA National Research Project with Tricia Szirom and Success Works, March 2002.

Corporate Citizenship, Governance & Sustainability - Web References

Accountability-Stakeholder Engagement & Triple Bottom Line (3BL) Reporting
- [Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting](#)
- [Institute for Social and Ethical Accountability](#)
- [Social and Ethical Reporting Clearinghouse](#)

Corporate Citizenship & Social Responsibility / Social Entrepreneurship
- [Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)](#)
- [Corporate Citizenship - Business Responsibility, Ethical Values, Environment](#)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility-World Gateway](#)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility Forum](#)
- [Deakin University - Citizenship and Globalisation](#)
- [Interfaith Centre on Corporate Responsibility](#)
- [National Centre for Social Entrepreneurship](#)
- [The Conference Board](#)

Ethical, Socially & Strategically Responsible Investment
- [Best Foot Forward - EcoIndex](#)
- [Centre for Economic & Social Studies on the Environment: Sustainability Library](#)
- [Domini Social Investments LLC](#)
- [KLD-Nasdaq Social Index](#)
- [Philanthropy Australia research resources](#)
- [SOCRATES Socially Responsible Investment Monitor](#)
- [SMH's *Good Reputation* index](#)
- [Sustainable Wellington Net - Ethical Investment](#)

Environmentally Sustainable Development & "Partnerships"
- [Australian Institute of Company Directors](#)
- [Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (Canada)](#)
- [Committee for Economic Development (CED)](#)
- [Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA)](#)
- [Environs Australia](#)
- [Leadership for Environment and Development](#)
- [Participatory Economics Project (Parecon)](#)
- [The Global Compact (UN)](#)

Policy Institutes
- [Aspen Institute](#)
- [Brisbane Institute](#)
- [Copenhagen Centre](#)
- [Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies](#)
- [DEMOS](#)
- [National Institute for Governance](#)