



## **SUBMISSION ON THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA CONSULTATION PAPER**

**Prepared by the City of Belmont March 2002**

### **A Local Government Perspective**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the development of the State Sustainability Strategy.

The City of Belmont supports the submission lodged by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) as provided in Attachment 1 and would like to further highlight issues relevant to Local Government.

The City of Belmont has achieved considerable progress towards progressing sustainability through its involvement in the development of the *Regional Environmental Strategy* (RES) (2000) (RES), the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Program and major efforts undertaken in foreshore restoration work along the Swan River.

The RES was developed in partnership with the EMRC and other member Councils and provides a strategic framework in which to protect and manage the natural environment and resources of the Eastern Metropolitan Region. The RES also identifies issues and defines future actions aimed at achieving sustainability and to value and preserve the environmental, social and economic aspects that make the Region unique.

The City of Belmont is undertaking the CCP Program through a regional approach with the EMRC and other member Councils. Belmont Council has made significant progress since its involvement in the CCP Program last year, having completed its inventory of greenhouse gas emissions and identified actions to reduce emissions resulting from Council and community activities. The City of Belmont is committed to this program and working together with its community to take positive actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide energy and cost savings to its community.

The City of Belmont has also undertaken significant work in foreshore restoration along the Swan River. The area is recognized for its regional significance and Belmont Council is committed to working with its community to restore the ecological integrity of the riverine environment.

## **Funding and resources**

There is an increase in the devolution of responsibility to Local Government. In most cases, this increased responsibility is not supported with additional financial assistance, training or technical support. In addition to its core responsibilities, Local Government is unable to continually accept these new responsibilities, while effectively deliver on its growing existing services without adequate resourcing.

Local Governments need a clear direction on how to progress sustainability within their current activities. This is currently lacking. This coupled with limited resourcing to undertake additional roles other than core business activities is a fundamental issue that needs to be clearly addressed.

It is essential that State Government's role include the provision of resources and technical support to assist Local Government integrate sustainability principles into its decision making processes. The proposed partnership approach for sustainability currently being developed between WALGA and the State Government is a positive and important initiative in this direction.

## **Local Planning Structures**

Local Government's role in planning and assessment of proposed developments provides an important role to incorporate sustainability principles in future planning.

It is important for Local Government to put in place long-term planning strategies that address particular land uses and set appropriate guidelines with the guidance and support from State Agencies. These long-term strategies need to be developed in consultation with the community and achieve an agreed outcome. This approach will ensure that developments occur in accordance with a proper framework and avoid 'ad-hoc' development that has limited reference to the long-term objectives for an area.

Local Government has a role in the assessment of any proposed development that includes subdivisions, development applications and buildings. Rezoning is referred to the DEP as required under the *Planning Legislation Amendment Bill (1998)*. Local Government also refers significant impacts and other major environmental issues such as site contamination to the DEP. It is therefore essential that Local Government has sufficient resources and expertise to properly assess the environmental and social impacts associated with development. The EMRC Environmental Service has been providing this level of advice to member Councils through a structured arrangement or on request. Proper assessment of environmental impacts during the planning stage is the most effective way of identifying potential impacts and putting in place management measures to control the impacts.

Planning approval conditions for subdivisions are recommended by Local Government and must be endorsed by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) with advice from respective State Government agencies such as the DEP and the WRC. In some cases, the DPI does not endorse the approval conditions recommended by the Local Government particularly in regard to environmental conditions. This aspect of the planning process has long been criticised by Local Government as being inadequate and inequitable. It is also recognised that there needs to be a process for ensuring all developments are being implemented in compliance with approval conditions. Some Councils have employed Compliance Officers, however, this is a resource intensive position that has achieved mixed success in improving compliance. More recent moves to address this issue rely upon more 'self compliance' and reporting aimed at demonstrating to the Local Government that a developer is implementing the approval conditions.

The RES recommends that a checklist be developed that integrates sustainable considerations into the existing decision making process as a useful way of addressing development in the short-term. Such a list should consider the expected impacts and effects of a development proposal on the social, environmental and economic components of the area.

### **Lack of a Holistic Approach**

At present, the statutory planning process does not generally incorporate sustainability measures into the assessment of proposed developments. Development proposals are often considered on a 'case by case' basis, which provides limited opportunity to consider issues associated with long-term sustainability.

This inadequacy has been addressed to some extent through the *Planning Legislation Amendment Bill (1998)* which requires all TPS amendments, including rezonings, to be referred to the DEP. The EPA considers and may decide to formally assess a TPS amendment by undertaking an Environmental Review. While this referral process is able to consider issues related to sustainable development, it is only available for Scheme amendments as most development proposals do not require rezoning and are not significant enough as individual proposals to be referred to the DEP for formal assessment.

This highlights the importance of long-term sustainable strategies, although it is recognised that there are no statutory requirements for Local Government to assess the sustainability of each development and building application. Many Local Governments throughout Australia have attempted to overcome this inadequacy by preparing Sustainability Plans based on the approach outlined in Local Agenda 21. The Sustainability Plan sets the Local Government's requirements for addressing sustainable development based on local values.