



# Focus on the Future:

Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia

## City of Mandurah submission to the Government of Western Australia on the proposed State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia

March 2002

### Key Questions

#### Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?

It is imperative. It is recognised that economic development cannot continue without the environmental basis that sustains it. However, the pursuit of short term financial gain continues to dominate decision making processes and therefore measures to ensure sustainability needs to be incorporated to enable an equitable balance of environmental, social and economic needs. This will not be achieved through education and incentives. A sound scientific knowledge base needs to be used to make sustainability measures mandatory.

#### What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?

Sustainability that ensures a balance of social, environmental and economic benefits is achieved in the longer term rather than one or more of the three elements being sacrificed in lieu of short term gains. Benefits are demonstrated in examples such as fishing exclusion zones within the Pacific. Banning fishing in fish breeding areas caused short-term hardship but within a few years the fish stocks increased significantly and this initiative has ensured the long-term sustainability of fishing in these regions, thus providing social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Other benefits include cleaner environments and the social and economic benefits associated with this and implementation of new technology and industry which will generate benefits through investment and job spinoffs.

#### In your experience, what opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?

The City of Mandurah is acutely aware of sustainability principles and goes to great lengths in its decision making processes to try to achieve these principles. However, the lack of legislative support continuously prevents the City from achieving truly sustainable outcomes. Although the State has many strategies and principles that advocate sustainability the City is still regularly frustrated by the lack of legislative backing to truly support these statements.

### **What is the role of government, business and the community in facilitating change to be more sustainable?**

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The City of Mandurah appreciates that the issues for achieving sustainability are complex but believes that with adequate planning and co-operation of governments and their departments, private enterprise and the community, sustainability can be achieved. Governments must ensure that long term sustainability is a priority. This will involve hard decisions that will have to stand up to public scrutiny. However, given the growing awareness of environmental issues through eg. water restrictions and public campaigns on issues such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is considered that the community is capable of accepting such decisions as long as they are fair. Broster (2000) states that:

*“The time for the hard decisions is now, if sound process is followed, good science is listened to and a bi-partisan approach taken, the community will, if not immediately, in the long-term, embrace those decisions and, at the end of the day, say thank you”.*

### **What best-practice examples exist, if any, to demonstrate how sustainability is being processed?**

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Water restrictions go some way towards sustainability. However, the lack of legislative control over bore water highlights the need to move quickly on these issues so that the benefits received from one decision are not at the cost of another. Eg. while the restrictions are helping to reduce reliance on scheme water it is increasing reliance on bore water and the effects of this that are becoming apparent through eg. tree deaths in high water table areas.

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

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The City considers that at this stage there is a wealth of research and development that has already been undertaken and although this should continue, particularly in the social arena, the difficulty is in implementation and resource sharing. Local governments, particularly in fast growing areas such as Mandurah, have difficulty keeping up with day to day issues and consequently tend to be, of necessity, more reactive than proactive.

### **In a more general sense, what else should Western Australia be doing to contribute nationally, regionally and globally to progress sustainability?**

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Governments at all levels have historically favoured economic development over environmental (and social) care and many decisions have been made without the knowledge of how ecosystems work. However, policy and decision-making bodies now have a much greater understanding of natural systems and the likely effects of development on them. It is now widely understood that economic growth cannot continue if the environmental factors that provide the growth are destroyed in the pursuit of financial gain and the City congratulates the Government for its proposed “State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia”.

If the Government is truly committed to achieving sustainability it has to bring in legislative controls that will genuinely allow all tiers of government to assist themselves, industry and the community to achieve sustainability. Suggestions to achieve this are listed below (sustainability issues).

## **Sustainability Issues**

### **Sustainability, Governance and Society**

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In preparing the State's Sustainability Strategy, the Western Australian Government may wish to consider the approach adopted by the City of Mandurah in the preparation of its Community Charter. The City focussed on people (social), planet (environment), prosperity (economic) and planning, as detailed below:

#### **Ø People**

- A commitment to all the age groups, whether children, youth, adults or seniors.
- A commitment to all ethnic groups within our community.
- The provision of a safe and secure environment.
- The provision of accessible services.
- The provision of good governance.

#### **Ø Planet**

- A commitment to integrated waterways management.
- A commitment to coastal rehabilitation.
- A commitment to maintaining bushland buffers and natural vegetation.
- A commitment to protection of our local fauna, flora and fisheries.
- Improved waste management systems.
- Reduction of greenhouse emissions and pollution control.

#### **Ø Prosperity**

- To encourage the attraction of eco-friendly businesses.
- To support the retention and expansion of existing businesses, and encourage new business opportunities.
- To encourage and support a vibrant central business district.
- A commitment to tourism development.
- To promote appropriate skills development.
- To provide good management of the City's assets.

Ø **Planning** (overarching to encompass people, planet and prosperity)

- To ensure strategic environmental planning occurs by providing sufficient resourcing to ensure that future growth is managed.
- To ensure that existing strategies and policies are refined to promote the City's sustainable principles.
- To ensure regional co-operation in all areas of planning.
- To be actively involved in the planning, lobbying for and provision of major infrastructure for the city's growth.

There are many initiatives that the City feels are hindering local governments' ability to achieve more sustainable outcomes, some of these are listed below. To alleviate these barriers it is suggested that:

**Sustainability, Natural Resources Management and Biological Diversity**

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- The State Government initiates its commitment to undertake a 'System 6' update for the Peel Region for inclusion in the Peel Region Scheme.
- The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage determine environmental conditions and finalise the Peel Region Scheme as a matter of priority to facilitate the Government's commitment to the Region's development.
- The State Government and Western Australian Planning Commission to provide adequate buffers to protect environmentally sensitive areas (eg. 50 metre buffer around wetland boundaries, sufficient foreshore reserves).
- The State Government change the Environmental Protection Act to provide more protection to the natural environment (e.g. include a section similar to Queensland's 'Duty of Care').
- The State Government establishes legislation that requires that stormwater is treated before being released into natural water bodies.
- The State Government / Western Australian Planning Commission undertake a comprehensive review of tidal fluctuations resulting from the Dawesville Channel and impacts to the Foreshore reservations identified in the Peel Region Scheme.
- The State Government and the Western Australian Planning Commission initiate the preparation and adoption of a Peel Bush Forever strategy similar to Perth Bush Forever strategy for inclusion in the Peel Region Scheme and then extend this concept across the state.

- The Western Australian Planning Commission and the Minister for Planning adopt a supportive position for initiatives and amendments to Town Planning Schemes, which are designed to protect remnant bushland areas.
- The Western Australian Planning Commission supports the inclusion of local government plans to protect locally significant bushland within Town Planning Schemes and that the Commission takes into account the recommendation of these Plans when determining future rezoning, subdivision and Outline Development Plan applications. Eg. The City of Mandurah's 'Concept Vegetation Plan' within the City of Mandurah's Town Planning Scheme No 3.
- A State wide education/awareness program be provided to local government to ensure awareness of provisions that allow landowners wishing to retain locally, regionally or nationally significant remnant bushland to do so. This could be in the context of tax and/or rate reliefs that are easily administered.
- A government agency be created that has statutory responsibility for the protection of the water quality and the use of the actual waterbodies associated with the Peel Inlet / Harvey Estuary waterways system. This agency needs to be adequately resourced to effectively manage the system. The waterways of the Peel Region are identified as one of its major assets yet the funding provided to its management is meagre.
- A specific Act for the protection of the coast be adopted and an agency dedicated to the protection of the coast under this Act be established. This is done in other states eg. South Australia's Coastal Protection Board which does not have to juggle political commitment and portfolio's and can focus on the conservation of the coast.
- Appropriately located marine parks be established with the aim of protecting fish stocks and the marine biodiversity, with the outcome achieving a sustainable fishing industry (commercial) while maintaining restrictions on recreational fishing and tourism.

### **Economic strategies for sustainability**

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- The Western Australian Planning Commission and the Minister for Planning adopt a supportive position for initiatives and amendment to Town Planning Schemes, which are designed to facilitate sustainable development (urban consolidation, integration of public transport planning, neighbourhood development and employment generation). Eg. (a) the integration of land use and transportation planning be incorporated as a key performance criteria for assessing Schemes, rezoning and ODPs; and (b) remnant bush exchange scheme be provided for increased development rights.

- The State Government amends the Local Government Act to enable Local Government to impose a sustainability levy on its ratepayers, over and above general rates (similar to the 'buying back our bushland' levy imposed by the City of Brisbane).
- The Western Australian Planning Commission and the Minister for Planning adopt the Liveable Neighbourhoods document as a subdivision and urban development policy.
- The Western Australian Planning Commission and the Minister for Planning provide support to introduce appropriate time limits on Outline Development Plan approvals. Eg. the City of Mandurah's Amendment No. 28, which proposes to introduce a 5 year time limit on Outline Development Plan (ODP) approvals.
- The Western Australian Planning Commission review the requirements relating to the preparation of Structure Plans/Outline Development Plans with the view of introducing performance based provisions addressing residential density ranges, affordable housing, housing variety, sustainable development, employment generation, public transport integration and protection of environmental features. Density bonus schemes be encouraged for Neighbourhood Centres and sustainable development which meet design criteria.
- The State Government introduces mandatory energy efficient requirements under the Building Code of Australia (BCA) for new residential dwellings, as has occurred in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. These laws require changes to building construction and design and significantly cut energy wasted through over-reliance on heating and air-conditioning. This initiative would have significant health benefits as well as financial and environmental benefits through reduced energy consumption;
- The State Government provides encouragement and assistance in the establishment of LPG and CNG outlets within Western Australia. This could be accompanied with tax incentives for converting vehicles to LPG and CNG; new vehicles equipped with LPG and CNG; and purchase of LPG and CNG (LPG prices have gradually increased to a rate that there is little financial incentive for people to undertake conversions);
- All government agencies commit to purchasing at least 10 percent natural power in lieu of fossil fuel sources, and commit to reducing energy consumption by a minimum of 15 percent in all government buildings, as the Victorian government has.
- A program (similar to the ICLEI program for local governments) be introduced to assist state government agencies to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. A program of this nature that can focus on energy consumption of buildings, vehicle usage and waste reduction can have significant financial and environmental benefits. The City of Newcastle has done a significant amount of work in this area.

- The provision of incentives for the use of solar hot water systems and the generation of natural power by individuals on their houses (ie solar panels). The incentives need to be such that individuals can achieve the financial breakeven point within five years. Current incentives are difficult for individuals to understand and the payback period too long to enable medium to low income earners the “luxury” of being sustainable. A concentrated campaign could be run to ensure the incentives are clearly demonstrated and access is simple, perhaps in a similar manner to Alinta Gas’s “Clean Air Melville” program. This program sees Alinta Gas replace wood heaters with gas heaters with no up-front costs. The cost is re-couped over a number of (eg. 3) years.
- Good agricultural land is protected from the pressure of urban development along with tax incentives to encourage sustainable agriculture, or disincentives for unsustainable methods. This needs to include factors such as provision of shelterbelts and vegetation corridors and the use of sustainable crops – Australia has such a markedly different environment than Europe and the United Kingdom yet we continue to use European methods of farming.
- Assistance and incentives be provided (possibly through Business Enterprise Centres) to small businesses to improve their product processes in terms of their environmental impact. This could include appropriate accreditation to business and industry (including retail) for better practices and be accompanied by community awareness programs to encourage people to use “sustainable” companies. This could be similar to the proposed “GreenStamp” program through the Motor Trades Association in conjunction with the DEP. Further financial incentives for using these companies would encourage companies to become accredited. However assistance with these systems should be easily accessible and not cost restrictive – eg. ISO 14001 accreditation is expensive and difficult to achieve thereby restricting smaller companies from being accredited. There is also some question to its structure and environmental benefits.
- Assistance and encouragement be provided for the establishment and research into alternative energy sources (wind, solar, tidal) by Western Power and private companies, (ie clean production). The current system of purchasing “GreenPower” through Western Power is cost prohibitive and it is felt that there should be more commitment to the reduction in fossil fuel dependency by making the purchase of renewable power more accessible.
- The State Government investigate the possibility of rain water tanks being incorporated into all new buildings (as in Strathfield, NSW) as an alternative to the use of scheme water in domestic situations (for use on gardens, in toilets and in washing machines). Current water restrictions have highlighted the need to treat water as a valuable resource and identified that restrictions are not enough to ensure long term sustainability.

- The re-use of stormwater and greywater on domestic gardens be investigated/researched further. This is a valuable resource that if effectively captured and treated could reduce reliance on scheme and bore supplies.
- The adequate public transport (ie buses) be provided to and within regional areas.
- Self sustainable rural and eco-tourism development be encouraged by introducing performance criteria with financial incentives being provided to support eco-based development that meet design criteria.

### **Social strategies for sustainability**

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- A ‘state of the social environment’ report in a similar style to the “Peel Away The Mask” document produced by the Peel Development Commission, be produced by the Government across the state on an annual basis as a review and monitoring mechanism for decision making processes.
- The State Government expedites its Homelessness and Housing Strategies, and together with the necessary budgetary allocations, implements innovative planning, development and partnering approaches to improve responses and outcomes for those in housing need, present and future.
- Modified versions of the ‘New Living’ strategy be trialed in high need areas (such as Coodanup within Mandurah), supported by meaningful financial contributions from government agencies, in addition to those of Housing and Works and Local Government.
- The State Government commit to providing regional “Department of Indigenous Affairs” offices and staffing resources in high need areas (such as Mandurah and Pinjarra).
- The State Government expedites implementation of its commitment to community and mental health and hospitals, and upgrades its resourcing commitment to suicide research and prevention strategy development in regional areas.
- Indigenous people’s and young people’s particular health needs be given a high priority in regional areas.
- The State Government endorses a process through which government agencies, and Lotteries WA will work with the Regional Lotteries House (Inc), Local Government and other relevant organisations to develop plans for appropriately located, shared building (with appropriate administrative supports) for counselling, group work and training providers.



- The State Government reviews the practice of standardised costs of tendered human services across the State and allows for regional variations in costs.
- The State Government commits capital works and operational funds to the building regional 'dry-out' shelters and provides operational costs on a recurrent basis.
- The Ministers for Community Development and Housing and Works commit additional State contributions to the Commonwealth/State SAAP/CAP Agreements to allow the expansion of supported accommodation options in regional areas.
- Primary and secondary school curriculum to include sustainability education (ie focus on the significant environmental and social issues confronting the world and what we as individuals can do to help).
- To ensure the sustainability of a vibrant non-government community based sector, the State Government ensure that infrastructure funding for such agencies is indexed to allow for wages and accommodation cost increases.

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#### **References:**

Broster, L., 2000, The Mighty Murray – Towards Solutions from a Community Perspective, State Science Briefing, Parliament House, Adelaide, Tuesday, 11 April, 2000, in possession of Murray-Darling Association Inc.