

22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2002

Professor Peter Newman  
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit  
Policy Office  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
15<sup>th</sup> Floor, 197 St Georges Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000

**RE: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Dear Professor Newman

As President of the Canning River Residents Environment Protection Association (CRREPA) which has a particular interest in the long-term sustainable management of the Swan-Canning River Catchments, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic. CRREPA has been involved with rivercare issues and projects since 1994. Our main focus areas have been along the Rossmoyne and Shelley foreshores of the Canning River and in Yagan Wetland Reserve at the mouth of Bullcreek. We are one of the many catchment and bushcare groups active within the catchments of the Swan Region working towards sustainable management of our natural resources. We have not had the luxury of time to conduct a workshop to create this submission so the following comments are my personal ones, although I am confident that I am not alone.

I am pleased that the Labor Government is promoting the debate on sustainability, particularly in regard to natural resource management, as without this encouragement the cultural and social change that is required, to achieve sustainability, will not happen. The present economic system is producing degradation and exhaustion of our natural resources and is unsustainable. Therefore responsible government must look to improve the system. We believe that the health and wellbeing of present and future generations depends on sustainably managed natural resources.

**SUSTAINABILITY:**

I would question the WA State Government's definition of sustainability (*Focus on the Future* 2001). "The simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals" is more a mission statement than a definition. This definition does not give any indication of what the necessary 'goals' are. It does not address the essential responsibility of one generation to another or the realities of finite resources. The essential nature of sustainability is the management of human needs (not 'wants') balanced against the ecological processes on which life itself depends. The present system of economic and social goals is unsustainable as it is out of balance with our management of essential ecological processes and which are being depleted and degraded as a result. Therefore economic and social goals will need to be reassessed against the realities of our natural resources if sustainable management is to be achieved.

With such an important issue it is essential that from the start we are all in agreement about the fundamental elements of the debate. The Government's adopted definition of sustainability causes me to question the commitment of the Government to sustainability. I very much hope that this forum will help the Premier's Sustainability Policy Unit achieve a greater understanding of the meaning of sustainability, and its responsibility to provide the means to achieve it.

**"Is Sustainability a Worthwhile Pursuit?"**

If only from a sense of self-preservation, sustainability makes sense. However, if we care for our children and grand-children sustainable management becomes our moral responsibility and an imperative if we are to secure their future wellbeing.

## **ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY:**

Sustainability is essentially a practical discipline. It is necessary to implement the principles of sustainability before it can be achieved. A friend recently displayed to me all the reports that he has collected which have been written over the past years on sustainability. I am therefore confident that there is already sufficient data for developing a successful Sustainability Strategy. What is lacking is the social and economic will to implement any recommendations. It is very much hoped that this new Strategy will result in practical application of the principles of sustainability.

I would fully support the concept that “Government must take a leadership role in facilitating the shift to a sustainable future” (*Focus on the Future*, 2001). The community requires encouragement and firm direction. It is unrealistic to expect to achieve sustainability if a minority are actively engaged in daily sustainable practises and others are not. Therefore success requires government leadership, enforcement of penalties and new legislation where necessary. I believe that the majority of people within the Australian community are willing to live within their environmental means if it is shown that it is necessary and that everyone is involved. Many people do not have the skills or knowledge to develop their own personal methods of sustainable living, but rather they look to guidance and practical methods from a community authority such as local or state governments. For example recycling and water conservation: householders know that there is little point in conserving water or recycling in isolation without a whole of community approach. The more difficult issues such as restricted land clearing also need government leadership. Rules for sustainable living need to be seen as being as necessary as those for ‘smoke free’ venues, wearing a seat-belt, a bike-helmet, having to have a vehicle immobiliser, stopping at traffic lights, etc. etc. All part of living sustainably in an ever more populated world. Standards need to be set, monitored and enforced.

Unsustainable practises that endanger the future are many and cross all interests and activities within the community.

### **One example of unsustainable practises allowed to become entrenched: (Taken from a recent submission by CRREPA to the Review of the Swan River Trust).**

“Recreational fishing has taken off – the incidence of anglers using our area has increased three or four times over what was the norm just 12 to 18 months ago. Sedge beds are being consistently trampled and dug out. Plant and animal communities are being constantly destroyed and disturbed. Branches are being broken off trees and used to build camp-fires. Each day sees more damage. Erosion has started in damaged areas and the remaining vegetation will progressively be lost, with resulting degradation to the fishery, loss of biodiversity in the area, and loss of landscape and amenity to the wider community.

“At our instigation a ‘stakeholder’ meeting was held late 2001 with assistance from the Conservation Council of WA to attempt to overcome the incremental damage that is being done each day by recreational anglers. The Trust has produced a good leaflet but to our knowledge the anglers have not had it distributed directly to them, so their attention has not been drawn to the need to protect the resource and the penalties that apply for irresponsible behaviour. Because anglers have been fishing unhindered for an extended period of time they will not stop their daily damage to the foreshore unless they are personally approached and warned. We consider that it is not our role to personally approach anglers, particularly as the Trust has not given us any authority to do so. Also our members are unwilling to place themselves in potentially dangerous situations without back-up from the relevant authority.

“We have been discussing possible action with the City of Canning but again feel that the Trust should be leading this not us. Action along our section of river could be swift and effective. Under a partnership arrangement the Trust and local government security officers could work along the river, one group on water and the other on land. Because our channel is mostly close to the shoreline Trust officers could travel up the river in the Trust boat, hail the anglers who are not on obvious sandy beaches, and inform them of the reasons requiring them to move – both ecological and legal. Those anglers out of hailing range or who have failed to move on after a warning could be approached by the land based team. With co-operation between the Trust, local councils and groups we feel confident that it would only need a couple of weeks of this to break the bad habits that have been allowed to develop amongst anglers.”

CRREPA suggested to the SRT Review that through partnerships between state, local government and community interest groups more efficient and effective sustainable management of our river system could be achieved. For your interest I list below the recommendations CRREPA made to the Review. I believe that they give an indication of the multiple levels at which the principles of sustainability need to be applied if we are to change cultural and social habits and achieve a sustainable future.

Recommendations from a Submission by Canning River Residents Environment Protection Assoc. (CRREPA) to the Review of the Swan River Trust, March, 2002. CRREPA believes that the implementation of these recommendations will provide the necessary support and encouragement that is required to secure the sustainability of volunteer rivercare groups, who provide the basis for the social component for the sustainable management of our river system and against which sustainable development can be gauged.

- *That an equitable working partnership be forged by the Swan River Trust between the Trust, any local government authority with responsibility for river foreshore maintenance, and local rivercare groups;*
- *the SRT actively encourages the formation of, and recruitment of members to, rivercare groups;*
- *the SRT actively provides technical information on rivercare matters to rivercare groups and relevant local government authorities;*
- *the SRT actively communicate with rivercare groups and relevant local government authorities to identify suitable project sites and to assist with sourcing funding;*
- *the SRT foster an equitable, working partnership between Dept for the Environment and Heritage and the Dept of Education, Sport and Recreation, and encourage enforcement of penalties.*

In view of the above it was astonishing to learn very recently that the Swan River Trust and the Western Australian Planning Commission in collaboration with local government are to “provide a long term planning framework. This will guide the use of the rivers and the use and development of adjacent land to ensure protection of the river landscape, its amenity and environmental values.” (Letter from Geoff Totterdell, Chairman SRT dated 15/4/2002). Apparently this document, The Swan and Canning Rivers Precinct Policy Plan, has been in development since 1997. Astonishing, because this letter was the first any of us had heard of it, in spite of continuous requests for a more collaborative approach by agencies to riverine management. For such a Plan to be successful and achievable I very much hope that it incorporates the principles of sustainability.

#### **SUMMARY:**

- Pleased that the Government is encouraging a debate on sustainability.
- Cultural and social change is required if sustainability is to be achieved.
- Definition of Sustainability not acceptable.
- The sustainable management of our natural resources is basic to the success of sustainable living.
- Sustainability is essential if we are to fulfil our responsibility to provide equity between this and future generations.
- Sustainability is essentially a practical discipline.
- Governments have a leading role to play.
- Mutually respecting partnerships between governments, agencies and community can work towards removing unsustainable practises.

The social and cultural climate within our community has still a long way to go before it is capable of self-managing our environmental assets. Until that happy day those who have been entrusted with the responsibility to protect and manage these assets must be vigilant and prepared to enforce the rules.

Practical skills are not given enough credibility and standing within our present social structure. We would urge you to hasten the implementation of sustainable practise within our community because our consumer life style is eroding the level of practical survival skills that are necessary for us to adequately respond. I have serious concerns regarding the environmental, social and economic legacy this generation of managers is passing onto the next, and of the consequences in the future when everyone realises they

have been led astray and lack the means to achieve sustainable living. Please do not let this consultation paper be just another report gathering dust, we need a living document that will initiate implementation of sustainable practise across the community.

Yours sincerely,

DIANE MATTHEWS

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