

# State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia

CONSULTATION PAPER

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Submission paper prepared by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council

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### Forward

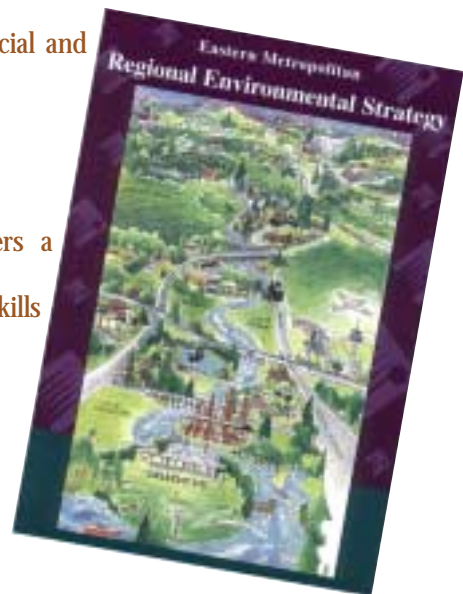
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the development of the State Sustainability Strategy. This submission has been prepared and lodged by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) officers on behalf of the EMRC and its member Councils: The Cities of Belmont, Bayswater and Swan, the Town of Bassendean and the Shires of Kalamunda and Mundaring.

The EMRC and its member Councils are keen to provide input into the development of the strategy and work together towards achieving a sustainable future.

The EMRC provides a successful model of a partnership by its member Councils to enable a strategic long-term focus that is both environmentally and culturally sensitive to the Region. The Regional Environmental Strategy 2000 (RES) is a major strategic initiative undertaken by the EMRC to protect and manage the Region's natural environment and resources. 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 EMRC Environmental Services team offers a professional service with significant experience, skills and expertise in the area of sustainability.



## Professional Capability

The Environmental Service team has been instrumental in assisting member Councils achieve numerous awards for achievements in the area of sustainability including:



- The Local Chambers “Certificate of Commendation for Innovation in Regional Environmental Management”
- The Western Australian Municipal Association’s Best Practice in Local Government Awards 2000 “Innovation Award” and
- Premier’s Award 2002 for Excellence in Public Sector Management for the category “Sustainable Environment”

It is clear that regional structures such as the EMRC are identified as the most beneficial framework to develop and implement sustainability in Western Australia. The EMRC’s experience and achievements towards sustainability are well recognised.

Following a presentation and discussions held with the Sustainability Unit, it is clear that the EMRC’s Environmental Service can provide valuable input into the development of key areas of the Strategy including biodiversity, environmental data management systems, education and regional sustainability plans. This submission supports the development of the State Sustainability Strategy and addresses a number of key issues raised in the consultation paper with a focus on critical issues relevant to Local Government.



## Institutional Barriers and Institutional Change



The division of responsibilities between national, state and local jurisdictions has been recognised as a factor that can work against sustainable decision-making. To foster sustainable decision-making there needs to be reform and a shift to improve integration of institutions.

### GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

Government has a leadership role to play and to ensure that mechanisms are in place for all relevant government departments to have a consistent vision, commitment and approach towards the attainment of sustainability, along with clear channels of communication. In Western Australia, restructuring and the combining of natural resource management agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Water and Rivers Commission (WRC) is a positive move towards integrating institutions and establishing a consistency in governance toward sustainability. This needs to go further to ensure that all agencies are aligned in terms of policy, governance and decision making to move organizations and Western Australia towards a sustainable future. In addition, programs that support sustainable decision making (ie purchasing policies) need to be adequately resourced to enable Government departments to deliver on their sustainability obligations.

### GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Links between the Commonwealth, State and Local Governments need to be strengthened and structures established to facilitate integrated decision-making. A formal partnership needs to be developed in Western Australia to identify opportunities for joint policy, planning and service delivery activities with other spheres of government. The partnership approach would also ensure that those mechanisms are practicable and reflect the specific needs of each government body. Such a partnership approach is currently being advocated by the Australian Local Government Association to increase the involvement of Local Government in Natural Resource Management (NRM). A business plan for a 5 to 10 year time frame has been proposed to reform the current institutional arrangements to effectively address Australia's growing NRM crisis on a regional basis.

### INTEGRATED APPROACH

Long-term sustainable planning must integrate all aspects of operations within Local Government. An issue associated with existing sustainable development programs is the difficulty Local Government experiences integrating its variety of operations. Coordination and communication across the service areas (ie. Planning, Engineering, Community Services, Administration) varies from Council to Council.



## Institutional Barriers and Institutional Change

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Service area activities and operations within Local Governments have a tendency to be quite distinct and separate from one another. The need to adopt a more integrated approach is being achieved in some cases through programs such as Local Agenda 21 (LA21) and Cities for Climate Protection (CCP).

### COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

It is considered that to effectively engage the community on issues that affect them, government needs to ensure that decisions made by them are not only representative of its community, but also participatory. Community participation needs to be further encouraged in high level decision-making bodies. This has been successfully undertaken in NSW through

the establishment of Advisory Councils or citizens juries that provide policy advice to Ministers. A similar approach would be encouraged in Western Australia to ensure community representation and participation in decision making on relevant matters such as sustainability issues.

This concept of fostering community participation to assist in Local Government decision-making has been successfully undertaken by a number of member Councils within the EMRC. Community representation on the Shire of Mundaring's Environmental Advisory Committee for example, provides an effective means in which advice is provided to Council on a broad range of environmental matters.

## Planning for Sustainability

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Increased population and urban expansion are major issues affecting sustainability in the Perth metropolitan area. This growth presents a range of issues that need consideration during planning and decision making to ensure that development and economic activities are environmentally sustainable. This requires a long-term focus (not short term profit) so that decision-making today does not jeopardise opportunities for future generations, the environment and the economy.

Local Government's role in the development of the State Sustainability Strategy should highlight the importance of appropriate planning to achieve sustainable development. Planning

must be holistic and incorporate the social, environmental and economic aspects of an area.

The Perth metropolitan area supports a range of land uses with economic and social opportunities and environmental impacts. In particular, the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Perth offers a unique and diverse environment, particularly within the Darling Range and Scarp areas, where biodiversity, tourism, recreation, cultural and heritage values are paramount in future planning decisions.

## Planning for Sustainability

Planning needs to consider the impacts of future development on factors such as:

- Air quality;
- Bushland;
- Biodiversity;
- Community facilities;
- Cultural and heritage values;
- Employment;
- Existing land uses;
- Lifestyle and safety of the community;
- Soil;
- Transport;
- Visual landscape; and
- Water catchments and waterways.

The Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) Statement of Planning Policy (SPP) currently being developed by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) provides a positive step to address these issues and the EMRC is providing a submission on the SPP.



## Strategic Programs and Tools

There are a range of effective strategic programs and tools across Australia that should be promoted and supported by the State Sustainability Strategy to help Local Government achieve sustainable development. The major program being LA21. A LA21 expands the scope of local environmental planning, and guides the activities of Local Government so that planning and policy-making are integrated, focus is placed on long-term outcomes and all sectors of the community are involved.

As experienced in the South Australian Partnership for LA21, the lack of statutory mandate for this program has meant that its long term stability and continuity has suffered because it was often viewed as at threat from changes in cor-

porate priorities and/or lack of funding. This situation has changed in South Australia however, due to changes to the Local Government Act 1999 that now incorporate Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD), strategic planning and public consultation provisions. A similar approach should be encouraged for Western Australia to ensure a long term commitment to sustainability, regardless of the government in power.

Other programs such as State of the Environment (SoE) reporting can complement LA21 and should also be widely promoted within Local Government under the State Sustainability Strategy. With regular reporting, Local Governments can determine trends in environmental

## Strategic Programs and Tools

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quality over time and assess the outcomes of policies and decision making.

Other effective planning tools for consideration in the State Sustainability Strategy include the *Liveable Neighbourhoods Community Design Code* developed by the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC). The code promotes planning that caters for a wide range of living,

employment and leisure opportunities which are environmentally responsible and can assist Local Government's planning decisions achieve a sustainable environment. Although it is recognized that the code should not be a statutory requirement, further incentives are required to encourage developers and Local Government to facilitate its implementation.

## Local Planning Structures

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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 APPROVALS

Planning approval conditions for subdivisions are recommended by Local Government and must be endorsed by the 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



## Local Planning Structures

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 considered on a 'case by case' basis, which provides limited opportunity to consider issues associated with the long-term sustainability of a Region.

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 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 and most development proposals may not require rezonings and are not significant enough as individual proposals to refer 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 LA 21. A Sustainability Plan sets the Local Government's requirements for addressing sustainable development based on local values.

## Procurement

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It is recommended that Local Government be included in any green purchasing agreements that the State Government negotiates for issues such as recycled paper, green power and energy efficient appliances (or at least given the option to participate).

The State Sustainability Strategy needs to consider the impact of decision makers at all levels, from purchasing officers to Chief

Executive Officers and Councillors. While individuals may have similar visions for the future (clean water, friendly neighbourhood, clean air etc), quite often only short term gains are considered when making decisions.

There is a need for a combination of legislation and intensive education/information to make individuals and decision makers at all levels to consider the future, today.

## Funding and Resources

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Although Local Government has a responsibility to promote changes that are in the broader community interest, sustainability may not necessarily be seen as a core business objective. Even for those Councils that demonstrate a commitment to adopt such initiatives, there is a general reliance on external funding to initiate these new programs. This source of funding tends to be limited and of a short-term nature and therefore Councils may be reluctant to introduce new programs that are going to lead to ongoing financial commitment. Managing areas of land acquired from State Government agencies for biodiversity conservation or maintaining an incentive scheme once Commonwealth/ State funding ceases are examples with long-term liabilities for Local Government that have future budget implications.

There is an increase in the devolution of

responsibility to Local Government, Regional Councils and community organizations. 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, and effectively deliver its growing list of existing services, without adequate resourcing.

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 the Western Australian Local Government Association and the State Government is a positive and important initiative in this direction.

## Partnerships

Developing partnerships to manage sustainability issues across the Eastern Metropolitan Region has successfully undertaken a regional CCP Program aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions within member Councils' and their community's activities. This approach has resulted in a number of advantages to member Councils such as the sharing of resources, access to Federal funding opportunities, greater efficiencies and better outcomes due to the collective learning experiences.

The EMRC and its member Councils have also achieved outstanding success in partnership projects involving multiple local governments and community members working on catchment based issues such as the Eastern Hills Catchment Management Project and the Natural Resource Management Project. These regional projects contribute toward sustainability and have demonstrated "on-ground" activity (revegetation, fencing, weed control) and the establishment and ongoing support of community support and networks.

experience and achievements towards sustainability are well recognized and the Sustainability Unit has expressed a keen interest for the EMRC to be represented on groups to assist in the development of key areas of the Strategy including biodiversity, environmental data management systems, education and regional sustainability plans.

The views expressed in this submission aim to be representative of the EMRC and its member Councils and seek to provide guidance on the development of the State Sustainability Strategy, particularly with regards to issues facing Local Government.

The EMRC understands that there will be further opportunities for Local Government to provide input into the development of the State Sustainability Strategy through workshops to be held by the Western Australian Local Government Association in March and April 2002. The EMRC is keen to progress the development of the strategy and provide further input following the outcomes of the workshops.



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