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Professor Peter Newman  
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Dear Peter

## **SUBMISSION REGARDING THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss development of the State Sustainability Strategy. The Forest Products Commission is pleased to make the following submission to the strategy.

The wealth and prosperity of Western Australia is strongly linked to large-scale, often energy-intensive resource developments. Action to date on sustainability objectives has been at a relatively small scale, often focused at a community level. Larger scale farm forestry programs have received periodic support, but significant action has relied on non-government investment that has targeted higher rainfall zones of the State. Current support for such programs is limited to Forest Products Commission borrowings.

The Commission is concerned with what appears as a reluctance at various levels to promote the role of renewable timber resources, agroforestry and biomass energy as commercial means of delivering sustainability in agriculture, water and atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>.

In this submission, the Commission emphasises the opportunities for large-scale commercial revegetation to address sustainability in Western Australia on a number of fronts – without significant cost to government.

The fundamental premise is a focus on renewable resources. Tree crops are the solar powered “factory” for construction materials, biomass energy, water pumps, carbon sinks and animal habitat. They provide multiple benefits from an integrated delivery point.

As a building material, timber consumes an energy budget several orders of magnitude less than aluminium and steel, and ten times less than concrete and brick. As an energy source compared with solar wind or hydropower, only biomass can deliver salinity control and biodiversity enhancement.

As agricultural crops, trees provide shelter for stock and erosion and watertable control. Furthermore, a diversity of species is available across pine species, native eucalypts for sawlogs, oil mallees and sandalwood.

Significant action is required to achieve benefits of the scale required to address sustainability issues in this State. The first principle is to achieve land sustainability; this requires measures to control the rising groundwater levels and salination. If we accept that trees are a major part of this solution, then we can use that as an opportunity to drive the other key sustainability issues facing the State. This should be achieved through policy action on a number of fronts, including but not limited to:

- promotion of wood waste as a biomass fuel source;
- promotion of biomass based fuel in transport systems;
- building codes for timber frame multi and single storey buildings; and
- controls on watertable management in agricultural areas.

Such action would have economic impacts, for example, reduction in fossil fuel usage and reductions in brick, concrete and metal demand. Agricultural enterprise would also change, but tree based renewable resources would be structured to provide new income for agricultural areas.

None of these outcomes can be delivered without a willingness to tackle large-scale issues and to turn the focus of attention to large-scale adoption of renewable resources.

Specifically, Western Australia will need to move to limit/cap or otherwise regulate or work with the Commonwealth to regulate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This action alone will create a commercial setting to foster carbon sequestration as a commercial enterprise. Similarly, Western Australia should move to set targets for renewable electricity generation as was done in New South Wales. Western Australia should adopt mandatory energy limits and guidelines for building construction and transport fuels.

At a high level, the State must recognise that sustainability will not be achieved by small-scale, community-based projects. Investments, such as made through the National Action Plan, must have strong strategic focus, rather than the piecemeal projects funded under previous programs. If Western Australia is serious about globally sustainable development, then the State Sustainability Strategy will need to address big picture energy and land use directions.

Vegetation, and specifically commercial tree-based renewable resources, can deliver to Western Australia sustainability in carbon balance, water balance, energy production and construction materials at the same time as improvements in conservation of biodiversity.

As described in meetings with you, the Commission will shortly have a “renewable resources” action plan for implementation. This will provide a valuable framework for delivery of renewable resources, and thereby enhance the outcomes from the State’s Sustainability Strategy. I look forward to continuing dialogue with you as the two strategies develop.

Appropriate policy settings will achieve this outcome and provide the framework for the commercial sector to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Yours sincerely

Dr Paul Biggs  
GENERAL MANAGER

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