

## **SUBMISSION TO STATE GOVERNMENT ON SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

**Jan Star**

I have been involved in both our Shire's submission and one from WALGA so in this I am emphasising a few crucial points only.

Congratulations to the Government for this long overdue initiative, and for its wide ranging approach to consultation with community. The latter is, of course, integral to an Agenda 21 approach, it is also an area for productive partnership with local government.

The major theme of the coming WSSD is integration – vertical and horizontal. This would seem to be the major challenge for the State. Vertical integration with local government ( and community) is progressing with the proposed 'Partnership Model'. With the federal government there are the COAG Agreements, some AGO partnerships and hopefully an IGA on the way for NRM. Industry partnerships offers many possibilities not least in the field of renewable energy. There is obviously an exciting synergy between academic institutions already in this area, the needs of our remote areas and international aid/exports. There should be federal and international assistance available to assist this develop a lot more than it has. Much of industry seems to be taking up the sustainability challenge faster than governments, and this initiative of the State will expedite the uptake.

It is horizontal integration between State agencies that needs attention. The agencies themselves are way behind industry and local government in embracing sustainability. Some have the rhetoric but as far as I know only Agriculture (and possibly Regional Development) seems to have adopted a triple bottom line approach and even then it seems to have moved away from that recently. There is an obvious conflict of purpose in the two government corporations. Their dilemma was highlighted with the water shortage – how

can there be talk of protecting the nursery industry when they are promoting non-sustainable systems? – the ‘gardens of delusion’ as they were referred to in the recent NRM conference in Adelaide, by the head of the Botanic Garden there. The streetlighting issue also highlights this dilemma in the local government arena

There is a need for the government to be serious about its intent. Industries which can’t adapt to a closed loop, be part of a systems approach, should not be encouraged by government over the longer term. Similar thinking should pervade relevant agencies. Purchasing guidelines for agencies need to move towards whole of life costing and low energy requirements etc. Tenders can be made to fit sustainability needs. New government buildings should all fit energy efficiency guidelines. Costs need to be internalised and hidden subsidies taken into account or removed. This is presumably not all the province of the Commonwealth. As Graham Harris said for the Enviro Conference “Our policies and actions fail to reflect the urgency of the situation”.... “We talk too much and act too slowly.”

While the Sustainability Strategy presumably will become a policy framework with consequent legislative changes, programs, R&D and monitoring, the most immediate needs are in the area of behavioural and institutional change. In the former the partnership with local government is important as they are closest to the community and can help effect such changes, though we are all still fairly crude in our consultation efforts. Effecting value changes and building community cohesion needs more knowledge of the basic science among practitioners. The area of institutional change is the challenge for government. The agencies operate very much as separate ‘silos’. Combining of Transport and Planning is a very real first step. Hopefully a consequential change will come to the definition of Sustainability used in the State Planning Strategy which includes reference to ‘while improving the quality of life’. This encourages people to think our consumer

oriented philosophies will continue, rather than pointing to reducing our ecological footprint. All departments should adopt the same definition as in the Paper. Combining agencies may help in some cases but we have also seen it have unhappy consequences as in the old CALM.

I would like to suggest one pilot in an area with which I am familiar. The Peel-Harvey has massive environmental assets and problems; it has rapid growth and huge social problems; it has a rapidly growing diverse economy. It has a Development Commission that has just made partnership agreements in the areas of Cultural Tourism and NRM with two universities, and is developing a triple bottom line approach. There is a new DEWCAP region which encompasses a large part of the region, a DPI regional office and its own police district. It needs an R&D centre for NRM which could move to an ESD focus (cf NZ model) or could become a major multi-purpose institute as in the Waterways Strategy. It could be a pilot area for co-location and active integration of government agencies. This would require a keen, probably junior, Minister with the time to drive such integration because co-location by itself would not be enough. There is more which I would be happy to discuss if there is an interest. It would seem there is a need to do something to achieve some integration of agency policies and actions. Local government with the proper management, can achieve such integration because it is working 'on the ground' where relationships and linkages are manifest, a region may provide the same testing ground. I am not suggesting a regional governance model, simply a way of making it easier to communicate as a necessary first step to integration.

Finally a Greenhouse strategy is needed and I gather this is progressing. Local government has shown leadership in this area with actual achievements. It needs to be included in the process.

**I commend the Government for its purpose, agree with the sustainability principles in the Consultation Paper, and wish it well.**

**Jan Star**

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