

Dear Professor Newman,

I would like to thank the Gallop Government for the opportunity to contribute to its State Sustainability Strategy, a topic of great interest to me, and have prepared the following submission. Due to late start on my submission, the scope is limited, but I hope will portray my major concerns.

Yours sincerely,

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30 April 2002

Firstly, I wish to congratulate the Gallop Government on its stated aim to address the challenge of economic development that does not result in social and environmental degradation over the long term. It is refreshing to see a political party interested in the well-being of future generations - and committing to taking a leadership role in this. If its decision-making was always to be seriously subjected to consideration of how outcomes would affect future generations, then that would be most encouraging. Dr Gallop's commitment to a STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (SSS) is most commendable, and if it is successfully implemented at every step, then Western Australia would become a shining example to the rest of the world. Agenda 21, the global strategy for sustainability agreed to at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, provides a framework within which WA can refine a philosophy and action program to suit our own circumstances, forever keeping in mind the global, intergenerational context. By involving the community in this whole exercise, the outcome ought to be more acceptable to the community - and so success more likely.

Perhaps by the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg this September, Western Australian delegates will be able to offer a raft of positive programs that this State is intent upon developing. The real test, of course, comes when such good intentions are actually being put into effect. We have to show that we are indeed reducing our 'ecological footprint' - and as the average Western Australian at this stage has a 'footprint' greater than the Australian average, we have a long way to go.

Energy policy is pivotal to sustainability. The various wind farms around WA, including the latest at Albany, are great examples of use of 'renewables' - and if applied on a large enough scale, could wean our society off dependence on coal-generated electrical power. The application of solar power is just in its infancy here. An effective SSS would ensure that such technologies - and other energy efficiencies - were encouraged by government subsidies. All new buildings should be designed to maximise passive energy. When possible, all existing buildings should be modified to decrease dependence on mains electricity, gas or coal heating etc. CALM's oil mallee project may provide a resource for producing electricity, (among other good outcomes like reducing salinity in the wheatbelt.) We need a public transport system so attractive that it will entice travellers en masse out of their own vehicles into those trains, buses and ferries. Around Perth, there is already a good system of bicycle paths, and sometimes dual pathways to cater for cyclists and pedestrians separately. Such facilities in our pleasant climate encourage better health and so more enjoyable lives for people here - and extension to further suburbs would encourage more healthy outdoor exercise while saving on fossil fuels. The less private transport, the greater will be WA's contribution to reduction of Greenhouse gases.

While the SSS is addressing the role of government in all this, it is certainly for every individual person to become more committed to reducing his/her consumption of electricity, water, land . . . We all have a part to play if we are going to have less impact on the environment. Government policies can help citizens to alter their life styles through provision of better public transport, through incentives to install solar energy panels on homes, through

urban design that reduces travel, through encouragement of native gardens that require less water and many other ways. Quality of life should be measured by less materialistic benchmarks - and have more to do with our inner lives, thoughts and personal creativity. A higher level of education could be an important factor in this.

A more educated populace could certainly help our economy to mature, leaving our dependence on extractive industries further and further behind us as we grew into a more tertiary, service-oriented economy. Our methods of agriculture need to swing to more organic farming and generally more in harmony with the land. It is painful to see so much salt scalding in the wheatbelt, and while there is a huge effort going into replanting trees in some injured landscapes, the scale required to reverse to trend to salination is probably beyond us as a society. Last weekend, I was looking at the engineering works at Lake Toolibin - The diversionary channel waiting to direct the first saline water away from the precious lake; the pumps right in the middle of the lake bed itself, in an effort to keep the salty water deep underground. If it all works, and Toolibin can be saved as a freshwater lake, lakes below it will eventually get the salt that would have further contaminated it. I am sure it is all worth the effort for the sake of the WA wheat belt's last real freshwater lake - but the scheme must be very costly - and the scale of the salination problem of WA so vast, that I do wonder how the larger problem can be addressed. For the sake of sustainable agriculture, we must solve this huge problem. Growing food in an environmentally sustainable way, has to have a very high priority.

One essential aspect of an SSS must be population size. Is the Gallop Government going to address this? Every time there is an extension of urbanisation, there is an outcry that yet another precious part of banksia woodland on the coastal plain or fragile Darling Range is 'going under'. We see how stretched our scarce water resources are - and seem now to be ready to drill more bores into the Yarragadee aquifer, a move I had thought was prohibited. We all need to reduce our water consumption rates. When the reservoirs are lowering, the population is asked to reduce watering gardens, shorten our showers, wash vehicles with buckets of water rather than hosing etc. Once we are used to such practices, why not simply leave them in place? Numbers of people and consumption per head have to be factored into a long-term SSS. Because the world itself is a finite system (apart from renewable energies), eventually human societies are going to have to stop growing - and that will either occur by famine, war, natural disasters etc - or by our own enlightened planning. Is there a brave economist or three 'out there' willing to devise the means of achieving a stable state economy?

One other essential part of an SSS for WA is that we must maintain our position of not mining uranium - and also continue to stay right out of the extraordinarily harmful nuclear fuel cycle. Prior to the last WA election, I was delighted to read that Dr Gallop regarded his opposition to Pangea's proposed plan to bury international high-level radioactive wastes in the outback of WA as one of his three greatest achievements as Leader of the Opposition. The Nuclear Waste Disposal (Prohibition) Act 1999 had been passed with both major parties' support. I wrote to him after the first anniversary of Labor achieving government here to say how I had welcomed that statement that he had made - but also to ask what he had done about nuclear issues since he had been in power. His reply stated that he saw some shortcomings in the 1999 legislation - but did not go on to say that the ALP while in government would support the Nuclear Activities (Prohibition) Bill that has been tabled in the Legislative Council already during his administration by Giz Watson, a Greens MP.

Unless this current Labor Government uses its term in power to enact such proposed legislation, there is the very real possibility that a future government under Colin Barnett would quickly allow uranium mining to start up in this state and also give its blessings to a Pangea-like burial plan. The 1999 legislation I have referred to above does not address transportation of radioactive materials; neither does it adequately address the definition of radioactive waste. Such shortcomings were why Dr Marcis Kerzeme of Pangea International thought he could 'drive a truck through' that 1999 Act. If the Gallop Government will oversee the successful passage of the new Bill (which would eclipse and replace the 1999 legislation), that would be a great stride indeed for an effective SSS. In fact, without such legislation, I would think much of the other effort towards a SSS would be undermined.

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