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RE: Sustainability Submission Letter

Thankyou for the opportunity to participate by writing a submission to our State Sustainability Strategy, Focus On The Future.

Currently I am a full-time student at Murdoch TAFE studying Certificate IV in Land Management. This course has made me more aware and informed of the environmental issues that face us at present and the implications that will occur to ecological processes if we don't take actions towards conserving our resources.

Maintaining sustainability is a very worthwhile and important pursuit because all life will be affected with irreversible changes, for ecological reasons and therefore our own quality of life.

In my experience I have seen opportunities to pursue sustainability through my employment in the agricultural areas of the South Coast of Western Australia Working in establishing new vineyards I have seen the heavy use of herbicide, fungicide and pesticide chemicals on farmland previously occupied by pasture and crop. This large amount of chemical use on the land is affecting the water quality and a percentage of the toxins are entering our waterways for reasons such as incorrect calibration and inadequate cleaning procedures. Stakeholders such as the Agricultural Department should be going out to see farmers to educate them on more efficient ways of controlling weeds, pest and diseases. Farmers can also work in with their neighbours to share ideas on better ways of managing their properties.

Methods that are of a more friendly nature to the environment are programs including physical and biological control methods. Examples of this are introducing sheep in a vineyard to keep weed levels at a more maintainable level Physical methods such as mulching and human impact of hoeing a badly affected area of weed all helps in reducing the need to use chemicals A biological control such as the use of guinea fowl is of benefit in a vineyard in controlling insect numbers. Introducing predators such as ladybirds, lacewings and mites are effective in reducing numbers of mealybugs and light brown apple moth. Using chemicals kill and discourage beneficial insects and so may induce more pest problems.

I have noticed in some supermarkets that you can recycle plastic shopping bags. I think this is a great idea because far too many are being used. Consumers may start bringing their own bags if a charge was to apply. After looking at my wheelie bin I have discovered that there are many items that can not be recycled in them such as shopping bags, meat trays, butter and margarine containers. I know myself that a large portion of my recycling material is actually shopping bags. What happened to the biodegradable shopping bag? I'm sure most people put their plastic shopping bags into their recycling bins thinking that are to be recycled. Supermarket employees should be made to conserve the number of bags they use when they are packaging the goods purchased.

Many farmers have properties and sheds with containers with left over chemical. Some can't be identified because the labels have come off making it impossible to use. I have read about a government funded project in Queensland where a service has been provided for farmers to rid their properties of left over and unidentifiable chemicals. I think this is a great idea and should be an option for Western Australian farmers. An annual event of this nature could be of benefit for farmers to gain up to date expert advice on chemicals and its use.

I think it would be of benefit if there were more government funded research programmes in rural areas in Western Australia. Salinity is a problem that is growing and reducing the amount of land that can be used for agricultural purposes. These programmes would produce more employment and help farmers to gain a better understanding of how better to manage their land to help prevent these problems. The salinity problem is also affecting wetlands and rivers which is having an impact on habitat, biodiversity and recreational assets. I am aware of the Salinity Strategy Action Plan and hope it gets government, farmers and the general community' to work together in resolving this growing problem.

There are some very good examples of demonstrated sustainability progress in Western Australia such as the recently built Wind Farm in Albany. Not only is it a good example of a renewable energy it will also bring tourists and provide more employment opportunities to the area. All the examples described in the State Sustainability Strategy consultation paper show that our state is progressing well towards preserving our natural resources.

Sustainability is a concern that should be taken more seriously. I think public awareness and education will play a large part in enabling change to happen. More education in schools on environmental problems is a great way to make children aware when they are young about things they can do now, that will make a difference in the future. Examples of this is getting them more involved in activities in their local areas such as revegetation, recycling and water management. The involvement of practical activities will give children the knowledge and confidence in knowing that they as individuals can make a difference. Presentations and seminars by groups such as Conservation and Land Management and Water and Rivers Commission could help in getting school aged children and adults interested in environmental issues.

The majority of the public are unaware of the number of voluntary community based projects in both metropolitan and regional areas. Some extra publicity for these groups would get a lot more people involved in such projects. Non government stakeholders are very important because they are actively involved in the practical aspects of environmental sustainability.

Sustaining our environment is an issue that needs to be dealt with now, not later and the education of both adults and especially school children is of most importance for the success of our future. Education will help everyone to realize that what we do today will affect our children lives and further generations to come.

Yours faithfully,

Kim Reid