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Professor Peter Newman
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit
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Department of Premier & Cabinet
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Dear Professor Newman

SUBMISSION TO STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

My submission on the State Sustainability Strategy is written as an independent individual, with professional experience over many years as an Environmental Scientist. This includes experience working as a Water Supply and Wastewater Bacteriologist, many years in various community development roles, particular interest and involvement in flora conservation and urban bushland, and involvement in catchment management in the Swan region over 6 years, being employed by government (DEP). I have a M Sc (Env Sc) Murdoch 1993 where my Masters project in environmental law was on protection of bushland in private ownership. I have been an active member of the Wildflower Society of WA and the Urban Bushland Council of WA for many years. More recently I have been the contact person in WA for The Natural Step Environmental Institute of Australia.

General comment

From the outset I wish to emphasise that development of a Sustainability Strategy that *seriously* addresses the fundamental sustainability issues in WA is of paramount importance. As mentioned in your paper we have very serious issues in WA but it is my view that there is very little if any recognition of this issue, if any, amongst government agencies, politicians, the business sector and the wider community. Unfortunately the tone and content of your discussion paper gives me little confidence that sustainability will be given the focus it deserves. The Sustainability Policy Unit will need to have a markedly different approach if it is to achieve anything at all in moving this state away from its highly unsustainable and irresponsible practices.

It is my view that *very radical changes* are needed going right back to first principles and setting basic goals. If done thoroughly and with proper government commitment and resources, much can be done and achieved in moving toward a sustainable society within a relatively short time once the long term goals are clearly defined. It is however an ongoing long term issue which underpins our very existence on this planet and in our society. The longer it is denied and ignored the greater the future costs to us and future generations, and the greater the environmental destruction along the way. Government has a pivotal role to play in leadership, education, policy, regulation and incentive structures.

Sustainability Goals

A strategy is a way to reach a certain goal. There is no point in having a State Sustainability Strategy if the goals are not first of all determined, agreed widely, and then clearly stated. Thus the discussion paper is starting at the middle of the pond without a destination or chartered course and will float round and round endlessly achieving nothing for the long term health of our society in our environment and for its sustainability.

‘The Natural Step’ provides a universal framework for moving toward a sustainable society. Your paper provides no information whatsoever in discussing this or any other possible model which could be used to set long term sustainability goals. There is no meaningful discussion of what sustainability really is and long term goals. Unfortunately your definition of sustainability is quite meaningless. It can only be implied from this that the government has no intention of addressing the issue of sustainability seriously and is not likely to even consider the big picture issues and the fundamental laws of nature. It is astounding that there is no information given about the enhanced greenhouse effect and climate change predictions for WA.

Priority sustainability issues for WA

1. BIODIVERSITY

- shameful paucity of government resources applied to survey and properly document WA's megadiverse biota of all classes
- astounding ignorance in all sectors of the priceless heritage values of our bushland and wetlands
- catastrophic flora and fauna species loss likely in wheatbelt in near future
- bushland loss and degradation in urban areas due to unsustainable urban sprawl
- inadequate and inappropriate management of bushland eg fire management on Swan Coastal Plain, lack of weed control, rangeland management
- absence of adequate legislation to protect bushland, wetlands and other natural remnants
- pathetic under-resourcing of biodiversity protection by government

2. LAND CLEARING

- WA landscape grossly overcleared in south west
- Land clearing continuing
- Substantial Greenhouse Gas emissions from clearing
- Absence of strict clearing controls which enact and enforce WA commitment to goals and targets of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity and the NHT Partnership Agreement. Specifically failure to meet the requirement of *'no net loss of vegetation quality or quantity'*
- Galloping salinity and land degradation due to overclearing in south west
- Inappropriate and unsustainable agricultural enterprises and practices in most areas
- Failure of farmers to appreciate and manage their farms as ecosystems and as closed systems which are sustainable
- Failure of government to provide legislative framework and incentives for ESD and sustainable farming

3. ENHANCED GREENHOUSE EFFECT

- shameful Australian Government position on Greenhouse and Kyoto targets which is nothing less than misleading and dishonest to the Australian people
- Failure of all levels of government to inform the community fully about Greenhouse emissions and sources
- complete failure across the board to understand the severity and extent of the Greenhouse Effect and sources of emissions
- profligate use and waste of fossil fuels in WA fostered by urban sprawl and transport system based on cars and promoted by government at all levels
- cheap petrol fostering excessive use and waste
- inappropriate government taxes and charges which seek to maximise production of cheap energy produced from fossil fuels
- continuing use and growth of coal as an energy source
- lack of policy, incentives and legislation for renewable energy production and use
- absence of legislation requiring industry to move toward no net greenhouse gas emissions

4. DEPENDENCE OF DOMESTIC ECONOMY ON BUILDING AND URBAN SPRAWL

- Perth domestic economy is driven by new land development and continuing urban sprawl of the worst kind (for social, energy, environmental and infrastructure needs)
- Land development industry has powerful lobby to government to direct land releases and meet own vested interests of massive financial gains from rezoning
- Lack of planning and legal requirement for resource use efficiency
- Urban development styles grossly unsustainable and consume vast energy, water, materials and destroy bushland and biota
- Natural bushland still being cleared for outer urban sprawl
- WA timber products too cheap, cheap imports from natural forests permitted

5. OBSESSION WITH ECONOMIC GROWTH WITHOUT ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Failure to recognise the environmental context and costs of all industries in a whole systems approach
- Failure of government to prosecute corporations which breach Licence conditions or pollute or degrade the environment eg Alcoa
- Business and government obsession with competitiveness blocks any vision of the fundamental concepts of ESD
- An obsessive mentality about growth blocks serious consideration and planning and action to reduce WA's escalating Greenhouse Gas emissions which are seriously out of control

6. PROFLIGATE CONSUMPTION OF RESOURCES AND WASTE GENERATION

- excessive consumption of consumer goods of all kinds
- per capita waste production second only to USA
- absence of an ethic and legal standard of continuous recycling for all goods throughout their life cycle (ie zero waste)
- hence lack of recycling and reuse of products, containers and packaging
- failure to systematically reduce our use of and dependence on fossil fuels
- continuing pollution by waste materials of all kinds in air, water, land, (surface and underground)
- lack of government legislation and regulation to make recycling and reuse mandatory for all products in a pattern of continuous product lifecycle
- water resources wasted on European style gardens and inefficient household practices
- fundamental lack of understanding and denial of the reality of the fragile landscape in which we live: for example inability of soils to retain nutrients, denial of the natural flora and fauna etc

NO ROLE MODEL OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

- There is no example of a sustainable society for us to use as a role model
- Thus we do not know what a sustainable society or city would be like; and we do not know what a sustainable agricultural landscape would look like for south west WA
- Some European countries and cities are much more advanced in their minimal use of fossil fuels for example Denmark.

THE NATURAL STEP

While the Natural Step may not provide the 'be all and end all' of sustainability, it at least provides a framework with some valuable tools. It provides a definition of four system conditions which would be met in a sustainable society. These four conditions are first order principles for achieving a sustainable society. They have been accepted internationally by leading academics including a group from Australia.

The Natural Step's four system conditions

"In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust

2. concentrations of substances produced by society

3. degradation of nature by physical means

and in that society

4. human needs are met worldwide"

(The Natural Step 2000, Sustainability Made Easy Short Course)

According to the Natural Step, "our ultimate sustainability objectives are to

- 1. eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances from the Earth's crust***
- 2. eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances produced by society***
- 3. eliminate our contribution to the physical degradation of nature through over harvesting, introductions and other forms of modification***
- 4. contribute as much as we can to the meeting of human needs in our society and worldwide, over and above all the substitution and dematerialisation measures taken in meeting the first three objectives***

(The Natural Step 2000, Sustainability Made Easy Short Course)

The Natural Step does provide a number of tools which could be very useful in assessing projects for sustainability and in developing future projects which are sustainable. It also provides long term objectives as described above. If you are interested in further discussions about its use I would be available to do this. I may be contacted as below.

Yours sincerely

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