

## **SUBMISSION ON THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

Submission to:  
Director Sustainability Policy Unit  
Policy Office  
Dept of the Premier and Cabinet  
15th floor 197 St Georges Tce  
PERTH WA 6000

From:  
Maxine Dawson  
28 Manning Avenue  
GOSNELLS WA 6110

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### **Introduction to submission**

So much that I see and bear about indicates that human activities are changing the natural world faster than the natural world can assimilate the changes. There now appears to a real question mark over how much longer the air, the protective layers around the earth, the water and soil, and our other natural resources, can continue to maintain life on earth, given the trends in human activity.

To me sustainability means being careful about how we use our natural resources now, so that we and other life forms will continue to be able to live on earth for as long as possible.

I consider that the pursuit of sustainability is not only a desirable, but an essential goal if human beings are to see out another few hundred years. While sustainability has become a growing issue recently because of the global impacts of human induced climate change, pollution, and depletion of resources such as forests, fossil fuels, healthy soil and biodiversity, it is as much a local issue as a regional or international one,

Although we talk about social, economic and environmental sustainability for convenience, I think sustainability practices are about more than that. It is a human induced issue and as such, embraces human and personal concepts such as integrity and quality of life. I consider that the concept of sustainability has very many facets and is relevant to everyone. I am comfortable that it is a fuzzy term.

The rest of my submission provides a few points on some of the issues related to sustainability.

### **Broad thrusts that Western Australians need to be involved with**

I believe that we, in Western Australia, need to tackle the following issues if we are not eventually to be overtaken by overall unsustainable world trends:

- To promote and implement living in Western Australia such that the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of our living does not exceed the capacity of Western Australia, Australia and the world, to sustain us;
  - Western Australian representatives to work with people of all other nations, to promote practices that cumulatively ensure that the world's peoples live within the capacity of the world to sustain us all; and
  - Western Australian representatives to work with people of all other nations, with the aims of ascertaining world issues that most threaten ecological sustainability, and of phasing out or otherwise replacing threatening practices with more sustainable practices. I draw attention to two specific issues of concern to me, as follows.
- \* Given what military weaponry is capable of I think it is likely that one of the potentially most destructive threats to the earth's air, water and land resources is war and military capability, possibly by friendly nations. Terrorism may or may not have as big a potential for impacting on the earth's ability to sustain life; and
- \* Research and development has at times occurred on a large or dangerous (in hindsight) experimental scale. It has sometimes been associated with little publicised (at the time) military races to outcompete other countries military and related capabilities. In my view, all the world's research and development needs to be within sustainability parameters.

### **Military and defence**

I consider that practicing "sustainability" in every day life and governance will be to no avail if the world's military and defence departments remain above the laws that apply to everyone else, and develop and use sophisticated weapons that destroy not only people but chunks of the environment and jeopardise the quality of the air, electromagnetic and other force fields, and water.

We do not see much of the devastation of war and weapons testing in Australia. However, given what it can do to the environment and to people post-war or post-testing, I consider that we need to be active in a world sense to address the issue of wars and weapons and international security, in the twenty first century.

I don't think we in Western Australia can say, "That's up to the Australian government. It's not for Western Australians". We have a large land area and can be affected by experiments that use the atmosphere and the earth's force fields or that produce radioactivity, whether triggered by friends or foes, and by accident or not.

### **Sustainability is of significance at all scales - world and local**

I see sustainability as a world issue. In Australia we rely on many products from elsewhere in the world. If in Western Australia, we could not trade with other places, I do not know if we could sustain much of a population at all.

However, it is also a local issue. We cannot expect others to protect the environment and ensure that life processes go on, if we do not adequately protect the environment and control our consumption of non-renewable resources, ourselves.

### **Changing our practices in Western Australia**

We cannot just change our practices overnight. However, if we don't make a good start soon, it may well be too little too late. I am concerned that all practices I can think of - from personal lifestyle practices to those of businesses and governments are not consistently based on conscious and conscientious comprehensive sustainability considerations. There is every likelihood that that is how things will continue to be.

We need to think through every detailed industrial, social and personal practice. However, as individuals we do not have the intricate knowledge to know whether practice A really is more sustainable in the long run than practice B, or whether as a short-term thing it is OK.

I don't think the solution is in doing what we do at the moment "according to best practice". I think we will have to come up with new ways of doing things. Then we will actually have to choose to do things that way, driven by a "natural imperative" to see no more loss of air, soil and water quality, and no diminution of non-renewable resources.

I see the pursuit of sustainability as something that must occur over time, and in a lot of places.

Getting the message through, and then getting people to take the message on board, in a material society, will be extraordinarily difficult. We know a lot about living a healthy lifestyle, but so many continue lifestyle practices that are not in the interests of their personal health. I do not think that sustainable living practices will be any more popular.

I think we have to move forward recognising that effective sustainability actions are never likely to be a first choice in the minds of the majority (though I am confident that the actual numbers of people and groups entertaining the idea of sustainable living will grow).

I would suggest that a State sustainability strategy focuses on:

- identifying the main issues and potential issues for us in Western Australia (which may or may not include deliberate incidents, accidents or by products from friendly, or not so friendly, research and other activities in other parts of the world);
- disseminating well researched information on the issues, and on technical good practices as they are developed;
- developing programs for schools and homes; and
- having participants in all world forums that directly or indirectly relate to things that may impact on the survival of the world into the long term.

### **Sustainability and town planning**

An example of a system that I think could very beneficially and relatively readily incorporate more sustainable practices, is town and regional planning.

As a person trained in the field of urban and regional planning, and now working to incorporate environmentally responsible practices into town planning, this is the field I know most about.

I have long been concerned that town planners and those making decisions on planning matters do not take a holistic view of the long term likely impacts of planning strategies and decisions.

I would like to see the following introduced with respect to the land use planning and development approval system:

- Planning education courses to give greater priority to teaching about environmental issues;
- All planning decisions to be backed by a report from the decision-makers (not only their advisers) showing that environmental as well as social and economic considerations have been checked and criteria are satisfied, not only in terms of short term implications, but also in terms of the likely long term impacts, to the best of current knowledge;
- Planners in government and private practice to have a check list of all possible relevant environmental and sustainability factors to check through as proposals for development and forward planning arise; and
- All members of decision-making authorities and the staff that advise them to receive at least basic sustainability training (including local government elected councillors, Council staff Department of Planning and Infrastructure staff etc)

Maxine Dawson