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WRITTEN SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER

The following comments on the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia encompass the views and concerns of the Edmund Rice Centre Environmental Task Force – Notre Dame Campus Group, The University of Notre Dame Australia, based on the consultation paper released by the State Government in December 2001.

Definition of Sustainability

We believe the definition of sustainability that the government has selected is too broad and lacks a specific view or vision for the future, something of key importance if we are to sustain the economic, social and ecological values of our community into the future.

A definition of the word 'sustain' is to 1. keep, hold up 2. endure 3. keep alive. This suggests some sought of continuance into the future. We believe the government's definition of sustainability as the 'simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals' loses sight of this.

We recommend that the government's definition of sustainability incorporates an aspect of 'the future' in the state strategy.

The definition currently adopted also suggests that sustainability is some end point that is achieved with each development as opposed something that is continually worked towards over time. It is difficult to expect that the three goals, environmental, economic and social, will be achieved simultaneously and with little or no indirect impact on ecological systems over time.

For example, when economic goals are set as a priority for development, social and ecological systems almost always suffer detrimental repercussions. We see evidence of this from many of our previously shortsighted and poorly informed approaches to management of agricultural systems in Western Australia. It is clear that in many of these circumstances the initial economic goal (e.g.: to increase productivity from an improvement of pasture growth) was being achieved, however the indirect effects of this goal caused greater impacts to social and ecological systems, rendering the economic development goals unsustainable. Our concern that many of the lessons which should have been learned from past mistakes have not, as yet, been fully incorporated into development goal-setting today.

It is understandable that the goals we initially set are going to require some readjustment, thus close monitoring is required to detect imbalances in these goals. In this way, goals can be readjusted so that sustainability or a balance between the three areas of ecology, society and economy is continually being worked towards. *Balance needs to be the focus of the sustainability strategy and thus this word should be included in the definition.*

The Ecological as the basis for our Society and Economy

While it would be ideal to have a thriving economy, it is unlikely that a scenario of this kind could continue indefinitely. *Ecology (or specifically in this case raw materials - water, soil air etc.) supports the economy and our society (as shown in Fig. 1).* Given that this natural capital is finite, it would follow that economic growth, which is supported by this, is also restricted accordingly. Therefore, it is unrealistic to have an economy based on exploitation of natural resources that will continue to grow into the future infinitely. We must accept this and also recognise that in order to sustain the economic and social values of our community, *it is paramount that we place an emphasis on sustaining the ecological values.* Otherwise, if we continue to promote a growing economy, this is likely to impact on the social and ecological base of our community and thus the whole system may be subject to collapse.



Fig.1. The ecological as the support for our society and the economy

Education for sustainability to curb our consumption based lifestyles

We believe that education will play a strong part in the success of moving towards sustainability in the state of WA. Funding big technology based projects such as solar power for renewable energy is important in the strategy, however, without the education of the community as to why sustainable measures are needed in our lives, little will change in our consumer lifestyles. And it is the cumulative effects of this lifestyle that have contributed to the greatest levels of degradation to our ecological values. The community needs to be given the opportunity to learn of the impact our West Australian lifestyles (perhaps through exploring our “Ecological Footprint”) and then be given practical examples of sustainable living in their own homes (E.g.: ongoing education of people regarding how to compost, recycle, as well as improve the energy efficiency of their homes).

A significant component of the Sustainability Strategy should focus on education for sustainable living, as well as focus on a reduction in consumer-oriented lifestyles.

Additionally, the concept can be explored at schools and young people can provide creative ideas to further develop the concept of sustainability.

Global issues of sustainability

It is noted in the consultation paper that WA has been highly innovative in sustainability at a global level. This needs to be extended to WA businesses that operate overseas. Rees and Wackernagel (1996) state that in many respects the Third World is providing the surpluses that [developed] countries exploit in order to have their extremely high standards of living. As stated earlier we must be educated about the global impact of our living. Additionally, policies need to be made to

ensure that WA businesses operating internationally are mindful of the ecological, social and economic conditions of the countries in which they are operating. These must be considered and balanced in business and work in every country as they are in WA. This works towards reducing any kind of deficit on the earth as a whole.

Other Sustainability issues

- § The WA state government should place considerable pressure on the Australian Federal Government to sign the Kyoto protocol to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions
- § Tourism in WA's sensitive and biological diverse ecosystems should also be conducted in a sustainable manner
- § New housing developments could be developed to allow for sustainable living. E.g.: preserving areas of native vegetation, subsidizing houses with a solar passive design
- § We should look to more than just repairing the ecological values of our community. The ecological values should be enhanced
- § Greater research funding should be given to universities to explore our ecological footprint and measures to reduce this throughout the community

We thank you for considering the views and ideas of the Edmund Rice Centre Environmental Task Force – Notre Dame Campus Group, University of Notre Dame Australia and look forward to the response from the government.

Yours Faithfully,

Edmund Rice Centre Environmental Task Force – Notre Dame Campus Group

Bibliography

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