

Comments on WA Strategy for Sustainable Development

By
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I wholeheartedly support the establishment of a WA Strategy for Sustainable Development. It has been along time coming and I am delighted that a Labor Government has recognized this as a key aspect of any truly responsible socialist party. It is time to move the debate away from green environmental politics to mainstream economics and social change.

It is right that this must involve balancing Environmental, Economic and Social needs. Hence, I support the definition:

‘Sustainability is the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals.’

As such, although I do not want to focus in detail, the Strategy needs also to recognize and evaluate the drivers behind much of the anti economic and social globalisation movements.

The Sustainability Principles are worthy and the Global perspective is applicable to WA.

The core issue is managing the consequence of the WA ecological footprint. Reducing consumption 10 fold and increasing efficiency by 2040. The ‘World’ maybe committing to Greenhouse targets, but clearly the Federal Australian Government isn’t. Which raises the question “Shouldn’t we in WA just go it alone”. Clearly the answer is a resounding yes, else why bother with this Strategy initiative.

The word ‘Thrive’ in the context of development, economics, and business worries me a lot. “Sustainability as an opportunity for growth” is an oxymoron. I am not anti growth, but I am worried about exponential increase in rate of growth, particularly when the goal is stock exchange driven. The basis of our current economics seems to be GDP type growth measures. Before going forward I believe it is a critical role of Government to ensure that periodically our best minds are employed to take stock and establish visions for the future. This is such a time. It isn’t happening Federally. I doubt that GDP and financial based economic measures, as the main drivers, will lead to a sustainable ecological footprint.

I would like to see the WA Government develop a model of life today, assuming it was constrained to the sustainable footprint. Life would be different, with a significantly lower consumption lifestyle, but how. Could we be happier and healthier? This shouldn’t be designed to put us off but make us value what we have, and would create expectations for the future. Would the outcome be “Thriving economic development”? I doubt that it would be viewed as such using today’s vision of economic growth.

I suspect that commodities, although far superior in design, etc, are replaced more frequently nowadays than in previous times. This may be good from an old economic perspective but is it so from a sustainable viewpoint?

Quality versus quantity underlie these questions.

I want to encourage the Government to facilitate investigating different views on what is valuable human activity in WA. This may be very different to, say, New York and London. 'Consolations on Philosophy, Alain de Botton 2001' summarises and teaches us that not much has changed over the centuries in this regard, ie, we have very good ideas about what is valuable, but we continue to be forced not to do it. Conversation, creativity, arts combined with basic Maslow type needs. In many aspects of life we are merely using more and more extravagant vehicles to conduct our lives. Take the space station as an example. The contraption is the most elaborate piece of human technology, but its support of the human needs (as opposed to the scientific experimentation) is designed to be sufficient and little more. We should ask whether this simplicity has reduced the astronauts quality of life, and consequently what does that teach us in WA? Do we need to houses with a kids sitting room, family room, activity room, formal lounge, formal dining, a quarter acre of thirsty grass, etc. Is Prix D'Amour our vision of future housing?

'The WA Government will promote ideas' is far too weak. Major development should be driven by Government plans and policies, not, as largely nowadays, Government reacting to large corporation proposals. For example:

"Where do we want to site our growing population? Currently we would deduce Kwinana, (new port, steel making plant, etc.)" Is it a sensible conclusion?

In parallel with the economic and social vision, objectives and target creation activity, the Government is right to foster the initiatives implied in the questions in Boxes 1-3. However, they should not replace the core thrust of vision making. Similarly the six areas outlined by the Department of Training for job opportunities are to be encouraged. These will no doubt require Government support and funding.

In thinking about a new view of economics, we need to evaluate questions such as: How valuable is mining, including boring for water, ie, extraction without replenishment?

Should farmers be taxed for ripping up land to grow crops that will lead to salinity, and paid for planting trees that reverse it?

Should buskers, street entertainers, authors, artists, voluntary work for the myriad of sports, music, arts, health, etc, type organizations, be highly valued, instead of treated as second rate or social lepers, in comparison with 'real work'?

I would be delighted to participate in any way I can. Committees, workshops, research, etc.

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