

6/53 Ramsdale St
Doubleview 6018
25 April 2002

Professor Peter Newman
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit
Policy Office
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
15 Floor 197 St Georges Tce
Perth WA 6000

Dear Dr Newman

I am delighted to see the word 'sustainability' being used apparently seriously by the state government, At this stage I have a few comments on the consultation paper.

Firstly the definition of sustainability adopted seems limiting. I would prefer one that refers to intergenerational equity and maintenance of ecological processes. These two points are listed as sustainability principles (the four listed are excellent) but I think these should be included in the definition.

I am pleased to see a reference to the coming oil shortages. This should hopefully highlight the need for changes to transport and urban design.

My main concern with the consultation paper is the complete absence of any reference to population growth. The paper makes reference to the 1998 SOE (WA) document statement that 'the most important environmental issue was our high consumption lifestyles'. Self-evidently the impact of Western Australians on our environment is a function of both per capita consumption and the number of people. Clearly we need to reduce per capital consumption of resources - our individual ecological footprint. However improvements in the footprint are negated by continued population growth,

Population growth also affects quality of life, in that increased management is invariably required to cope with increased use of the natural environment (for example beaches, rivers, national parks). It also creates pressures in our cities for roads, urban expansion, etc. Many of the advocates for increased population have vested interests (the building industry, for example) while the costs of urban congestion and resource depletion are borne by all.

Population should be an integral part of the sustainability debate. While it is interesting that population is at least being talked about within Australia, there is a danger that the debate will be hijacked by advocates for growth, with little consideration of the carrying capacity of this country.

It may be the case that a slightly higher population could be supported if per capita consumption can be reduced. However we should be cautious about population growth in the absence of the need for reduced per capita consumption being understood and achieved, I suspect there are sections of the community which still dispute the need for reduced per capita consumption as does the present US Vice President, for reasons which are not hard to fathom.

The population question is a difficult one. It can rapidly degenerate into racism and xenophobia. However its importance is such that it must be considered. Australians need to understand its importance in achieving sustainability. I find it a major deficiency that the consultation paper is silent on this issue.

I wish your unit well with the development of the sustainability strategy and will follow it with interest.

Yours faithfully

Peter Wilmot