

Contribution to the State Sustainability Strategy (WA)

by Planit Earth Project, Inc.

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future....We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

[Extracts from *The Earth Charter* in italics throughout this document.]

Thankyou for this opportunity to contribute to the drafting of the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia. The consultation paper is excellent on the whole, giving cause for optimism about the future of sustainability and the sustainability of the future.

Planit Earth Project is a local, small, relatively new grassroots organisation whose purpose is “to cause a shift in thinking that results in ecologically sustainable living.” We are the WA contact point for the Earth Charter, an international document and movement (www.earthcharter.org).

Values and Principles

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organisations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

The consultation paper for the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia recognises the need to be based on “common values” and “principles for sustainability”. It outlines four key principles and rightly mentions *Agenda 21* as the official global strategy for sustainability.

Planit agrees that it is essential to have explicit values and principles forming the foundation of the Strategy, but argues that the principles outlined in the consultation paper do not adequately express the integrated nature of sustainability issues and challenges. The *intention* for an integrated approach is relatively clear in the body of the paper by statements such as, “Any distinction between social and ecological health is artificial and prevents the discovery of solutions that address both sets of problems,” and the definition of sustainability that is provided. However, the principles in the section on “Sustainability Principles” do not reflect this intention well. It is important that they do because it is to the principles that we turn when issues become difficult, especially when dilemmas are encountered or trade-offs required.

The principles expounded are almost exclusively ecological, and while it is wonderful to see the environment being strongly regarded, an integrated definition requires consideration also of our attitudes, social justice, democracy, non-violence and peace as articulated by the Earth Charter (see full text attached).

As the Earth Charter Briefing Book (June, 2001 – document available at <http://eca.anu.edu.au/about/about1.html>) states, the vision of the Charter recognises “that the pressing issues of our times are not independent problems emendable [sic] to piecemeal decision-making. Rather, they are interconnected phenomena demanding integrated solutions based upon a common ethical framework – global ethics promoting a more sustainable way of living. The Earth Charter argues the need for sustainable paths of development that ensure ecological integrity together with social and economic justice. These in turn are predicated on a culture of peace, non-violence and tolerance. The Earth Charter provides a new framework for thinking about and addressing these critical issues.”

The Earth Charter has 16 main principles (with 64 more detailed supporting principles) that fall under the following four themes:

- I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life
- II. Ecological Integrity
- III. Social and Economic Justice
- IV. Democracy, Non-Violence and Peace

We believe it would be appropriate and useful for the Earth Charter to constitute the principles of the State Sustainability Strategy because it expresses *universal* values and principles for sustainability. Compared to any other document before, the drafting of the Earth Charter involved the most *extensive worldwide consultation*, with thousands of experts and people from grassroots groups in all sectors of society between 1995 and 2000. Much of the strength and depth of the document stems from the discussions and debates about the principles that occurred during this consultation process. For further information about the process by which the Earth Charter was developed, including the initial call for such a charter at the Brundtland Commission in 1987, please visit www.earthcharter.org/aboutus/

Neither is *Agenda 21* a fully integrated vision or set of principles for sustainability. Whilst it does take social and economic dimensions into account, it fails to deal with them at the depth of the Earth Charter, mainly due to the differences in drafting processes. *Agenda 21* is a document forged mostly by government representatives, whereas the Earth Charter is a people’s charter written by and for them. Therefore, it is representative of what people want and believe, and importantly includes a primary focus on our fundamental attitudes towards *all* life. We believe this is crucial and should be included in our State Sustainability Strategy because ultimately it is these attitudes that guide our behaviour, individually and collectively.

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives has endorsed the Earth Charter, as have some individual councils. Planit is heading a new

campaign this year to have local governments in WA and Australia endorse the Charter and base their own strategies on it. Melbourne City Council has already done so on its own initiative.

There is an international effort to have the Earth Charter endorsed by the United Nations at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September this year. Our State government may be able to play a valuable role by helping have Australia's representative at the Summit support the Earth Charter when it is tabled; and also by supporting the formation of an Australian National Council for Sustainable Development (see <http://eca.anu.edu.au/projects/projects2.html> for the draft proposal).

Priority Issues for Sustainability

Basic models of priorities

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices.

At first glance, the definition of sustainability put forward in the consultation paper is succinct and eloquent: "...the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals." However, there is a vital element missing from this definition.

Although environmental, social and economic goals rarely need to be at complete loggerheads, it is inescapable that sometimes they are. In these instances the environment usually comes last, an unsustainable practice in the outcomes it produces.

Ultimately, we are wholly dependent on the environment. There simply would be no society and no economic system if there were no environment. Neither would there be any economic system without a society. These basic facts reveal a pragmatic set of priorities that can be described as either a nested or tiered model (Figures 1 & 2).

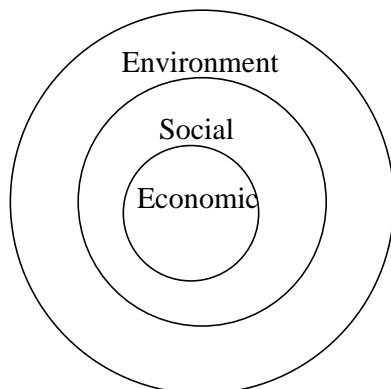


Figure 1.
Nested Model of Priorities

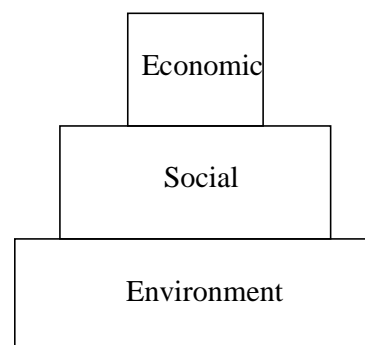


Figure 2.
Tiered Model of Priorities

An example of the need for this model to be used may assist. Our State has uranium deposits which promise to and are reaping economic benefits by creating jobs in the mining sector. However, this mining has the potential to create great environmental and social harm during its production and waste containment (in the event of a problem, there would also be significant economic costs, such as health and social support services). The nested model of priorities would suggest the mining not be permitted due to environmental risk, a decision supported by the “precautionary principle”. Because the inherent model used to date has given greater weight to economic benefits, the uranium mining has been allowed to proceed. This outdated model does not support sustainability and should be replaced by the nested model described above.

Reducing consumption, redefining development

We must realise that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

The consultation paper correctly states that we need to reduce our ecological footprint approximately 10-fold. We cannot do so without reducing the levels of consumption and waste-production of our State (people and government), as these are the fundamentals of the ecological footprint measurement. This requires us to re-examine our lifestyles and what we expect in our lives. We need to develop a *culture of sustainability*. In doing so, there is a strong role for formal and community education. The Earth Charter can be a useful tool for either, encouraging dialogue and explicit examination of the ways we think about the world and our relationship with it.

Our quality of life does not depend on greater consumption in Western Australia, where we have a very high standard of living. Nor will economic growth benefit the poor in our society, as well we know the gap between rich and poor is widening fast. We must redefine “quality of life” and “standard of living” to mean *being* more, not *having* more.

The Earth Charter contains some guidelines for sustainable economics, including:

Principle 10: Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

- a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
- b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
- c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labour standards.
- d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organisations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

As the economic system has an enormous impact on the quality and quantity of production, consumption and reproduction, we argue that substantial (even radical) changes to the economic system are the priority, second only to a change in our values and worldview.

A change of heart and mind

Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living.

Top priority should be given to bringing about a change in values and worldview, particularly the latter. This is the mental framework on which the majority of our decisions and behaviours are based. A worldview is our mental 'picture' of how the world essentially works. Currently, the dominant worldview is one in which we are separate from each other and nature. A different worldview that is gaining more currency and has much support from science is that we are all interconnected and interdependent, on all levels from sub-atomic through to major systems. It is likely that only from working from the paradigm of interconnectedness and interdependence can we make true progress towards a sustainable and just society.

The best ways to support these efforts are through formal education from kindergarten to tertiary education (a compulsory unit in first year university would probably help immensely); and funding to support not-for-profit groups doing work in this area (including celebratory activities).

Practical Measures

End sprawl

In respect to the well-known priority issues of biodiversity and climate change, it would seem important and urgent to end (sub)urban sprawl. Continual growth outwards certainly indicates to us that consumption and habitat destruction - anathema to biodiversity – are progressing without any end in sight. In this regard, it destroys the spirit as well as the creatures and plants that constitute biodiversity.

We believe there is immense need for a no-growth zone of native and rural lands surrounding the city to stop any further outward developments, and the same concept planned for large towns to prevent them becoming too large in the future. Any further building should occur within that ring and be designed along the lines of the Liveable Neighbourhoods program or urban villages and supported by substantial infrastructure and behavioural programs for sustainable transport (e.g. TravelSmart). Existing urban and suburban areas should be provided with TravelSmart programs as early as possible at the very least, and sustainable transport infrastructure and village designs implemented too. Support should also continue for housing cooperatives.

Assist development of businesses with sustainable products

There is clearly a lot of room for improvement in the environmental credentials of many products. There may be a role for State government in supporting this through partnerships with groups such as the WA Sustainable Industries Group, and also through a program specifically designed to help and encourage the creation of small businesses developing alternatives to currently available products.

Hemp is a resource that can replace many higher impact products, and should be given the legal status and financial support necessary for it to be viable.

Other

The section on *Innovate WA* could do with an added focus of encouraging good debate on important topics in highly accessible fora and media.

Conclusion

We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

The principles and priority of values need to be explicit in the State Sustainability Strategy. The principles put forward in the consultation paper need to express a more integrated vision of sustainability, and this can be achieved easily and credibly by using the global Earth Charter as the declaration of principles.

Planit sees the top priority as support for initiatives that promote a worldview of interdependence on each other and the Earth. Secondly, the definition of sustainability should acknowledge the ultimate dependence of economic and social systems on environmental systems. Thirdly, economic reforms should target zero-waste and vast reductions in our ecological footprint.

The State government of WA could also assist sustainability efforts by encouraging the Federal government to support the Earth Charter at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in September 2002; and supporting or leading the creation of an Australian National Council for Sustainable Development.

Thankyou once again for the opportunity to contribute. We look forward to seeing the draft strategy.

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

THE EARTH CHARTER

PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

PRINCIPLES

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.

- a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.

2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

- a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.
- b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

- a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
- b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

- a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.

- b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.

In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

- a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
- b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.
- c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
- d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.
- e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.
- f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

- a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
- b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.
- c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
- d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.
- e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

- a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.

- b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
- c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
- d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.
- e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
- f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

- a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
- b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.
- c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

- a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
- b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
- c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

- a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
- b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
- c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.
- d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

- a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.
- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
- c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
- f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

THE WAY FORWARD

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and

expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.