

SUBMISSION TO STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

This submission is made on behalf of the Royal Australian Planning Institute (W A Division) which represents professional planners employed in the private and public sectors. The Institute is committed to the objective of sustainable development based on the definition of sustainability by the West Australian Government as:

" the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals".
(WA Government, 2001 Consultation Paper, Draft State Sustainability Strategy)

The submission outlines the main elements of the planning system highlighting its prime role in the consideration of sustainable development. It identifies priority sustainability issues and the barriers to achieving sustainable development from a land use planning perspective. Finally it makes recommendations as to how such barriers may be overcome to achieve more sustainable outcomes and draws general conclusions on the role of planning in this area.

The concept of sustainable development was first articulated in 1987 by the Bruntland Commission. Since then planning literature and practice in Australia, as in most other countries, has been grappling with the meaning of sustainability and how it should be encouraged and implemented. Sustainability objectives are clearly articulated in most planning strategies and plans but as in other countries and states in Australia, a clear understanding of what constitutes sustainability and the successful achievement of such objectives has proved to be a difficult task.

It is important that the State Sustainability Strategy does not become a document of broad motherhood statements but one which builds on the experience of other countries and states in Australia clarifying the meaning of the term and focusing clearly on implementation of the principles and practice of sustainability.

It is the intention of this submission to focus on the issue of sustainability within the context of the land use planning system and to suggest recommendations for improving the process to facilitate the achievement of sustainable outcomes.

ROLE OF PLANNING IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

The primary aim of the planning system in Western Australia is to provide for the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use and development of land.

State Planning Policy Framework

The State Planning Policy Framework is a central framework for existing State and regional policies and plans.

The State Planning Strategy is 30 year plan which has a goal of ensuring that regional wealth creation based on the principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability will generate enormous benefits to the community including more employment, a higher standard of living and increased expenditure on public programs and infrastructure. It establishes key principles relating to the environment, the community, the economy, infrastructure and regional development. It then identifies strategies and actions to achieve the main principles and monitors these on a yearly basis to measure the level of achievement and relevance of the Strategy.

The State Planning Strategy provides the overarching framework for Statements of Planning Policy, Regional Strategies, Regional and Sub-Regional Structure Plans, Strategic Policies and operational policies which provide direction for future development and growth.

These plans and policies are formulated and reviewed on a continuing basis and deal with a range of localities and regions and a wide range of planning issues providing guidance and direction to those agencies that make decisions on planning matters.

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Local Planning Strategies

In October 1999, an amendment to the Town Planning Regulations introduced the requirement for each local government to prepare a Local Planning Strategy at the time of preparing or reviewing a town planning scheme.

Regulation 12A(3) of the Town Planning Amendment Regulations 1999 requires that a Local Planning Strategy shall:

- (a) set out the long-term planning directions for the local government;
- (b) apply State and regional planning policies; and
- (c) provide the rationale for the zones and other provisions of the Scheme.

The Local Planning Strategy provides a planning framework for development of each local government in the next 10 to 15 years and has a responsibility to interpret state and regional policy for application in local area planning. It is a plan which involves public participation and provides a significant opportunity to influence sustainable development outcomes within each local government by adopting a vision for growth and development based on economic, environmental and social sustainability and evaluation of local demands and needs.

Local and Region Town Planning Schemes

The Town Planning and Development Act, 1928 provides for the preparation of town planning schemes for regions or local government areas to provide for control of growth and development.

A Region scheme operates as a broad planning framework for future town planning schemes in the region and provides for reservation, protection and acquisition of land in these areas.

Local government town planning schemes generally have a time frame of 5 to 7 years and can either :

- Provide for the zoning and reservation of land and the provisions for control of development in the area normally referred to as zoning schemes
- Provide guidance for and facilitate the development of land through guided or resumptive development schemes.

Any new town planning scheme is required to be referred to the EPA who has a responsibility for setting the level of assessment for the scheme. This assessment is generally based on potential environmental impacts of any proposed changes to the scheme.

Schemes through zoning, reservation, provisions or subdivision guidance should reflect the sustainability principles and strategies in the Local Planning Strategy and other regional strategies or policies relevant to that area.

Statutory Planning Decisions and Appeal Decisions

Local government are generally responsible for decisions relating to development and State government for subdivision and amendments to town planning schemes. Town Planning Scheme amendments are required to be referred to the EPA to determine the level of assessment. Appeals against decisions relating to development and subdivision are determined either by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure or Town Planning Appeals Tribunal

Assessment of all such applications is guided by state and regional policies and any local strategies which should reflect the objectives for sustainable development.

Special Projects

The planning process includes a number of special projects which address specific issues and provide the opportunity to facilitate sustainable development. These include projects such as the Townscape program which aims to improve the image and identity of town by involving the community in developing a vision for their community and Liveable Neighbourhoods which is a development control policy to facilitate the development of sustainable communities. Other initiatives include integrated land use and transport planning which is vital to sustainability

The East Perth, Subiaco and Armadale Redevelopment Projects involve extensive consolidation of land and subsequent redevelopment with associated infrastructure development to create more sustainable living environments.

PRIORITY SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES FOR WA

With a high percentage of the population concentrated in Perth and the strong link between urban form and sustainable development, the priority sustainability issue for WA is focused on future development of the city and other major centres such as Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany. The issues of economic vitality, social equity and ecological integrity are core elements of a sustainable approach to development within the city.(1996, ACT Government, Canberra- A Capital Future)

In regional areas, rehabilitation and protection of productive agricultural land, creation of employment opportunities and promotion of tourism, protection and management of coastal and wilderness areas, protection of natural resources and cultural heritage and provision for physical and social infrastructure are all priority sustainability issues.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

- Lack of clear understanding of the meaning of sustainability in the wider sense of the word - tendency to promote either the environmental or economic perspective without adequate consideration of the implications for the other perspectives.
- Lack of understanding and commitment to sustainability objectives associated with the ethos of consumption associated with modern society.
- Primacy of the Environmental Protection Authority in assessment of development - the enabling legislation requires the EPA to consider environmental factors in such development but permits only limited consideration of social and economic factors.
- Achievement of environmental and social sustainability is a medium to long term objective and often difficult to justify when short term economic or social gain is expected.
- The achievement of sustainable development outcomes requires a balanced approach and invariably involves compromise between economic, social and environmental objectives - the success of these negotiated outcomes is not easily measured and therefore seldom given adequate recognition.
- Planning for sustainable development is often undertaken at a distinct spatial level which does not always acknowledge the interconnections between spatial areas and the impact on sustainability.
- The existing structure of cities and expectancy of the community with regard to use of private transport.
- A tendency to follow planning fads for urban change based on idealised versions of past settlement and theory without adequate debate and research regarding the ability of such urban form to achieve sustainability.

- Dispersed settlement patterns in rural areas to accommodate demand for rural living.
- Fragmentation of local government - no overall coordination
- Lack of guidance with regard to implementation of sustainability principles as a result of the gap between strategic planning objectives and the decisionmaking which occurs at the local planning level.
- Lack of coordination between government agencies - different objectives and agendas - poor integration between transport, land use planning and environment.
- Lack of commitment by Govt to implementation of sustainable settlement such as coordinated provision of infrastructure.
- Public Consultation and Participation is often characterised by NIMBYism and self concern than with issues such as intergenerational equity and concern for the urban environment.
- Lack of information and resources for sustainable planning particularly in rural communities

HOW BARRIERS CAN BE OVERCOME

- Recognition that there is not necessarily one desirable urban form but a need to focus on a range of urban forms which respond to existing settlement patterns and contexts.
- Undertake comprehensive research to clarify the term sustainability in the context of WA and the options for implementation of the sustainability principles.
- Changes to EPA and planning legislation to ensure integrated assessment process and ability to assess development from a balanced perspective.
- Foster collaboration between and within government, industry and the community. (WAPC, 2001)
- Incorporate clear and unambiguous guidance within legal and policy frameworks to assist planning authorities to resist the short term and parochial pressures that are endemic in the political realities of the current system.
- Formulation of sustainability criteria for assessment of development and performance indicators which take into account economic, social and environmental sustainability and incorporation into planning policy and practice.
- Encourage amalgamation of local governments or initiatives which provide for better coordination and use of resources.

- Continue the process of review and preparation of new regional strategies and policies to deal with demands for growth and change in a sustainable manner.
- Prepare and implement a coordinated program for provision of infrastructure to promote sustainable development throughout the State.
- Provide assistance to local government to undertake strategic planning such as Local Planning Strategies and Agenda 21 programs by providing datasets and professional guidance and assistance.
- Foster better community involvement and participation in the process of both urban and regional development.
- Provide continuing professional and public education to promote the benefits of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This submission draws attention to certain characteristics of the planning system which provide the opportunity to implement sustainable development outcomes :

- It recognises that a sustainable future requires cooperation between a range of disciplines and is beyond just planning. (Caswell,2001)
- It is based on a holistic approach which has the ability to look at environmental, social, cultural, economic and governance aspects. (Caswell,2001)
- It provides the opportunity to think, reflect, innovate, drive envision and create ideas.(Caswell,2001)
- It operates at a scale and time frame to match the issues.. (WAPC,2001)
- It has a regulatory framework which can be used to achieve sustainability outcomes. (WAPC,2001)
- It is sensitive to politics and the desires of the community. (WAPC,2001)

Western Australia is fortunate in that it has an established planning system administered by agencies and institutions with considerable experience in dealing with a range of development issues and community views. It provides significant opportunity through strategies, policies, regulation and special projects to influence the direction and type of growth and development throughout the State and demonstrate commitment to sustainability principles.

It is submitted that the State Sustainability Strategy should recognise this sound foundation and focus on providing the legislative and political support and assistance to both clarify the understanding of what is sustainable development and to facilitate the innovative and behavioural change to achieve such objectives.

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