

SOUTH WEST ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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SUBMISSION

'Focus on the Future'

State Sustainability Strategy

April 2002

Introduction

The South West Environment Centre (SWEC) would like to commend the State government for pursuing a policy that supports the principals of sustainability.

The SWEC Strategic Plan 2001-2003 states that the Centre's primary objective is to conserve and enhance the natural environment. Strategy 1.1 from this plan is "to work in partnership with the community and local council to promote issues of sustainability." SWEC supports the broadest possible input towards developing a workable sustainability strategy for Western Australia.

Key Issues

- o The definition of sustainability, as outlined in the 'Focus on the Future' consultation paper can be broadened. The stated definition of sustainability, "Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", is incomplete. The articulation that sustainability is a goal in itself must be stressed, and the definition as outlined by the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development in 1992, incorporated. "Development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends".

- o Leadership within the government on a state wide, regional and local basis is vital if the development and implementation of a strong and effective Sustainability Strategy is to be successful. Work towards sustainability must be community-led and consensus based. The sustainability strategy must recognise regional uniqueness, and consult broadly with communities to respect their different needs.

- o In order for goals to be set to increase activities that are consistent with sustainability, or decrease activities that are not, genuine progress indicators must be adopted. Issues such as salinity, and deforestation need to be addressed pro-actively. Salinity must not only be curbed, but productive land, and natural environments protected, rehabilitated and restored.

- o Public educational strategies are vital to achieve change and must be sufficiently funded and supported alongside other strategies such as regulatory changes.

- o Funding to assist schools and other educational institutions to develop environmental projects and activities has enormous benefits to the community. In recent times, primary schools in Western Australia have participated very successfully in projects from programs such as Ribbons of Blue / Waterwatch, and other environmental initiatives. Glen Huon Primary School near Bunbury has recently begun to implement a whole school 'Eco-Village' concept focussing on the learning areas of 'Science', and 'Society and Environment' in the WA Curriculum Framework. More activities of this type need to be encouraged within communities in Western Australia, in order to develop environmental education at the grass roots level of society. Environmental education of children, beginning at a young age enables them to make informed decisions as adults in later life, therefore developing a more socially and environmentally responsible society for the future.

- o Activities and industries that are wholly inconsistent with sustainability, such as uranium mining, and the production of genetically modified foods, must be banned or heavily regulated with an aim to their eventual cessation.

- o A Council for Sustainability in Western Australia should be developed to drive and implement the sustainability strategy. An independent Sustainability Commission could also be formed to assess sustainability performance, undertake integrated assessment of Cabinet proposals and review reporting by agencies regarding sustainability indicators and targets. These processes should include and be subject to community verification.

- o Neither the government nor the community can continue to support activities or industries that increase the total greenhouse gas emissions in Western Australia.

- o Media education in Western Australia regarding sustainability issues is generally inadequate. A Council for Sustainability could support training for journalists to encourage them to facilitate greater understanding of issues and stimulate specific and timely responses from the general public.

- o Community leaders could also be trained and encouraged to network to broaden the platform for the discussion of sustainability issues.

Local focus groups could be involved in decision making processes that involve issues requiring recognition of the principals of sustainability:

- o Housing Development
- o Water Consumption
- o Mining Practices
- o Forestry
- o Eco-Village's
- o Urban Planning
- o Fisheries
- o National Parks
- o Population
- o Transport

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please contact Lucy Nankervis or John Sherwood at the South West Environment Centre on 97913210.

South West Environment Centre
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