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Dear Prof Newman,

SUBMISSION ON THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER

PARTICULARS

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability at all three spheres of Government has to date been addressed extremely poorly in comparison to the level of knowledge and technology that has existed on the issue for the past three decades. I strongly believe that the great proportion of work to date conducted by governments has focused on public perception and the notion of 'to be seen to be doing something', as opposed to real action and change. The status quo is not a real option.

Even though some of the most pressing sustainability issues have been addressed to some extent, they have often not gone far enough in addressing the issue, and as result, there have been little in terms of large-scale whole-community results. For example, the Perth Air Quality Management Plan released by the State Government attempted to address air quality management issues. The recommendations focused on improving the efficiency of pollution sources (such as wood heaters, vehicles, etc) instead of changing the fuel sources that cause the problems (e.g. change domestic heating from wood to gas; cars from petrol to LPG). These incremental steps are what has failed reports dealing with sustainability issues in the past. I sincerely hope that that this will not be the case in this instance.

As outlined in the Consultation Paper, identifying the major issues will be the Step 1. The recommendations below identify 18 major sustainability challenges facing all spheres of Government in Australia, and to which the State Government can contribute significantly.

Step 2 is to identify the problems associated with the issues and to determine the level at which these problems can be deemed acceptable, if at all. Step 3 will be to identify the desirable state for the issues and alternatives to the current situation.

The implementation of the proposed changes, Step 4, should focus on large-scale changes that will have large-scale whole-community sustainability benefits. It must be recognised that in some instances, impacts on individuals or groups may be unavoidable in order to have society benefit as a whole in the present, and for the longevity of human habitation in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations represent common-sense solutions to issues and problems that have been researched, discussed and debated for the past three decades. For most of the issues involved, there has been sufficient research already conducted and the 'jury is out' as far as the effects on the planet, the human population and other species. I have not focused on new R&D initiatives as we already have significant R&D that is not being implemented throughout the wider community. It is perhaps more appropriate that funding be focused on implementing these technologies to the wider community (in order to get a benefit from the R&D) before embarking on new R&D project

Please consider the following comments for inclusion in the development of the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia:

1. Secondary Waste Treatment

- The State Government should set a realistic target (as opposed to the waste 20-20 vision) for all local governments in the metropolitan region to be operating secondary waste treatment/recovery for domestic waste. Landfill represents an archaic form of waste management that no longer has a place in a sustainable society, and threatens long-term human health through potential groundwater contamination.

2. Domestic Wood Heating

- This issue has been poorly addressed in the Perth Air Quality Management Plan as the outcomes focused on wood burning efficiency, rather than changing the fuel source. Domestic wood heaters need to be completely phased out through a legislative process that would prevent the installation of new wood combustion heaters. In this process, all new houses would only be allowed to install gas, electric or reverse cycle air-conditioning systems for domestic heating (the more efficient/less polluting heating options). Houses currently operating domestic wood heaters could continue to do so until the system becomes redundant (because of age, etc) and is replaced by one of the heating alternatives.

3. Population Policy

- The benefits/costs of increasing or reducing WA's population should be considered through the development of a population policy. This will provide direction on how to manage population, instead of the current non-managed system where WA moves 'blindly' forward. The population policy should be linked to the issues of affluence, resource consumption and carrying capacity.

4. Triple Bottom Line Reporting

- Triple bottom line reporting must be incorporated into all government departments in order to prevent imbalances between environmental, social and economic goals. This reporting should also be done for State accounting/budgets.

5. Government Vehicle Fleet

- All government fleet vehicles should be powered by LPG gas. The environmental/social/economic benefits of this technology have been well documented. Fleet vehicles when sold would also increase the proportion of private vehicles running on LPG when these vehicles are sold to the public. This could be developed through the current government vehicle purchasing/rental policies.

6. Nutrient Management

- This issue has traditionally been addressed through community education to reduce fertilizers entering estuaries and wetlands. Unfortunately, this past mechanism has failed, as indicated through reduced water quality and increases in incidences where nuisance and toxic alga, and midge and mosquito plagues are detected. It is perhaps time that nutrients are managed in the same way as dangerous chemicals – through a licensing procedure. A licensing procedure will help to effectively regulate fertilizer applications within catchments.

7. Local Government Initiatives on Air Quality

- The State Government should be actively encouraging all local governments to join the Cities for Climate Protection program in order to help tackle local air quality problems within their own boundaries.

8. Sustainability Criteria for New Housing Developments

- New housing should have to meet mandatory sustainability design criteria (developed through a legislative framework) before being accepted for building approval. Examples of such criteria are listed below:
 - ü *Solar orientation principals should become mandatory for all new housing developments within Western Australia. These principles have been around for decades, and have been proven to significantly reduce energy consumption.*
 - ü *Water delivery devices such as taps and showerheads should meet water-saving criteria.*
 - ü *Roof insulation should become compulsory.*
 - ü *Domestic heating should only be of the most energy efficient and low polluting form.*

For each house that is currently being built without meeting such criteria, it will leave a long-term legacy of debt to society as a result of being comparatively unsustainable.

9. Domestic Water Recycling

- Regulations that currently prevent domestic water recycling should be relaxed in order to allow water recycling (reuse of potable water [excluding from the toilet]) on gardens and for other appropriate domestic purposes. However, this relaxation will need to account for catchment nutrient influxes resulting from this.

10. Community Consultation/Sustainability

- Community Consultation should be real and where the community decides what happens to their region in the evidence of notable opposition. This is most noteworthy for developments in rural/semi-rural towns that wish to maintain their lifestyles. Community consultation should not be a public relations exercise, whereby at the end of consultation the Government still goes against the community opinion. In some instances, community sustainability is of a higher priority than economic sustainability and should be recognized as such.

11. Ratify the Kyoto Protocol on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Even though this is more a responsibility at Federal Government level, the State Government can:
 - Declare to adopt the principles of the Kyoto protocol for the State, and
 - Encourage the Federal Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in order to set achievable greenhouse reduction targets.

12. Government Purchasing Policy

- The State Government needs to adopt a “buy-local first” purchasing policy in order for WA to be economically sustainable and socially responsible in the long-term. Goods and services required by Government should be sourced first in Western Australia, secondly from other states, and the thirdly from other countries. This policy will help to keep money in the State (and secondly, Australia) and will encourage local and regional employment. This should be reflected in every department and be considered for every purchase, from the purchase of teabags and copying paper to the purchasing of fleet vehicles and office furniture.

13. Penalties for Environmental Pollution / Environmental Degradation

- Recent environmental news items (such as illegal land clearing) have highlighted the deficiencies in penalties for environmental pollution and environmental degradation. In one example, an organisation was fined less than \$50,000 for illegal land clearing in an area containing sensitive wetlands that will cost the taxpayer more than \$1m to restore. These penalties are currently inconsistent with the benefits that are gained from these actions, and inconsistent with what the public believes are acceptable penalties for unacceptable actions. A review of these penalties is urgently required in order to make environmental pollution and environmental degradation a real cost and disincentive to polluters, instead of a marginal externality to business.

14. Review of Subsidies

- Industries and businesses that receive subsidies should meet triple bottom line (environmental, economic and social) sustainability criteria. For example certain high-polluting industries (such as coal burning) should not receive subsidies because they fail to meet environmental and social (health) responsibilities. Unsustainable industries should have full-cost pricing, at both full cost to the manufacturer and full cost to the consumer.

15. Renewable Energy

- The energy use patterns of Western Australia, as a whole, are unsustainable and lacks significant direction. We still derive the vast majority of power from the burning of coal, which is one of the most outdated, inefficient and polluting power sources available. More investment is needed in solar and wind technology so that we can reach the point where the greenhouse gas output from industrial and domestic energy consumption is zero. To my knowledge, the only set targets for renewable energy replacement is to have around 3% of energy produced by renewable sources by around 2005-2010 (rough figures). This is clearly insufficient.

In contrast to this status quo, we really need to be looking at replacing around 5% of energy sources with renewable energy every year. I realise that this is not a priority of this Government, nor the governments before it, but reducing energy consumption from unsustainable sources is the cornerstone for sustainability within a high-energy use society. With this kind of target setting, WA can achieve 100% of energy requirements met by sustainable energy sources, with the power being essentially 'free'.

Renewable energy on a broad scale for the entire of society makes economic, social and environmental sense. One has to look long-term to see this, however.

16. Drink Container Return Scheme.

- South Australia operates a successful scheme where 5c is refundable on each drink container. The scheme has resulted in less drink containers being disposed of as street litter, which is a significant problem in Western Australia (refer to the results by composition from the 'Clean Up Australia Day' efforts). This scheme should be adopted Western Australia to reduce street litter and improve the recycling of drink containers. The scheme should apply for all recyclable drink containers (milk, soft-drink, beer cans, wine bottles, steel cans).

17. Product Packaging Sustainability Criteria

- All domestic products for sale should have to meet product packaging sustainability criteria before being allowed for sale. Packaging contributes to a significant proportion of waste that is buried in landfills, with excessive packaging exacerbating the problem. This criteria would determine if a product had excessive packaging (e.g. a product is in two layers of plastic) with each product assessed on a case-by-case basis. Products deemed to be over-packaged must have the packaging redesigned before being cleared for sale.

18. Sustainability Education

- One interpretation of social sustainability is being able to live life without leaving a long-term ecological footprint on the planet. In essence, social sustainability is about how to live your life, which imparted through an education process (whether learnt from your parents, school, friends, etc). In my opinion, sustainability life skills are an important part of this education process, and therefore should be included in primary and secondary education as core units. The applicability of sustainability life skills are something everyone can use throughout their lives, compared to traditional

teachings such as history, art, geography (etc) which have very limited values to the greater community. In essence, to create a sustainable future, we need to educate the future generations on how to be sustainable.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart A. Hawkins

Please note:

This communication represents the views of the author only, and may not be representative of the view of any organisation to which the author is associated.