

## SWAN CATCHMENT COUNCIL INC

---

30 April 2002

Professor Peter Newman  
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit  
Policy Office  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
15<sup>th</sup> Floor, 197 St Georges Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Professor Newman

### **RE: SUBMISSION - STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER**

The Swan Catchment Council is pleased to make the following submission to the Government's consultation paper "*Focus on the Future: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia*", (the Paper), and congratulates the Government for taking the initiative to develop a State Sustainability Strategy.

#### **Definition of Sustainability**

The definition of 'sustainability' is incomplete. The ecological processes that underpin all life must be protected if the goal of sustainability is to be achieved. The definition – "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" (National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, 1992) is preferred.

#### **The Swan Catchment Council - a regional NRM group**

The Paper does not acknowledge the regional NRM Groups in Western Australia. The Swan Catchment Council is one of five. Our regional focus and strong links with grass roots catchment groups and land conservation district committees ensure we are well placed as key stakeholders in implementing the Sustainability Strategy, along with the WA Museum and others mentioned.

The Swan Catchment Council has recently prepared a NRM strategy (*The Swan Region : a Natural Resource Management Strategy, 2001*) which is a major and current regional initiative. It is strongly underpinned by sustainability principles. It addresses key community concerns, and as a result of broad consultation, sets out strategies and roles for partnerships between community, government and industry in the sustainable management of natural resources.

Regional differences occur, and within their field the Regional NRM Groups have accepted that plans, priorities and methods of operation should be flexible to meet regional objectives. Similarly, the Sustainability Strategy must respect and reflect regional differences and needs. Region-specific strategies must be the result of representative, consultative processes.

"*Landcare* is one of Australia's most internationally renowned achievements in ESD policy." (Institutions for Sustainability, Dr Stephen Dovers, ANU, 2000). Landcare groups are the grass-roots basis for the activities of the Regional NRM groups.

## **Institutional Arrangements and Reviews**

State of the Environment reporting provides an established framework through which to report progress on achieving sustainability. Initially SoE was defined quite narrowly around the "environment" but across Australia a broader ESD focus has now been adopted. A SoE report for WA must be due shortly and it should incorporate sustainability indicators.

The Sustainability Strategy must identify existing programs, institutions and arrangements that provide a platform from which to implement sustainability strategies. Lets use this opportunity to build on to existing institutions and secure the Landcare investment that has been made over the past decade. It may be extremely in-efficient and wasteful to create new institutions when existing ones may provide the necessary basis.

The incorporation of sustainability across society and into Government decision-making processes requires broad support and involvement throughout the community. Sustainability must be community-led and consensus-based.

Tensions exist between the policy objectives of different government departments, particularly where objectives relate to economic reform, industry and resource development and infrastructure - versus -environment and sustainable resource use. There is a primary role for government, especially in the way government departments do business, to lead the way. Experience suggests that State agencies still tend to be sectoral. Sustainability affects many policy and management areas of government and integration across issues, sectors and jurisdictions is required and must be a priority for the Sustainability Strategy.

Government must admit and address the fact that unsustainable practices are often inextricably linked to outdated systems and traditions (e.g. the continuing requirements to stock pastoral leases that are no longer sustainable). There should be a wide ranging legislative and policy review to identify laws, policies and programs that restrict the adoption of sustainability principles.

It is essential that the Government set specific and measurable goals for increasing activities that are consistent with sustainability, and specific and measurable goals for reducing activities that are inconsistent with sustainability.

A State Sustainability Council should be formed to provide advice and recommendations to Government in relation to implementing the sustainability agenda. An independent Sustainability Commissioner should be appointed to provide an overview of sustainability performance and reporting on the progress of Government departments and agencies with respect to sustainability indicators and targets.

The Government must promote and support developments that adopt sustainable practices. Incentives could be offered through the State's purchasing processes to reward companies that meet sustainability criteria. Research and development must be undertaken in line with sustainability principles and codes. Innovation that leads to less resource use, cleaner production and helps meet sustainability targets (eg. Greenhouse gas emissions) must be supported and rewarded.

There is a need for a strong and well developed communication strategy to focus on community behavioural change. Research into models of good practice and the provision of practical and useful information is at the core of generating behaviour change. (Examples from the Swan Region are catchment management plans, property planning programs and industry codes of practice).

The introduction of natural resource management and sustainability into the education curriculum is required to ensure the next generation is ready to build on the achievements of this generation.

It is imperative that goals and objectives be clearly defined, achievable, measurable (by adopting Genuine Progress Indicators in order to measure the 'real progress') and open to review. Implementation of the sustainability strategy should be reinforced through the publication of sustainability documents and the development of firm commitments by partners through formal Agreements.

Australians are notorious for their apathy. Greater and stronger use of market forces (incentives and disincentives) are required to ensure we reach people who "do not care".

### **Omissions and other Comments**

There is very little in the Paper on water as a resource which is surprising given the 2001 winter drought and restrictions this summer. And issues around pollution and contamination, waste management and the role of local government should be more clearly defined in the final Strategy.

Local government, being the tier of Government closest to the people, needs to be given the incentive, responsibility and accountability to implement sustainability strategies. However, local government is also very sectoral in its interests and impacts. By working more closely with the NRM regional groups, within a formal sustainability partnership agreement, local government could develop into an institution through which significant sustainability outcomes could be achieved.

It is essential that Western Australia has a strong and effective Sustainability Strategy and its development and implementation must be given a much higher priority by the Government.

The global context is important to mention, but only to provide comfort that our Sustainability Strategy operates within an international framework and supports higher objectives. The emphasis, however, needs to be on our State, regional and local mechanisms to implement the necessary actions to achieve our objectives.

Yours sincerely



Michael Grasby  
**CHAIRPERSON**  
**SWAN CATCHMENT COUNCIL**