

# **Focus on the Future: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia *Discussion Paper***

## **Submission from the Western Australian Museum**

The Western Australian Museum (WAM) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion document. It has been involved in the debate on sustainability for some time now and is well placed to have an ongoing role, particularly in the area of education for sustainability.

The Western Australian Museum is a diverse institution covering the disciplines of science, the natural environment, history, anthropology including archaeology, art and design and materials/heritage conservation. This diversity allows it to be a point of synthesis between disciplines – an intellectual node as it were – for the multiple axes that intersect within the sustainability theme. The WAM can have a unique role as a mediator and facilitator of the cultural shift required for a more sustainable future.

The challenge is great. In order to achieve sustainability in Western Australia there will need to be a change in the way we, as Western Australians, work, live and recreate. In particular there will need to be a change in the way we interact with our environment.

The opportunities are equally great. Western Australia is a developed country with a good infrastructure and fine academic and research institutions, set within a stable political environment. Yet it is a geographically remote society located on an ancient landscape impoverished of soil nutrients and water. As well as setting the foundations for the future of the State, committing to sustainability could see Western Australia assume a world leadership role, that will attract international interest as well as potential investment.

We consider that Western Australia's Sustainability Strategy should begin with a clear goal and a definition of a sustainable community.

### **Definition**

The definition as presented:

*Sustainability is the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals*

is a little confusing and not as focused as it could be. The goal is Sustainability, so our goal should be to meet the environmental, economic and social needs of both this and future generations. The Oregon definition is a good example, encompassing as it does the concept of equity between generations.

*Sustainability means using, developing and protecting resources at a rate and in a manner that enables people to meet their current needs and also provides that future generations can meet their own needs.*

*‘Sustainability requires simultaneously meeting environmental, economic and community needs.’*

### **A sustainable society**

An outline of the features of the kind of society towards which we are working will assist in promoting the message of sustainability. A sustainable society is one that:

- makes informed decisions based on broad citizen participation in an open and flexible manner, based on an understanding of the impacts of human activity from economic, environmental and social viewpoints;
- recognises that there are limits to growth – the carrying capacity of the environment;
- respects, protects and preserves its natural environment and supports biodiversity;
- maintains cultural assets and values cultural diversity;
- identifies and accounts for the full environmental, social and economic costs of decisions;
- uses renewable and sustainable sources of energy and promotes energy efficiency;
- makes use of energy efficient modes of transport such as walking, cycling, rail, clean-fuel vehicles and telecommuting;
- fosters local and regional communities and solutions at the local level;
- promotes and develops activities that use materials in continuous cycles rather than cradle to grave. This involves optimum reuse, systematic recycling and a reduction in consumption.

### **The culture of sustainability**

The Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity*, pointed out the importance of culture as the catalyst for development, the means by which communities can flourish, without losing their identity or heritage.<sup>1</sup> Too often culture is seen solely in economic terms, as an industry contributing to employment and to the economy. While this is a valid variable for assessment, it is only one of several. The role of culture in the empowerment of communities and the development of social capital is often ignored. Culture is often low in terms of Government priorities, being seen solely in terms of arts organizations, institutions and artists. Culture (and ‘the arts’) is seen too often as a recreational, or folk loric, engagement. The World Commission lists some of the challenges for policy makers:

*When culture is understood as the basis of development the very notion of cultural policy has to be considerably broadened. Any policy for development must be profoundly sensitive to and inspired by culture itself .... Defining and applying such a policy means finding factors of cohesion that hold multi-ethnic societies together, by making much better use of the realities and opportunities of pluralism. It implies promoting creativity in politics and governance, in technology, industry and business, in education and in social and community development – as well as in the arts.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Our Creative Diversity*, Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, UNESCO Publishing, 1996.

If we see culture as the basis of development, it must be seen as more than the traditional associations with artistic expressions such as in dance, music and art. It is the mix of human relationships in a society and a vital component of social and economic well-being. Cultural policies need to be more closely integrated into policies in other areas of government. A vibrant culture, one encouraging diversity, equity and creativity, is at the very basis of a sustainable society.

Western Australia's cultural diversity is a great strength, enriching the quality of life of the community. The WA Museum, with its broad knowledge base and its role as guardian of material records, cultural and natural heritage, is well placed to contribute to the cultural change needed to ensure sustainability. It can promote and strengthen the means of providing broader access to culture for all sectors of the population. It is also able to contribute to the dialogue between cultures, particularly with Aboriginal and multicultural groups.

### **Education for Sustainability**

It must be recognised that education is the main tool for mobilising the community, bringing about social change and developing citizenship. Public awareness, education and training have a key role in achieving sustainability. The main areas in which sustainability education is being carried out overseas are:

**Formal education** including Ministries, Departments of education, schools, universities, teachers

**Non-formal education** including museums, parks, botanic gardens, and zoos, NGOs, government departments, local government, voluntary organisations, community groups and private sector initiatives

**Informal education** including media, documentaries, written press, films, the internet

All segments of society must be involved. Issues of sustainability cross disciplinary boundaries and should be at the heart of all education. The WAM is already playing a lead role in education, research, policy development, community outreach and support. Through partnerships with educational institutions, public programs, publications, the documentary and media units, the WAM could build on this role in education for sustainability.

It is recommended that the WAM could play an ongoing role in the following proposed initiatives to encourage civic discussion of sustainability:

- The launching of Government-wide education and discussion opportunities on sustainability.
- The convening of a Conference on Education for Sustainability, as a catalyst for strategic planning for the remainder of the 21st century. The WAM could be a key player in an initiative such as this.
- The establishment of Round Tables, both central and local should be examined as a method of involving the whole community in discussing sustainability.
- The establishment of interagency sustainability working groups across Government.
- The research and dissemination of success stories in sustainability.

## **Sustainable Business**

It is important that the WAM and all Government agencies are seen to lead by example. The WAM proposes to:

- Incorporate ‘triple bottom line’ principles into decision making and into the process of implementing programs and activities.
- Investigate the sustainability of internal operations such as procurement policies, building design and maintenance (see *BiosphereWest* below), energy and water use and waste management.
- Develop multidisciplinary partnerships to promote sustainable communities, both in Perth and in the regions. This will involve working with other Government agencies and NGOs and collaborating with communities to develop common objectives.
- Continue to foster research which provides base level knowledge of biodiversity, as an information source for predictive modelling, for interpretation of the rates of change and the barriers to sustainability (also recommended by the recent report on strategic research by the Premier’s Science Council)
- Contribute to education for sustainability by protecting and disseminating knowledge of our cultural and natural heritage.
- Create new institutional relationships, particularly with business and NGOs to work collaboratively towards sustainability.
- Showcase technologies and innovative practices that lead to sustainability and encourage research and development on alternative technologies and products that integrate sustainability principles and design (Sustainable Futures and New Technologies are both intended ‘portals’ for *BiosphereWest*).
- Contribute to global sustainability by forming networks and partnerships with museums worldwide. This will foster dialogue, research, ideas and actions to clarify and expand the roles of museums in securing a sustainable future for their communities. (Recent research by the WAM in partnership with several overseas institutions has revealed the marine biodiversity hotspots of the world. This research will inform many millions of dollars in management decisions over the next decades).

## **A Regional focus**

In order to achieve a transition to sustainability and permit strategic planning for sustainability, it will be important to have a clear understanding of the state of the social, economic and cultural environments in regional Western Australia. The WAM, with its knowledge resource - environmental, historical and cultural - and its museums in key regions (Albany, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie), is well placed to play a key role in this process.

The recently established program, *MuseumLink*, is a topical and contemporary exhibition program, designed to respond to issues quickly and to tour them to sites around the State or more widely. Non-museum venues are suitable for *MuseumLink* products and hence they can be mounted in many different sites. It is intended that *MuseumLink* will facilitate the engagement of regional communities with important societal issues such as sustainability, and thus empower them to better participate in the dialogue about their future. As part of this commitment *MuseumLink* could develop programs that could be located in, for example, Department of Indigenous

Affairs regional offices, those of regional Aboriginal cultural bodies and even communities.

### **Ecotourism**

Ecotourism and nature based tourism are the identified niche opportunities for tourism in Western Australia. *BiosphereWest* is committed to exploring close liaison between scholarship and tourism, that will see visitors to the new facilities given an introduction to the State and then able to take their exploration further by booking experiences *in situ*. In particular, nature based and cultural tourism will have links via *BiosphereWest*. It will also be a centre for training of tourism operators in nature based tourism and especially content development for a meaningful visitor experiences. The Gateway concept noted below links closely with tourism as well.

### **Multiculturalism**

The WAM is moving to better engage with community groups and government agencies in the development of stronger communities and a better awareness of the dimensions of citizenship. MuseumLink is already developing multicultural products. The WAM also provides a Community Access Program, whereby communities can use museum galleries for their exhibitions.

The WAM would like to take this much further with the proposed *CommunityLink* program. This would see the WAM act as partner in a proactive way with community groups, working with them to develop products (exhibitions, performances, websites etc) that allow those groups to engage with the greater community. In this, *BiosphereWest* will provide community spaces and assistance to develop these products, thus acting as a facilitator of community dialogue. The WAM is not resourced to do this at this time but hopes to move in this direction with Government support.

### **Aboriginal Australians**

The WAM is the primary repository of the material culture of the Aboriginal people throughout the State. While our collections are sparse for the south west, other areas are represented in greater detail. These collections are of fundamental importance to many Aboriginal people/communities in maintaining their cultural identity. We feel and honour a special responsibility in assisting Aboriginal people maintain their rights and assert their authority as an integral section of the wider Australian community.

## **Forthcoming initiatives to assist with sustainability education**

### ***Sustainability WA Exhibition***

This exhibition, developed in conjunction with the Department for Premier and Cabinet and the WA Museum's *MuseumLink*, was launched with the Government's *Focus on the Future* Discussion Document. It is at present touring about 30 regional centres, telling stories of people who are working now to achieve a more sustainable future. It tells stories of sustainability in action.

### ***Watching Waste***

This exhibition, to open late 2002, is funded by a grant from the Waste Management Fund.

The move towards the Western Australian society envisioned in the Waste2020 Task Force Report and Recommendations, *Towards Zero Waste*, will require a change in attitudes and thinking about waste. An environmentally, socially and economically sustainable society will not leave a legacy of waste in all its forms, nor borrow the natural resources of future generations. It will instead see waste reduction, re-use and recycling as a way of life, with waste as we now know it, no longer existing.

The process of change required within Government, community and industry sectors, is substantial. It requires understanding of the problem and commitment and participation of the whole community.

The project proposed, a travelling exhibition on Waste in Western Australia, aims to assist in the process of public education for a more sustainable future. It will examine the changing composition of the waste stream, the growth of the recycling industry in Western Australia, the emergence of secondary waste treatment technologies, the move towards extended producer responsibility and the growing recycled and recyclable products market.

### ***The Power of Wind***

This exhibition will highlight the role of renewable energy, in particular wind power, in moving to a more sustainable future, one relying less on non-renewable fossil fuels. It will be completed by mid 2002 and tour the State.

### ***BiosphereWest - Development of the WAM Perth site***

*BiosphereWest* is the new conceptual framework of the WAM. It recognises the simultaneous occupancy by people of three environments –

1. the natural environment
2. the social environment
3. the built environment (architecture, engineering and new technologies)

Amongst its key themes or portals are Sustainable Futures and New Technologies. These themes were developed in advance of the current Government's election and it is very pleasing to have the *BiosphereWest* concept so substantially embodied in current Government policy.

Full delivery of *BiosphereWest* will only be possible with the redevelopment of the WAM's Perth facilities which are tired, inadequate and of high safety risk to staff, and to a lesser extent, visitors. The *BiosphereWest* redevelopment will be based on partnerships with other government agencies, research and academic institutions, the private sector and community groups. It will be an ideal forum for exploration and profiling of the issues that make up the holistic concept of sustainability.

As well, the actual infrastructure of *BiosphereWest* will display the cutting edge in sustainable design, reflecting a commitment to low energy use, generation of its own energy, use of recycled materials and low water consumption.

*BiosphereWest* is also intended to be a gateway to the State. This aligns with the Government's commitment to explore a Gateway to Western Australia in Perth. This need not be a separate project from *BiosphereWest*; its concept will easily embrace the notion of gateway. *BiosphereWest* is intended to provide the local resident and visitor to the State with an introduction to Western Australia and life in this remarkable part of the world. Biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management, and sustainable lifestyles will all be part of that introduction.

(*BiosphereWest* concept document attached.)

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# **PRELIMINARY OUTLINE OF ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR DISCUSSION PAPER AS A SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

**Name:** Gary Morgan

**Organisation:** WA Museum

**The role of arts and culture in the Sustainable Development of Western Australia** (CBD, regional and statewide: What are the various roles? From whose perspective? Where are the gaps?)

Sustainability is the intersection of multiple factors, divided as much for convenience as any other reason into environmental, economic and social/cultural. I am not engaging here with the notion of the 4<sup>th</sup> pillar! Whether it is 3 or 4, these are basically simplifications of multidimensional factors. The concept I think of is multidimensional space, with the various axes corresponding to factors that relate to sustainable futures. 'Arts' can be treated as such but the Museum's interest is more in culture, a much broader term, that can reflect things as diverse as ethnic background and citizenship, through to technologies (we live in a technological society). 'The Arts' per se are one aspect of this.

Societies move through phases of evolution. It is arguably time for WA to evolve from a society that is pre-occupied with the infrastructure of roads, rail and sewage (as important as these things are) to one that pays equal attention to the value-adding factors that enrich life, and the cultural dimensions are paramount in this. A healthy society is not just one with good hospitals but also one that is creative and diverse. This is as true in the bush as in the city, although the actual embodiment of this diversity will vary from place to place. Recognition of human relationship to place – and the concept of landscapes – are underpinned by cultural mores and perspectives. The relationship of 'western' societies to Islamic societies will be a major issue for Australia and the world, and is a cultural exploration.

The fixation in primary infrastructure remains strong in WA Government and bureaucracies at all levels. It will take a brave Government to elevate the value added dimensions of sustainability to be on par with the bitumen and steel of that old world infrastructure.

**Cultural Sustainability** (What is it? What are the issues? Why does it matter?)

It is crucial not to overly segregate any of the three primary axes. We run the risk of sustainability policy being developed by a room full of economists, one of environmentalists and scientists, and one of cultural historians and artists. Which room will hold sway over the others? There is a discussion to be had re sustaining cultural activities (including the arts) in WA yes, but that discussion must be seen to be an equal player to the other factors, and linking with them, or it will always be relegated to an afterthought.

This must be about empowering people of any background to sustain what they want from that background (within reason; old animosities are not conducive to a healthy society). It is also to empower them to engage with the diversity of cultures and to recognize them as equals. We recognize Easter as we should; how many people in WA were aware of the Passover? How many know that Orthodox Easter is still 3 weeks away. Our celebrations and engagement needs to be multifaceted. This does not dispense with Christian beliefs but enriches them with the cultures of the world.

Government must lead. It must show itself to be aware of the importance of cultural issues and initiatives and prepared to support and resource them.



**Cultural Resources** (What are your key assets that can contribute to economic, environmental and social sustainability.)

Please refer to the submitted paper on this. The WAM is heavily engaged with the issue of sustainability, in its various facets. It is an underpinning foundation of the BiosphereWest concept that will guide the WAM's programs and hopefully site development in the future.

**Creativity and Innovation** (How can your artform or organisation help other industry sectors be more innovative?)

The WAM can be a/the primary public intersection point with issues of sustainability and innovation. The intention is that BiosphereWest will profile innovation at all levels of society – innovation in cultural activities, urban planning, architecture, new technologies and science, lifestyle practices – all are relevant.

It is intended to work in partnership with other agencies and organisations to profile initiatives and to engage the public in discussion about them.

**Communication** (How can the sector help communities, businesses and governments to connect with each other, communicate issues and ideas and promote the results? What type of projects could provide marketing and networking opportunities across industries and sectors?)

This is substantially answered above. The Museum's new program MuseumLink is taking products around the State.

**Education** (How could your artform or organisation educate businesses, communities and governments in sustainability.)

The communication strategies above are also educational strategies. As well, the Museum's involvement with schools and the curriculum will continue and it is hoped under BiosphereWest to be significantly enhanced, so that programs can contact with a maximum number of school children who in turn influence their families.

**Sustainable Partnerships** (In what sort of partnerships with business, the community and governments could you practice sustainability?)

Partnerships are a core principle to BiosphereWest. The WAM is strengthening old and developing new partnerships with government agencies, industry, universities and communities to engage with contemporary issues that are significant to a healthy society. This will see exploration of environmental, social and to a degree even economic issues, and will attempt to set them within the theme of sustainability.

**BARRIERS** (...AND HOW THEY CAN BE OVERCOME.)

I note above that the fixation in WA on primary infrastructure will not change soon or easily. I suspect there is little appreciation of or real commitment to the true depth of sustainability at most levels of the bureaucracy and government. Industry is variously attempting to factor in dimensions other than economic; some companies are very good, others do no more than legislation requires of them.

**EXISTING ACTION** (WHAT ACTION IS YOUR ARTFORM OR ORGANISATION UNDERTAKING IN PURSUIT OF A SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR, A PARTICULAR ISSUE OR ANOTHER SECTOR.)

Please refer to the previous submission.