

8 April 2002

Professor Peter Newman
Director
Sustainability Policy Unit
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
15th Floor, 197 St George's Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Sir,

The Wetlands Conservation Society is replying to your invitation to comment on the discussion paper for the State Sustainability Strategy.

From our perspective as a community group dedicated to the conservation of wetlands we would like to see some emphasis placed on the need to conserve biodiversity and water resources in the State Sustainability Strategy. WA has an appalling record for mismanaging its biodiversity and water resources. Much of this State, especially the wheatbelt and the pastoral zone are highly degraded and large areas may be lost to salinity and/or desertification unless urgent action is taken. The fight against salinity is not being waged with sufficient resources at present and this should be rectified as part of the sustainability strategy.

We would particularly like to see the Government's promise to complete an inventory of WA wetlands honoured and to go beyond that to monitor and manage this natural heritage effectively..

Likewise for the State's water resources. Currently the aquifers in many parts of the State are being over exploited. We urgently need a State Water Resources Strategy which includes a water efficiency strategy, and further exploration of our underground water resources to ensure that they are managed sustainably.

Community education is vital if sustainability is to succeed. Unless the public is convinced of the necessity to change its lifestyle nothing will happen. Funds must be allocated to sustainability education in schools and community groups. This could be best achieved by a sustainability grants program to which schools and community groups can apply for support.

Another important element is the State of the Environment Report. Although WA has carried out two of these exercises there has been no follow up action. The recent SOE Report (1998) contained a large number of valuable recommendations that would have helped to create a more sustainable society in WA but nothing has been done to implement them. This process and a procedure for monitoring implementation should be included in the State Sustainability Strategy.

We would like to see a commitment to sustainability specifically included in the Environmental Protection Act and the planning legislation. The Sustainable Agriculture Strategy needs to be completed and implemented and the Agriculture Act amended to ensure this happens.

The whole process should be overseen by a Sustainability Commission which requests the economic, social and environmental assessments for new projects from the appropriate agencies. The Sustainability Commission should also request the EPA to prepare a State of the Environment reporting and monitor its implementation. The Sustainability Commission should report directly to the Premier so that it can carry out its coordinating role for all government agencies.

All Government Agencies should be required to prepare sustainability strategies based on the State Sustainability Strategy with key performance indicators which are regularly reviewed by the Commission. The Commission could report to Parliament on their performance like the Auditor General does at present. This would ensure that this exercise was taken seriously.

Thank you for the invitation to comment.

Yours faithfully,

Philip Jennings
President