



# ***Communications Advisory Committee***

3 June, 2003

Dr Peter Newman  
Sustainability Policy Unit  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
197 St George's Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Dr Newman

## **SUBMISSION BY COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC)**

While we recognise that the normal deadline for submissions on the Consultation Draft Focus on the Future was a couple of weeks ago, we trust that you will accept and consider this submission by the Communications Advisory Committee (CAC), appointed by Cabinet in 1980 as the Satellite Communications Committee, and supported since by the Governments of all persuasions as an effective and low cost community service, particularly for remote and regional areas.

CAC meets only every three months or so. Discussions at our meetings on the 8<sup>th</sup> March led to discussion that the board roles of "communications" does not appear to have been explicitly recognised as a line item in the draft Consultation Paper.

We consider, as our brief submission shows, that effective communications is both:

- A vital, fundamental **necessity for sustainability** of both communities and projects,
- By it's nature and **excellent example for sustainability**, provided the triple bottom line is recognised.

In particular, a major problem confronting CAC is that all too often **economic costs** are not adequately balanced or evaluated in comparison with **social benefits**.

Furthermore, of course effective communications can reduce environmental impacts arising from travel; can provide education and training and increased awareness of environmental and technical skills and data banks, thereby directly bringing improvements to environmental management. We note the "hope" for Sustainability On Line service, but there is much more to the communications issues than this concept, valuable as it could be.

We respectfully request that, when formatting your final report and documents, you give **Communications** and line-item status, and include it explicitly as part of recommendations.

We will be pleased to meet you and assist in such matters if requested.

Yours sincerely

**MIKE GRANT**  
**CHAIRMAN**

**SUBMISSION**  
**by the**  
**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**on**  
**THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

**SUMMARY:**

The W.A. Communications Advisory Committee (CAC) at its 69<sup>th</sup> meeting on 7 March 2003 noted the increasing attention in State Government policy making and practices to the issues of Sustainability. CAC is very conscious, from its more than 23 years of wide-ranging community and operational analyses and actions, of the vitality important but often-overlooked roles that effective communications can and must play in sustainability. This is particularly so for remote and regional areas which are both the sources of much of the State's wealth and revenue but also the locations of many operational controversies about governance of sustainability and sustainable development. CAC recognises that this is a late submission on the document Focus on the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability or the 42 "priority areas" for the next 5 to 10 years. CAC supports the concept of "Sustainability on Line" in the document, but suggests that there are far more diverse issues where Communications is vital.

**1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

**1.1 Sustainability**

Global attention to issues of Sustainability, Sustainable Development and the "Triple Bottom Line" of environmental, economic and social factors was promoted by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland and often simply called "The Brundtland Commission". Their report *"Our Common Future"* (Oxford University Press, 1987) served as the foundation for the United Nations Rio de Janeiro Conference in June 1993, often called the Earth Summit. Australia, alone, adopted the notion of "Ecologically Sustainable Development" and created a National Strategy under this name, in 1992. The prefix "ecologically" is now being deleted.

The W.A draft under current consideration defines sustainability as "meeting the needs of current and future generations through simultaneous environmental, social and economic improvement." The Draft admits "Sustainability is a 'fuzzy' concept when analysed by itself...[but] begins to make sense when applied to specific issues, land management, energy, settlement, project or specific communities."

With respect, CAC submits that the concept of "*simultaneous*" and "*improvement*" in the definition are unrealistic and unrealisable. The very fuzziness is likely to be anti-development in Western Australia whose future lies in responsible future development, in which, as we will show, effective communications to remote and regional areas is essential, often a prerequisite. If we wait for "*simultaneous*" improvements, the State will stagnate.

We recommend that for a far more suitable definition for Western Australia is that expressed personally by Mrs Brundtland in her Foreword to the World Commission Report:

*“What is needed now is a new era of economic growth – growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally responsible.”*

## **2. COMMUNICATIONS FOR REMOTE AND REGIONAL AREAS**

In this brief, and late submission, CAC draws attention to the fact that Western Australia has developed relying heavily on communications, whether by camel, ship, overland, telegraph line, Trans-Australia rail, phone, television, internet, and data services, broadcast or hard-line, satellite links, copper or fibre cables. The sustainability draft appears to overlook such lesson of history, despite the “hope” for a “Sustainability On Line” service.

The first domestic satellite was “sold” to the Australian community because it would bring phones to remote areas. CAC can provide much further material to give details and references. However, since the draft *“seeks to give sustainability meaning to Western Australians”*, and considers that *“sustainability makes sense when applied to specific issues”*, here we provide examples where: ‘communications’ is absolutely vital for sustainability. We deal here only with a few examples of rural and remote issues.

## **3. COMMUNICATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

### **3.1 Communications required before “Sustainability” can even start**

Mentioned above was the fact that the first domestic satellite for Australians, long overdue, was finally “sold” to the Australian community on the basis of a “fair go” for phone services to remote areas. Subsequently development of a low impact communications of many varieties is now fundamental and essential part of every project in Western Australia, whether it is

- a A field geologist reporting to head office with raw data of finding his way by GPS.
- b Phone, internet, radio and television that keep remote and often isolated communities in touch with the world community, and often provide life-saving services and alerts, or vital marketing information, education and training, etc.
- c Local governments and individuals accessing data banks in central locations, for a wide variety of economic and management reasons, including precision farming.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

CAC will be delighted if the “triple bottom line” of social, economic and environmental benefits are adopted by government and communication-vendors. Often resource-rich remote and regional areas are penalised because high economic establishment costs of some early communications services are allowed to dominate policies and planning, without sufficient regard to the massive social and ultimately economic

returns thereby enabled. As for the environmental component, remote and regional areas are the frontier bastions for Australia in issues ranging from importation of exotic diseases, or drugs, safety, search and rescue and maintenance and development of Australian resources for the very concept of sustainability.