



SUBMISSION ON THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION DRAFT

Prepared by the City of Belmont

This submission has been prepared and lodged on behalf of the Council by the Planning and Development Division.

The City of Belmont generally supports the draft Sustainability Strategy and appreciates the need for this important initiative to be undertaken.

The Council for its part has adopted and is implementing an environment plan (City of Belmont Environment Plan 2002), and whilst the Plan is not a sustainability document it recognizes the need to protect and manage natural resources in order to achieve sustainable outcomes.

GOVERNANCE

Left to their own resources it is difficult to envisage local governments being able to contribute significantly to sustainability outcomes. This underlies the importance of regional initiatives such as those being undertaken by the EMRC. Thus the linking of Federal, State and Local initiatives will be crucial in the pursuit of successful outcomes and underscores the need for a whole of government, or top down approach to the issue of sustainability.

Many Local Governments do not employ environmental Officers nor do they have departments dedicated to environmental management. If Local Governments are to play an active and meaningful role in sustainability significant cultural and institutional changes will be required. The role of regional agencies such as the EMRC will become increasingly important to member Councils that do not have the resources (or the need) to fund the establishment and ongoing maintenance of dedicated departments.

It is expected that a significant cultural change will be required in the Department for planning and Infrastructure if sustainable development assessment procedures are to be formulated and successfully implemented. The change required is of such a magnitude as to be unachievable without the strongest government commitment and a willingness on the part of the agency to accept change.

RESOURCES

From the foregoing it follows that significant financial resources will be required in order to fund bodies such as the EMRC, to continue employing competent professional officers and resource sustainability programs.

EDUCATION

The importance of education and training cannot be overemphasised. The concept of sustainability has been known and discussed for over 30 years yet remains a topic much misunderstood, and in some quarters, much maligned.

Central to the problem is the difficulty experienced in clearly defining what sustainability is and how it is done. There is no doubt that it is, among other things:

- a very big idea
- a new social goal
- a new way of understanding how the world works
- a new way of doing things that requires a reassessment of old values, and
- a new pathway to and of change

Most of these things are, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted but are not well understood by the general community. Furthermore, it is not generally appreciated that sustainability cannot be taught. This is, perhaps, because it is a whole of place idea involving partnerships across a broad spectrum.

Without ongoing educational programs it is difficult to envisage anything other than moderate success being achieved at a local level.

CONSERVATION & BIODIVERSITY

Local governments have a great opportunity to contribute to the conservation and biodiversity agenda but at present there are no means of assessing development proposals other than on pure planning grounds. The Western Australian Planning Commission's Model Scheme Text, for example, provides minimal guidance in respect of heritage assessment and conservation but this is difficult to implement and not particularly well received by the community.

An agency like the EMRC is particularly useful to Local Governments in tackling conservation and biodiversity issues. However, additional resources are needed in order to assist Local Governments to undertake conservation and biodiversity activities.

SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

Sustainable housing design and construction guidelines should be developed by the state in close collaboration with local governments. However, issues of practicability and affordability should not be ignored if the community is to be supportive.

CONCLUSION

The City of Belmont is supportive of the State Sustainability Strategy but is of the view that if implementation is to be achievable issues of:

- Funding
- Technical and educational resources
- Priorities
- Responsibilities, and
- Institutional change

will have to be seriously addressed by the state in close collaboration with local government, the private sector and the community.