

State Sustainable Policy Submission from Information for Action Inc.

The content of the document 'Focus on the future - Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy' is good and the State Government should be congratulated on initiating this strategy. Unfortunately the strategy fails to address the urgency of the problem. The proposed time frame for its implementation of five to ten years is too long. The environment is deteriorating at a rate far in excess the effort being applied to ameliorate the problems.

While the Government has begun to deliver on the issue of logging in unlogged old growth forests, the Government's has failed to deliver in areas such as urban bushland, marine conservation, clearing, greenhouse, rivers and wetlands.

Land clearing is an ongoing cause of erosion, salinity, desertification and species extinction. Australia continues to clear more native bushland (trees, shrubs and grasses) faster than any other developed nation. For every one tree planted about one hundred are cleared. While the WA Government is obviously aware of the problems, existing legislation is not being enforced and adequate legislation is not being put in place to protect the environment. The Government is too slow to act. WA lost between 3,000 and 5,000 hectares of native vegetation over the past year.

Species loss is irreversible and currently species are being lost at a rate never witnessed on earth. The major cause in WA is land clearing and although action is being taken to reduce land clearing in WA, land continues to be cleared for housing, industry and infrastructure, both legally and illegally. Western Australia has important biodiversity and it is being lost forever. There is no excuse for the lack of action. The WA Government has clearly failed to protect bushland.

Perth has the worst urban development of any city in Australia and arguably in the Western world. It has massive urban sprawl. With a population of 1.25 million Perth is as long as Los Angeles, which has a population of about 13 million. Perth suburbs continue to devour

wetland and bushland on its fringes. Many residents still use septic tanks and waste material from them is seeping into wetlands and rivers.

Perth central business district is a glass graveyard at nights and on weekends. Other State capitals are far more people orientated. They have a vibrant and entertaining city centre with markets, cafes and areas where buskers, jugglers and magicians perform, areas for kids to play and places where people congregate.

In the Netherlands, 70 percent of people go to work by bike. In Western Australia, we have the flat terrain and the perfect climate for cycling but we have adopted the car as our mode of personal travel. In WA last year there was a 1.6 percent increase in the number of licensed drivers (1.293 million drivers in total) and a 2.2 percent increase in the number of licensed vehicles (a 39, 000 vehicle increase in the past 12 months). The Dutch have chosen a very low polluting means of transport as a leading option and set up the facilities and laws to support cycling. In some Canadian and European cities, 25 percent of trips are on public transport. The Australian figure is 3-8 percent.

Agriculture also impacts on the land, poisoning it with pesticides and nutrients, which with sewage, cause algal blooms to appear in the Swan and other rivers with increasing frequency.

Western Australia is failing in its responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to take advantage of new economic opportunities and job creation opportunities that new environmentally friendly technologies bring. In this regard we need more tax incentives for environmentally friendly activities and disincentives for environmentally unfriendly activities.

The environment has been given a low priority in the legislative reform agenda. Most pre-election commitments to environmental legislation such as Environmental Protection Act amendments, a Waste Management Act, a Contaminated Sites Act and a Biodiversity Conservation Act are yet to be delivered.

The Government is making a big deal about its commitment to sustainability but it is not delivering enforceable hard laws. And the promised shift towards sustainability is not being applied throughout all Government departments. 'Growth at any cost' is still the policy of most Ministers and agencies.

Many agencies still trying to fast-track assessment processes and support energy hungry, greenhouse gas emitting developments. The Government should work more to attract and support industries that fit in with the sustainability values proposed in the Draft State Sustainability Strategy.

In summary I would like to stress that fine words and good intentions are not enough to end and reverse the rapid environmental decline that we are experiencing. We need stronger leadership, we need legislative action and we need it now. The time frame proposed for implementing policy change will mean going backwards for another five or ten years. There will be opposition from business groups and others who perceive (rightly or wrongly) that they have more to lose than to gain from policies that work towards sustainability. Workers will need help in training for and adjusting to new types of employment. The Government will need the strength of character to keep focused. Although words are important, future generations will not judge you by your words.

They will judge you by your actions and results. If the Ningaloo reef is still alive and healthy in 50, 100 or 1000 years you can take the credit. We must move quickly from information era to a sustainability era. The alternative is mass extinction and a lower quality of life for everyone.

Humans are destroying a valuable and beautiful living resource. Time is running out for the diversity of life that inhabits our planet and for our quality of life. We are dependant on the health of our planet and if its biodiversity continues to decline, as it has done over the past century, then human health and wellbeing will decline as well. The window of opportunity for us to organise globally to build a sustainable society is open - but it is closing. The time to act is now!