

Submission to draft State Sustainability Strategy
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The definition of Sustainability is a good one that sets new ground in this state – however, it fails to acknowledge that the environment is the foundation for the social and economic sectors of society.

The environment existed before human evolution, and therefore prior to the social and economic sectors – in fact they are derived from the environment.

The triple bottom-line is a step forward, but the underlying importance of the environment must be acknowledged.

Unfortunately, the triple bottom line of sustainability is a new concept that has limited real application in our society. The definition equates commercial, environmental and social factors, yet it is difficult to think of a government, commercial or private activity in our society where the 3 factors have equal weighting in decision-making.

The most crucial decisions still rely primarily on economic factors, with social and environmental ones lagging far behind in relative importance.

Whilst the present process is a significant step forward, the threats to the overall environment are substantial and real.

I have lived in S/W WA since 1957 – in that time I have seen the collapse of major ecosystems : the Jarrah forest, the Blackwood River, the S/W Tuart forests and the salinisation of agricultural land.

Given that the Gaia hypothesis (all life is interconnected) is now widely accepted, one must ask how many more major ecosystems of the SW can be degraded or collapse before the entire SW environment also collapses ?

The precautionary principle (referred to in the draft strategy) would suggest none – hence the environment now deserves a higher weighting in decision making than social or environmental factors.

This is not to suggest that economic and social factors should be sacrificed – to the contrary, they will be protected by giving the environment a higher relative weighting.

We live in a society where the environment has taken a distant 3rd place in decision making almost since the time of European settlement – were this not the case, then equality of social, economic and environmental factors would be appropriate.

As it is the case, and has been for a long time, it is imperative that the environment be the primary factor considered in decision making if our environment is to be sustained, so that the economic and social sectors of our society can thereby be sustained for future generations.

Looking back at the example of salinisation of agricultural land, the problem was widely known round the middle of last century, yet it is only recently that action has been taken to address the problem.

Predominance of economic (eg viability) and social (eg ownership, availability of knowledge) factors were responsible for delaying significant steps to address the problem with the outcome of higher than necessary present and future economic and social costs.

This example underlines the necessity to give the 3 factors equal weighting our environment has significantly deteriorated whilst economic factors have predominated in decision making.

Had the factors had equal weighting in the past, then equal weighting of them now would be appropriate. As this was not the case, and because of the degraded state of our present environment, it is critical that the environmental factors predominate.

The same logic can be (and must be) applied to considerations of sustained yield and sustainable forestry.

This raises an interesting dilemma : **In a society where decision making is still primarily based on economic factors, how do we give the environment sufficient weighting without prejudicing social and economic factors?**

In order to simultaneously increase the weighting of social factors, we need to at least consider ways of realigning our present society. As our society is a materialistic one, we will have to re-examine our economic structures, which will also impact on our social ones.

Whilst this may seem revolutionary in nature, I submit that many events have taken place in mankind's evolution that have done this and been embraced, or not even noticed at the time because of their incremental nature.

For example, the development of the combustion engine, the telephone and the computer have all re-aligned our societal structures without causing unacceptable dislocation at the time.

In the context of Australia, where we are faced with environmental degradation and the challenge of reconciliation, our methods of land ownership and management need re-assessment.

I have written a paper on this that is available on request.

Community involvement :

Myself, and many other community members and ngos have made substantial voluntary commitment in terms of time and financial costs to this consultative process.

In contrast, bureaucrats and industry representatives who have taken part would have been paid to do so.

The point of including this section in my submission is not to seek sympathy, but to underline the inherent bias towards entrenched interests that result from such processes. Many of these entrenched interests have been directly or indirectly responsible for some of the past and present lack of sustainability in this state.

I have a letter from Dr Peter Newman that thanks me for my input, and have been approached by many of the consultative process participants congratulating me on the quality of my input.

My experience with sustainability extends back to the mid 70s when I resigned from my well paid position with one of the world's leading oil companies to take up organic farming in the south west, to establishing the Environmentally Safe Shop in the late 80s, attending major international environmental conferences as freelance media and a participant, addressing a UN Forum on "The role of Sustainable Agriculture in helping achieve world peace", heading and establishing SW environmental groups, achieving landcare grants for private property owners and voluntary community conservation work.

Similarly, the Margaret River Regional Environment Centre does not have the resources to make a comprehensive submission. The result is that key voluntary conservation groups whose only bias is towards a healthy environment, will not be making proper submissions – to the detriment of sustainability in this state.

The many regional seminars conducted by Dr Newman enabled the draft strategy to be discussed across much of the state. However, these seminars were nowhere near as comprehensive as the series held in Perth, even though some of our most pressing sustainability issues exist in regional areas.

Whilst acknowledging the important commitment to sustainability by the present government in this process, and in light of the above, I conclude that the process, by its own definition, is unsustainable, as :

- It is socially inequitable and discriminatory
- The finances allocated were insufficient for a comprehensive process, and participation depended largely on financial capacity to do so.

One of the initiatives suggested in the initial draft developed by SPU is the relevance of artistic involvement in sustainability. It should therefore be relevant to, but is lacking in, this consultation process.

I therefore enclose below a poem I wrote on Sustainability.

Sustainability

I wuz sittin' at a meeting
Dozing up the back
Someone wuz doin' talking
I'd already lost track.

I wuz dreamin' of a forest
The light wuz shining through
It landed on the leafy ground
An' glistened in the dew.

The people there wuz happy
The animals they wuz too
I wuz a happy chappy
The sky an azure blue.

I sensed a sound encroaching
It chilled me to my core
Talk of growth and property value
Sustainable for evermore!

Our earth has her own values
They're not wot we wuz taught
Talk of sustainability
Call it "sus" for short.

M J McBain 2002 ©

There are some basic assumptions in our society that need addressing :

1. The right of private landowners and developers to continually develop urban land. Perth is a city that has already exceeded its sustainable water usage capacity. In a country and state that requires a degree of decentralisation for the viability of its rural communities, it makes more sense to encourage people to live where there are adequate resources such as water, rather than to move the water to where there is already an excess of people. One way to do this would be to provide cheap residential/commercial

land (to be developed using best available sustainability practices) where the water is. Eg In the state forest over the Yarragadee Aquifer. This would have other benefits such as providing cheap land in an area where there is a high demand that has pushed land prices beyond the affordability of the average person. It also has potential to form part of an innovative and alternative approach to the presently socially inequitable status of native title claims in that region.

2. Our legal system has acknowledged that this land was occupied prior to being settled by Europeans, yet still recognises our land titles above the pre-existing rights of Indigenous Australians. At the same time, we deny the underprivileged of the world the right to settle in this land. Simultaneously, we have adopted methods of land ownership and management that are increasingly capital intensive at the expense of an agricultural labourforce – the end result is a significantly degraded environment that urgently needs more people working the land for both production and repair. I submit that the social diversity and potential of our land, its economic productivity and its environmental health can all be enhanced by welcoming immigrants/refugees who are prepared to work in landcare.
3. Just as a house must be built on solid foundations, so must a country or a state. The social inequities and contradictions of a legal, social and political system that condones the violent theft of a land, yet penalises the descendants of those from whom the land (and its resources) was stolen for the theft of relatively insignificant property such as CDs and cars must be addressed for this country (and state) to be truly sustainable.
4. Access to resources, information and knowledge is determined by factors such as power, wealth and political influence. This is socially discriminatory, and has a huge unquantified cost to our community as it decreases the realisable potential of the underprivileged in our society. This is a crucial factor that must be practically addressed in the immediate short term by this government.

Sustainable Forestry

The consideration of sustainable forestry in the Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy is irrelevant unless it will over-ride the proposed forest management plan being formulated by Conservation Commission of WA that will be in place until 2013.

Any cutting down of our native forests is unsustainable.

There is recent research that contradicts the assertion that newly growing trees fix more carbon than their older counterparts. Climatic change in the S/W of WA should be enough to cause extreme concern about continued logging of our, and future generations, native forests.

The precautionary principle demands a cessation of logging.

Burning of our native forests has been partially justified on past indigenous practices – if we are going to be consistent, indigenous people did not cut down trees, they harvested from them. There is immense opportunity for economic activity and employment in re-establishing this perspective on our forests.

The latest research also shows the threat to biodiversity from continued logging – our forests belong to future generations and biodiversity is close to their hearts.

There is immense future tourism potential in increasing the biodiversity of our forests, and also huge potential for increasing employment.

Construction of nesting boxes to replace habitat lost in previous logging practices could be done as a cooperative venture between local schools, conservationists and displaced timber workers or their families. Such an initiative would :

- Decrease community division that arose during the forest campaigns,
- Increase species biodiversity,
- Lay the foundation for future higher levels of community involvement in our forests.

We, as a state and a nation, should be expanding our native forests, both in size and integrity. To think we can do this by logging them using present methods is arrogant in the extreme and an insult to the complex system we call nature.

Nature was, and is, akin to a church to indigenous Australians, and also to many non-indigenous ones . To desecrate it is, in my opinion, a form of discrimination. I certainly feel discriminated against by the proposed logging of our forests over the next decade.

There is modern technology, and old know how, that would enable us to pinpoint trees as they fall, inspect them to ascertain their soundness, and on that basis, leave them in the forest environment or extract the commercially viable timber using portable mills.

The economic, environmental and social benefits of doing so are significant – in short, sustainable.

A truly sustainable forest management plan would reserve all of our existing forest as National Park, and expand it towards or past its pre-european settlement size and quality.

This is not to say that timber can not be harvested from our forests – The brief outline paper below provides the background to, and a proposal for, a possible method of sustainable timber extraction that is consistent with the above.

Our natural environment has been highly impacted by European settlement.

Our native forests are no exception ,whether assessed anecdotally or by scientific data.

Many of the advances in forest policy have been due to Community input.

Forest policies still fall short of those sought by the Conservation movement despite a history of voluntary input and popular support.

Although CALM manages much state forest on a trial basis, community desires for our forests have never been tested, although some aspects have been researched and put into practice on private land .

I propose such a trial.

Proposal

The trial area should be at least 10,000 ha to encompass a diversity of forest and enable financial viability.

WAFAs policy and data on the trial area to be displayed on an interactive website enabling a representative community initiated Forest Management Plan to be developed.

The website could be linked to Educational, Community, Government, Professional and Union sites to enhance input and outcomes.

The process will have a high degree of community 'ownership' and participation, although initially funded by Government.

Western Australian forest management is recognised Internationally – this proposal could only enhance that reputation.

The recent decision to establish the Margaret River Centre for Wine Excellence on the grounds of the Margaret River High School is a beneficial move for further educational choices in the region. However, the minimal level of public consultation undertaken so far has resulted in widespread community concerns.

In this paper I will focus on the Sustainability of Viticulture in the region and the unrealised potential of the centre.

Viticulture is certainly a predominant economic activity in the region. However, in a region prized for its natural attributes, some industry practices fail to meet best practice standards.

- The expansion of the industry has been accompanied by the construction of many large dams which have reduced the natural

waterflows that are an essential component of the land and ocean ecosystems.

- The use of Agricultural chemicals is widespread and often irresponsible. For example :
 1. Accidental spillage of chemical at Rosa Glen is believed responsible for the death of many Marron.
 2. Routine chemical use is believed responsible for the deaths of frogs, again in Rosa Glen. It should be noted that the Chapman Brook that runs through Rosa Glen, is known as a relatively clean water source.
 3. Chemicals are often used without protective clothing, partly because of the discomfort in wearing masks, gloves, etc when chemicals are applied.
 4. Many labourers are forced to either use or be exposed to agricultural chemicals, although they are personally opposed to them, through the casual and seasonal nature of their employment.
 5. Plastic chemical containers, which are brittle when exposed to weather, are to be found lying in the open with chemical remnants inside.
 6. Agricultural chemicals are often (illegally ?) applied to the very edges of watercourses. This occurrence is not restricted to the viticulture industry, but also applies to roadside weed management.

Each of these instances can be independently verified, and together represent cause for concern about the sustainability and public reputation of the industry. In the case of (5) and (6), I have videotaped evidence to substantiate these assertions.

Such chemical usage has further issues associated with it :

1. Vineyards will regularly spray at least 30 % of their total land area for weed control, yet their road verges are inundated with weeds leading to future infestations. Similarly, as there is no coordinated approach to regional weed control, infestations can come from other sources such as neighbouring properties and upstream, necessitating continuing future chemical usage.
2. I estimate that some vineyards have a comparable, or higher, allocation of finance for weed control annually as is spent by government agencies to protect the biodiversity of our national parks and state forests.

These 2 examples that weed control in the region of Margaret River generally, and for viticulture specifically, is unsustainable as it is based primarily on economic factors.

I believe there is an easily measurable indicator that can assess the quantity of chemicals used – if all sales of agricultural chemicals are required to be recorded on a register at point of sale it would then be easy to monitor the increase or decrease of their purchase and therefore use.

A decrease in such usage has other advantages than lessening environmental risk :

- The health risks to workers and nearby residents are lessened.
- Whether viewed from the perspective of regional, state or national economies, any lessening of imports (the commercial rights to such chemicals rarely belong to the region, state or even country where they are used) has a benefit for balance of trade.

Due to the small town nature of the industry, locals in particular risk loss of employment or estrangement from speaking out.

Verification of the inappropriate use of chemicals comes from Denis Horgan - I quote from Leeuwin Estate's pro-forma submission to the AMR Shire Council regarding Town Planning Scheme No.11 – Amendment No.95 : "Spray drift, noise, odour and nuisance are a fact of rural life....".

Viticulturalists quote "The right to farm" as justification for such bad neighbour practices –I make the following observations:

- Some people effected by the examples above were resident before the relevant vineyards were established – surely there is also a "Right to live".
- Chemical use in the region has escalated as tax driven viticulture has displaced traditional farming.
- Implicit in any "Right to farm" is an obligation to farm responsibly.

I believe it is possible for a sustainable and profitable viticulture industry to exist harmoniously within this Shire, and further that the probable future oversupply of grapes from this region, state and

country make it imperative to enhance the existing perception of 'clean and green' produce to maintain the industry's viability.

These are not the only concerns about the sustainability of the industry – for example :

Recent falls in grape prices have raised concerns about the medium term viability of the ever expanding industry and for the regions' increasing reliance on what is fast becoming a rural monoculture.

Many viticulturalists claim they have to use chemicals, despite the presence of established and successful organic vineyards in the region such as Settlers Ridge, Serventys and Foxcliffe (owned by Veuve Cliquot).

Seasonal workers without prior industry experience commonly earn a wage below \$5/hour. This is not a livable wage, nor a justifiable one. In Margaret River, such workers often eat at the local soup kitchen, which is staffed by volunteers and supported by donations from local businesses. It is simply not satisfactory, socially justifiable or sustainable for an often absentee owned, tax driven industry to rely on the local soup kitchen to supplement the inadequate wages of their workers.

Such workers are obliged to provide their own transport to the vineyard, further decreasing their net earnings. They may drive to work, and be asked to work for as little as 1 hour in a day, further decreasing their earnings.

I suggest that vineyards should be required to provide a minimum daily earning, and should be encouraged to provide accomodation (in the case of many workers, somewhere to park a van) and access to ablutions and cooking facilities.

The savings in vehicle emmissions from such an initiative alone would justify such an initiative.

I propose that the government establish a Sustainability Department either as part of the Centre or as a separate institution. If the latter were the case, I suggest it should be at least partly located in a S/W timber town as funds are already allocated in the budget for those communities.

This is a project I have had a long interest in, and I make the following points.

- It should be practically based – for example, a Viticultural Section could be established on an existing organic vineyard.
- It should use existing facilities as far as possible – better utilisation of existing resources is a component of sustainability. For example, School computers can be part of a networked data base that could be the core of such an Institution or for media purposes (see 3. Below). This is allowable under existing Education Department regulations, and would complement the school curriculum. TAFE is also present in this community, and many community members are interested in sustainability issues.
- It should be economically viable through :
 1. Production eg Wine, fruit, vegetables.
 2. Intellectual property, consultancy eg Sustainability is a growth industry globally.

Urban development :

The draft stipulates that infill sewerage programs are a pre-requisite for further land development.

Our methods of household waste management are based on out-moded technology that date back to Victorian era ; the flushing toilet, leach drains and deep sewerage all combine to turn valuable resources into waste and health problems.

They take the resources of clean water, grey water, urine and faecal matter and combine them into one output called sewerage.

The process enables people to ignore their own waste, while using freshwater to turn it into a large environmental and health problem.

Faecal matter per household is low volume, high health risk; urine is larger volume, lower health risk; and the water flows are high volume, negligible (if any) health risk.

Present systems combine them to produce a high volume, high health risk, high environmental risk product – in short, the perfect example of wasted resources and unsustainability.

Centralising this process through deep sewerage (thereby consuming electricity) necessitates environmental and health defects in the process such as designed emergency overflows into river systems (eg Margaret River) and systems that can accidentally overflow into the environment (eg Swan River). This system is designed, enforced and implemented by Water Corporation and Health Departments – the

same bodies who would prosecute a business or household that built such a design weakness (overflow to river) on private property.

In short, our sewerage systems are not only environmentally unsustainable, but socially hypocritical.

It is no coincidence that such sewerage plants are called “Waste water treatment plants” – their names should be changed to something like “community resource facilities” to reflect the true value of the inputs to such plants, and to encourage a mindset that recognises that value rather than wasting it.

Agriculture

There are 3 main sections I wish to address under Agriculture :

1. land ownership and management – degradation of land is one of the most pressing problems facing this country and state. To own a firearm, drive a car or build an extension on a house require some form of licence; to operate as a doctor, lawyer or social worker requires some form of licence, yet the only qualification to own land and (mis?) manage it is money. There is no social requirement (such as a qualification or level of expertise) or environmental qualification. Hence, our systems of land ownership are, by the state’s definition of sustainability, unsustainable. I have written a paper that suggests forms of partnerships that address this problem – phone 042 119 1113 to arrange access to this paper.
2. Pest control – There are many introduced species and pests that have adversely impacted on the sustainability of agricultural (and other) land. The commitment to lessen the impact of these from government and private enterprise is sadly lacking. For example ; (a) The release of the Calesi virus has had a short term impact on rabbit populations across Australia, creating an opportunity to lessen their populations by other methods such as trapping. Yet no agency in Australia has taken advantage of this opportunity, nor introduced measures that will encourage private individuals to do so. I have written a short paper on a method to encourage action against rabbits and other species, whilst simultaneously encouraging sustainable agriculture and indigenous foods. Again, access to this paper is available on request.

3. Live animal exports – there is a high level of concern in our society about the way livestock are treated when exported live, raising questions about the sustainability of this aspect of agriculture. Key aspects of such concern can be traced back to the length of time taken to reach destinations and conditions of livestock whilst being transported. Chris Burbury (one of the pioneers of sheep export in WA) and I have collaborated on ways to improve this industry. Access to those suggestions and papers can be arranged by contacting myself. In addition, I am concerned about what happens to the manure collected during transport – export of manure from a paddock, farm , region, state or country is a prime example of an unsustainable practice. Again, I have a method to address this problem which is available on request.