

SUBMISSION TO
DRAFT WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY
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1.

I have great faith in the wisdom of ordinary people IF they are educated with proper information and not brain-washed with propaganda and marketing. They will, in general, accept discomfort and pain if they are convinced that it is necessary for the future of their progeny.

The Gallop government was elected on commitments including the development of a sustainability strategy; so there was general acceptance that cultural change (which is always associated with some pain) was necessary.

(The culture referred to here is as defined by T.S.Eliot; " culture includes all the characteristic activities and interests of people."¹)

The Draft Sustainability Strategy has missed the opportunity to lead into culture change by not addressing the urgency for change and has instead presented a "little pain-little gain" document which will hardly upset anyone.

The options available to the authors ranged from continuing the "Business as usual" scenario (spelling doom), to aiming for a self-sufficient subsistence economy scenario, (approaching true sustainability although perhaps at the cost of terminal political damage).

The option chosen was a wide-ranging but essentially cosmetic slightly-modified business as usual scenario which is ethically indefensible.

The impending collapse of the biosphere signals the need for a cultural revolution to enhance the survival opportunities of this society.

"The hoopla about a new 'Earth Day' or future 'Sun Days' or 'Wind Days', like the pious rhetoric of fast-talking solar contractors and patent-hungry 'ecological' inventors, conceal the all-important fact that solar energy, wind power, organic agriculture, holistic health and voluntary simplicity will alter very little in our grotesque imbalance with nature if they leave the patriarchal family, the multi-national corporation, the centralised bureaucratic and political structure, the property system and the prevailing technocratic rationality untouched."²

The strategy continues the culture of denial which marks western industrialism, by ignoring the 2nd Law of Thermo-dynamics. This fatal flaw in the philosophy of the document panders to the dominant ideology of economic rationalism which is neither economic nor rational; requiring unsustainable growth from a finite resource base.

That economy relies on the diminution of the environment and society so there can not be "simultaneous environmental, social and economic improvement" unless there is an economic revolution. The strategy gives no inkling of such change. "Historian Donald Worster, in his excellent essay 'The Shaky Ground of Sustainable Development' (1993), traces techno-cratic concerns about sustainability back to the European roots of this term in the late 18th century German concept of 'sustained yield'. Rather than arising out of ecological concerns, the modern concept of sustainability arose out of economic concerns about the declining productivity-the disappearance, in fact- of Germany's forest.

Sustainable development.....reflects uncritically the modern faith in human intelligence's ability to manage nature."³ Page 16 of the strategy claims that "sustainability is a relatively new concept". What is relatively new is the bastardisation of the word until it is a limp residue of its legitimacy; an ancient concept moulding civilisations until their overthrow by vandalism.

The scientific concept of sustainability is zero increase in entropy, arising from the work of J.P.Joule (which is not very new either); The earth is an importer of energy from the sun but it is also an accumulator of entropy, ie, pollution and disorder, from the transformations of energy accompanying modern human activities. These are the cause of the crisis of the biosphere which must be addressed to approach sustainability. There is no technological fix.

The hydrogen economy is not a solution!

"Because we make decisions about technologies as if they were neutral tools, rather than representatives of moral and political commitments, it is to be expected that our world must inevitably produce asthmatic executives whose industries pollute the air and Vice-presidents of pesticide corporations whose children are dying of cancer."⁴

The growth that will be sustained by a hydrogen economy will be cancerous.

A strategy that gives a false sense of security that sustainability is being addressed, is dangerous.

The terms "sustainable construction", "sustainable energy" and "sustainable mining and petroleum production" are examples of the bastardisation of the word sustainable but the concept of "Nett sustainability" promotes the art of spin doctoring to spin professoring.

Sloppy language leads to sloppy thinking.

There can be no "disposal of waste" because nothing can be disposed of. There is no renewable energy because of the 1st Law of Thermodynamics.

Pedantry may be irritating but it helps avoid erroneous conclusions.

Comments on Pages

P10. "The government is hoping to establish Sustainability On Line, a one-stop shop for sustainability information." In the last census, only 37% of Bunbury people were using a home computer while the national average was 42%. Bureaucrats tend to ignore those figures because of the convenience of Web Sites. Are libraries going to be supplied with "hard copy" of sustainability information? Non-computer users are being pushed into another column of the ever-increasing underclass.

P11. "Shifting agriculture to a more sustainable basis will require continued innovation to develop new industries..." The shift to sustainable agriculture does not require anything new- it requires throwing out the modern system of oil-based broad acre hydroponics.

"The development of the new Forest Management Plan provides the opportunity to put in place a framework for the sustainable management of forests into the long-term."

The new FMP does not advocate sustainable forest management. The most conservative calculations of the logging rotations periods gives jarrah 72 years- not nearly long enough to form the hollows necessary for the survival of fauna or to produce high grade timber. ⁵

But conservative calculations are of little moment because "Specifically, FMP's are not binding on the Department of Conservation and Land Management, The Forest Products Commission, The Conservation Commission or on third party contractors."⁶

P11 (cont.)

"This has allowed companies to examine what sustainability means for extractive industries....."

George Orwell would have been impressed with that double-speak".

P13.

"Energy." That paragraph was gobbledegook to me.

"Heritage. Our sense of place..."

Government and business encourage a mobile workforce; even fly in-fly out arrangements. Are there plans to phase out this socially disruptive system?

"Community Services"

Children's services did not get a mention. They are the most neglected members of our society and should be given the vote.

"Housing."

"If we as a society had any real concerns about the financial hardships of young couples in their endeavours to bring children into the world, then we have been holding the remedy for their problems in our hands all the time.

However, first we would perhaps have to overcome the endemic greed that we accept as normal in our selfishly blind culture. If past governments had taken steps to discourage the ramping of real estate prices by developers and also private individuals which could have been done by removing tax incentives such as negative gearing, this would have diminished the number of speculator investors in real estate.

This would have helped keep down the cost of housing to affordable levels. Which, in turn, would mean that the young mothers might not need to be leaving home and working every hour that God sends in order to pay the huge mortgages needed to keep a roof over their heads.

And this, in turn, might result in children knowing the love of their mothers in their formative years and save us much in social costs further down the track.

However, we prefer to live with the schisms of our morality. We pontificate in grand style about our concerns and support bandaids solutions, like paid maternity leave, to fix the ills that we have ourselves created and continue to create.

When politicians themselves are pursuing profits from property dealings and real estate is such an easy cash cow for the media then there is little incentive to change things."⁷

P 13 cont.

"Education. Formal education and school provide excellent opportunities to demonstrate sustainability in action." But it still requires the personal contacts of a village to educate a child. Information via computer is not education.

PI7

"Sustainability is best understood by seeing its application by industry, the community and government agencies." And what about studying a pristine ecosystem such as a forest?

p22

"The Bruntland Commission concluded that there ought to be development but it must now be different: it must be sustainable development."

"The Bruntland Commission simply reformulates the concept of growth as sustainable development. 'Our Common Future' claims that the concept of sustainable development implies not absolute limits but the limitations imposed by the present state of technology and

social organisation on environmental resources and by the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.

Thought of in this way, a scarcity of trees or fresh water becomes not a limitation on the activities of deforestation or irrigation, both of which are essential for sustained development, but, rather, becomes the technological challenge of genetically enhancing trees or of designing large-scale desalination plants."

P23

"The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.....A detailed program of action for the 21st Century, Agenda 21 was agreed..."

"The UN Conference in Rio inaugurated environmentalism as the highest state of developmentalism. Developmentalism, the Eurocentric ideology behind post war development strategies, privileges the interests of an elite. However, this elite is not simply comprised of political, business and military leaders. It is a global middle class of individuals with cars, bank accounts and career aspirations. It is made up of the majority of the North and small cities in the South and its size roughly equals that 8% of the world's population which owns a car."⁹

P25

"These kinds of integration-where environmental, social and economic factors begin to mutually reinforce each other-are often found in situations where business, communities and governments form creative partnerships."

I do not believe any case studies bear testament to that process. Social and environmental factors do reinforce each other but the neo-liberal economic rationalist factor consumes both society and the environment.

"Sustainability is not about halting progress"

What is progress?

P26

"A set of background papers considering ethics and sustainability was collected from a diverse range of ethicists, philosophers, creeds and religions.."

I would be interested to see some of those but, along with most of the population, I do not read via a computer. Will the underclass be able to read them via hard copy from a library?

Photo of 2 adults and two young children.

"It is a rare exception when an advertisement depicts a large family or three generations: the usual family on the hoardings consists of two parents and one or two young children. What is held up for admiration is not devotion to a family, but personal affection between the members of it: and the smaller the family, the more easily can this personal affection be sentimentalised.

But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote."¹⁰

Things haven't changed much in the 50 odd years since T.S.Eliot wrote that! A definition of sustainability could well include the term 'solicitude for the unborn, however remote.'

P35

"the draft strategy describes how the government will undertake to support the pursuit of sustainability for Indigenous communities."

Because the indigenous people hold the key to the knowledge of sustainability on this continent, the government should be asking for directions from them.

P59 "There are also policy issues...for example on how best to determine boundaries for managing sustainability issues through Regional Councils of Local Government."

Local government boundaries are nearly all too big, especially in the country, being determined by population and not natural bounds. This leads to ridiculous situations such as Capel and Donnybrook/ Balingup which both span two river catchment bioregions. Federations of self-defined bioregional precincts would be much better than regional councils of arbitrarily bounded local governments.

P64 "Western Australia is well placed to show global leadership on Indigenous sustainability..."

If Indigenous sustainability means assimilation into a multi-cultural society, then W.A. could learn from New Zealand and probably many other countries.

P89 Oil Vulnerability.

From an interview by Michael Ruppert (publisher and editor of the influential newsletter 'From the Wilderness') of Colin Campbell (perhaps the world's foremost expert on oil and the oil business);

"The key event in the 'petroleum era' is not when the oil runs out but when oil production peaks, especially as demand and population are rising. World per-capita oil production peaked in 1979 and has been in decline since. The peak in volume of total world oil production is upon us right now, even as demand- or, better said, the need- for oil is increasing rapidly."¹¹

"We are extremely wasteful energy users. But it involves a fundamental change of attitude and the rejection of classical economic principles, which were built on endless growth in a world of limitless resources."¹²

P94 "Local government is democratically elected and therefore representative of their region."

That is not necessarily so. In my experience it is never so!

P101 "annual rates of return of agricultural enterprises."

These show how the market economy fails. When apple juice from Chile is being sold in Donnybrook and potato chips from USA are being sold in Manjimup economic rationalism is shown to be a threat to sustainability.

P108 "Sustainable Forestry & Plantations "

This section is blatant propaganda.

"The draft Forest Management Plan proposes substantial change in the manner in which decisions are made on levels of harvest from native forest....The proposals are consistent with the precautionary principle."

The precautionary principle was abandoned to placate the timber industry. See submissions from the W.A. Forest Alliance.

P110 "Work with relevant Commonwealth agencies to prevent the introduction of new plant diseases into Australia."

"Yet relaxing our quarantine rules and abolishing the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme are just two of the surprising items Prime Minister John Howard has put on the negotiating table in an effort to nail down a free trade agreement with the United States"¹³

"Support accreditation of forestry....."

At the instigation of the timber industry the Federal government has created an Australian sustainable forestry scheme because the internationally accepted accreditation system was too difficult for the industry to comply with.

P111 "Sustainable Mining and Petroleum Production."

Australian mining companies have a long way to go to overcome the international infamy they have earned for environmental vandalism and social disruption.

"They have demonstrated that mining is a lot more than digging up the ground and are finding clever solutions to their problems."

One of their solutions is very corrosive and is pumped under- ground for mineral leaching without knowing or caring about the environmental consequences.

"The need for agreed principles of sustainability in operations is important for the public to recognise where net benefit considerations are occurring."

The public may need a lot of convincing that the net benefit of some jobs is a net benefit for 'the unborn, however remote.'

P112 "The problem of over consumption of resources would not be assisted at all by stopping resource development. This can only be addressed by consumers and by eliminating processes that support over consumption, not those who extract the resources." By the same logic, heroin manufacturers and dealers should not be impeded.

P113 "Vision; Non-renewable resources continue to be produced from Western Australia as it remains the most sustainable option globally, with net benefits accruing the state."

What an obnoxious vision! Let the heroin dealers continue because they spend some of their profits in our shops.

P149 "Objective; Prevent the generation of waste"

Alaudable but impossible objective. It would be more practical to minimise the generation of waste by minimising the transformations of energy.

P168 "The Neighbourhood Network program... is being trialled in Picton Waters, Bunbury and will be facilitated by a \$2,500 package provided to each householder by the developer of the area, Pindan. This money will enable each household to have a computer and fast (broad band) internet access from which a community electronic network can be created."

I have had personal experience of Pidan's development procedure and found it sadly lacking in public consultation but it is heartening to hear that they are altruistic.

However I fear that having a computer in every house will be more antisocial than having a car and a TV in every house.

P171 Why do I suspect that the quotes were given to the wrong authors?

"This innovative approach to housing through partnership between government and the private sector needs to continue."

I strongly disagree! I can see how public funds are being splurged in my area for the benefit of Pindan. In any partnership, the public will lose. This explains why the private sector is so keen on the partnership. We had all this before with W.A.(Inc.)

P180 "We need to raise the awareness of sustainability and provide education for sustainability if we are to shift to a more sustainable society."

Correcting the misinformation in this document would be a good start, as would education about entropy.

P184 "If Western Australia is to be sustainable, then what needs to be sustained is not only existing buildings and industries, but cultural and natural environments."

The inclusion of the word 'industries' reveals a blinkered view of the future.

P201. This section is refreshingly frank.

There is much with which I agree and much that I admire in the strategy but with limited time and application, I only commented on that with which I disagree. I am grateful that such a document has been produced and hope my comments may be of some use in refining it.

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ENTROPY

The Laws of Thermodynamics can be stated in one small sentence;

"The total energy content of the universe is constant and the total entropy is continually increasing."

The first law (or conservation of energy law) can be stated as;

"No material or energy can be consumed or disposed of,- it can only be transformed."

The second law (or entropy law) can be stated as;

"Every time energy is transformed, there is a loss in the amount of energy available to perform work in the future. That loss is called "entropy" and is a measure of pollution, disorder and degradation of the environment."

Nobel Prize-winning chemist Frederick Soddy, referring to the Laws of Thermodynamics, commented that they "control, in the last resort, the rise and fall of political systems, the freedom or bondage of nations, the movements of commerce and industry, the origins of wealth and poverty, and the general welfare of the race."

According to Albert Einstein, Thermodynamics "is the only physical theory of universal content which I am convinced that, within the framework of applicability of its basic concepts, will never be overthrown."

Gerard Holmgren gives the following description of the effects of Entropy." Today we look at the world around us and say "What a mess!". And that's exactly what it is. Disorder. Waste. A massive entropy debt, manifesting itself in pollution, car accidents, famine, war, economic collapse, mental illness, industrial accidents, violent crime, etc. So next time you think 'This world's crazy', think again. The world's ENTROPIC. And as society struggles to contain the huge wave of entropy crashing down on it, internal order to prop up the exponentially increasing energy flow infrastructure has blown out to unbelievable proportions....

When the energy base is depleted and inefficient, hierarchies and with them, authoritarianism are inevitable to hold back this entropy debt. So while socialists and anarchists may dream of a world without authority and a world of efficient production * for need rather than profit, this is only possible if a radical shift in our economy and lifestyle to a less entropic base takes place. It is delusion to think that the growth economy, whether capitalist or communist can continue without ever-increasing authoritarianism. It is politically impossible because it is physically impossible. It would contradict the entropy law.

In the final analysis, the only thing the 'growth' economy grows- is entropy."

The message is; any actions to improve the social, economic and environmental situations, by governments, intellectuals, community groups (including environmentalists) or individuals are futile unless they address the underlying cause of the problems; the excessive transformation of energy.

More information about this underlying cause can be found in "Entropy into the Greenhouse World" by Jeremy Rifkin with Ted Howard.