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Dear Professor Newman

**Focus on the Future – The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy:
Consultation Draft**

I welcome the opportunity to make comments on the above Strategy, particularly as it relates to multiculturalism.

While the explicit acknowledgement of the demographic and cultural diversity of Western Australia indicates the role and nexus between migration and sustainability, multiculturalism as a critical framework that offers insights about how members of communities live and/or co-exist appears to have been marginalized in the overall conceptualization of Sustainability Strategy.

Using gender as a tool with which to appraise where, what, which and how services are provided is currently accepted as an effective means of determining whether service delivery models are inclusive and representative. In a similar vein, ethnicity also offers alternative insights about a range of issues in the public domain: community, heritage, health, housing and education. Devoting a separate chapter to multiculturalism appears to suggest that diversity supplements the Sustainability Strategy, rather than issues of diversity such as gender being intrinsic to the development of the various facets of the Strategy. Placing issues of diversity and multiculturalism at the periphery results in particular conceptual anomalies evident in the Consultation Draft. I refer to Chapter 6 – Preserving Cultural Heritage, Landscapes and Creating ‘Sense of Place’ to illustrate how assumptions about who are Western Australians affirm homogeneity of values, aspirations and expectations. Chapter 6 notes that “Western Australians have...a strong sense of local identity” and that “...there has been an erosion of the very values that informed these views, as the impacts of western-style development have manifested”.

My queries relate to the assumptions and values that underpin these statements. In short whose aspirations, values and emotional needs shape the “symbolic” value ascribed to “this place”? How and why do people develop a sense of attachment to the State, and does such a sense of attachment include those who have arrived in more recent times, and whose experiences of the land and the coast differ. What steps, if any, are being taken to ensure that recently arrived migrants either those who are disillusioned with ‘western-style developments’ or those who aspire to

such developments acquire a sense of attachment to this place when such a notion appears to be pivotal to Western Australian identity.

At the most simple and pragmatic level, ignoring the realities of diversity means that appropriate interventionist and proactive initiatives are not explored, and certainly not introduced. For example, how are “good relationships...with neighbours” to be built when one’s neighbours request that “you go back to where you came from”. If city centers are as noted in the Strategy, an expression of who we are, then it seems apposite that the needs and lived experiences of ethnic minorities as well as their contributions to the sense of Western Australia are encompassed and acknowledged.

Ethnic minorities or people from culturally diverse backgrounds appear to be absent in the considerations of significant components of the Strategy including the community, arts, health and the like. This relegation of people including women from culturally diverse backgrounds to the margins means that only some Western Australians will attain the future envisioned in the Strategy.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise my concerns about the Consultation Draft of the Sustainability Strategy. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters.

Yours sincerely

Dr Leela de Mel
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR