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Dear Sir

**SUBMISSION ON DRAFT WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

I wish to make the following comments on the above draft:

1. Page 24: definition of sustainability: I think this is a 'Clayton's' sustainability, leading to emphasis on the 'triple-bottom line' approach throughout the draft. The outcome will be an application of this approach to a wide range of matters, and this having been done, it being claimed that the results will be 'sustainable'. In fact, the draft acknowledges that there will often need to be 'balances' made between the triple-bottom line factors, and the result may well be one which is not really sustainable in the sense that it results in a condition which can be maintained in perpetuity. A new definition is needed which will mean real sustainability, and which could be related to the simple question being asked: "Can we keep going like this for as long as we want or will there come a point when it will no longer be possible?"

Environmentally or ecologically sustainable development (ESD) has presented a similar danger. For example, a major new housing development on the fringe of a city may include the state-of-the-art 'green' features such as solar orientation, energy efficient housing design and 'water sensitive urban design', and consequently be presented as ESD, and therefore the sort of thing needing to be done in pursuit of sustainability. However, what the development really represents is one of many similar urban fringe residential growth areas where remnant bushland (and its associated fauna etc) and existing or potential agricultural land has been replaced by a new housing area which will add further population to the city, increasing pressure on natural and infrastructure systems. In other words, although superficially seeming to warrant a tick in the 'sustainable' box, it is really not sustainable at all.

2. Page 18: ref. proposal that the final Strategy will be implemented over the next 5 to 10 years: real sustainability will take much longer than this, particularly to make the sort of changes required to our economy to transform it from essentially a 'growth'

dependent economy to one which does not depend on growth. For example, imagine the sort of changes required to Perth's economy to make it one which does not depend so much on continued growth of new suburbs, and the implications of this for the land development and home building industries, and related industries such as furniture, white goods etc suppliers.

The reference on page 22 (last para.) to the long time which will be required for the necessary change to be made to the world economy similarly applies at much more local levels.

3. Page 22, last para, last line: this seems to contain a typo., and should presumably read "...that did not take into account ....."
4. Page 28: Foundation Principle headed 'Settlement efficiency and quality of life'; this principle is supported, however how on earth is a city's ecological footprint going to be able to be reduced if its population continues to grow. In short, do not pretend that a city is being directed down the path of sustainability (eg. through incorporation of 'green' design features in new suburbs) if the strategic plan for that city involves continued population growth, especially on its edges.
5. Page 30: 'Governance' vision: It would be great if our system of governance could be world famous in the manner described, however we have an awfully long way to go. Our government and most of its agencies still are locked into the mentality that 'growth is good' and to be sought after, and any sort of 'levelling out' (particularly in the economic area) is something to be viewed with concern and steps taken to put things on the rise again.
6. Page 30: 'Settlements' vision: this vision should include mention that the settlements are not growing (but given 5. above, this would presently be inconceivable).
7. Page 32, Table 1: 'Wealth increasing'; in other words growing. Why? This is not sustainable.

Table 1: 'Ecological footprint index per capita': why just 'per capita'? There should also be a total ecological footprint index, to ensure that the full impact of population growth is measured.

8. Page 55, quote by Royal Australian Planning Institute: reference to "... the direction and type of growth and development ....." : 'development' is something which can be consistent with sustainability, 'growth' is not.
9. Page 66, quote by CCI: ".... generating sustained economic growth." This is a good example of how 'sustainability' has been bastardised over recent years, particularly by economists and those involved in 'big business'. An economy cannot keep growing in perpetuity and therefore such growth cannot be called sustainable.
10. Page 70: It is agreed that information and monitoring is very important and it is particularly important that appropriate indicators are used eg. the size of urban areas: if they are continuing to grow then we should conclude that this is not sustainable.

11. Page 75: “The global population needs to stabilise, as a continuously growing population undermines sustainability”.: This is considered to apply not only at the global level but at all levels eg. Australia, WA, Perth.
12. Page 78: Vision: : “Global population is stable .....”: we need a similar vision for Australia, WA, Perth etc.
13. Page 80: “Biodiversity conservation is intimately linked to issues of population growth ....”: Agreed, however the draft strategy does not appear to propose any action relating to population growth.
14. Page 87: Vision: “....stabilised population growth”.: This is presumably referring mainly to global population growth, but should also refer to population growth at all levels (see 11. above). There should be indicators included regarding population growth.
15. Page 131: “... managing growth”.; “... redirect growth more sustainably.”: A good example of how planners have also become good at bastardising ‘sustainability’. If we are still talking about growth, then do not try and pretend that it is somehow being made sustainable through some type of ‘management’ or ‘redirection’.
16. Page 132, 1<sup>st</sup> para.: This rightly points out that for sustainability to be achieved, resource consumption (including land) must be reduced. Given this, how on earth can it be claimed that a city is being put on a path to sustainability if its strategic plan is still premised on significant ongoing population growth mainly occurring at the edge of the city, consuming adjacent native bushland and agricultural areas?
17. Page 134: ‘Managing Urban and Regional Growth’: What exactly does ‘redefining growth’ mean? It is perhaps being more honest than it means to be in that it intends giving new meanings to words such that we can continue to have a growing city and pretend that this is still somehow sustainable.

Regarding Liveable Neighbourhoods, it should not be thought that sustainability will be achieved through making new urban developments of the Liveable Neighbourhoods type (see 1. above). Liveable Neighbourhoods developments which are actually ‘on the ground’ are not really all that different to ‘conventional’ urban developments.

18. Page 135: Objective: “....managing urban and regional growth,....”: see 15. above. What does ‘population change’ mean?
19. Page 135: Indicators and targets: there should be indicators for the growth rate of urban areas (population and area): the lesser the rate (ideally zero) the better.
20. Page 142, proposed action 4.20: Regarding locating of new small businesses and ‘corner shop’ retail facilities in existing suburban communities: the former is generally facilitated through ‘home business’ and ‘home occupation’ provisions in

local Schemes. The matter of corner stores needs to be provided for in the initial planning and development of the community.

21. Page 175: "... and continuous urban growth continue to degrade the environment,...": At last, an acknowledgement of the problem presented by continuous urban growth; but the draft proposes no action on the matter.
22. Page 184: The issue of cultural change is considered very important as the move toward real sustainability involves just that ie. not just a superficial change to the way we think, act etc but a fundamental intrinsic change. This is also why the matter of getting the definition of sustainability right (see 1. above) is so important.
23. Page 194: Vision: This should also include something along the lines that business/the economy has been subject to a transition so that it is not dependent on continued population growth and growth of urban areas (see 2. above).
24. Pages 204, 205: the information and objective regarding the need to reduce the ecological footprint of the WA economy is considered very important and should be related to the issue of population growth.

Concluding comments:

- a) Real sustainability is seen to be essential, but will be extremely difficult to move toward as it involves 'stepping on so many toes'. eg. why would the many people whose livelihood depends on continued growth of new housing areas (land developers, house builders, tradespeople, furniture/white goods suppliers etc) seek to embrace any move to curtail growth of such areas? Why would the many small investors with rental properties wish to embrace a move which would be likely to mean a reduced demand for rental properties? Such interest groups will take a lot of convincing to accept something which will be so at odds with their own personal interests.

Possibly the only way that such people will be able to be convinced on the matter is basically to put the matter to them in quite dramatic and powerful terms, and this is where culture, the arts and the media have an important role. People need to know for example that if they do not allow these essential changes now, then they must be prepared to be confronted by their grandchildren and be asked: You were told about the problem; why didn't you do something about it?"

Personally, I am a town planner and if things happen as I think they should as indicated in this submission then there will be a lot of town planners (perhaps me included) who will be out of a job.

- b) It may be noted that most of the comments made above relate to the issue of population growth. In the past when planning strategies have been released for comment, the matter tends to get responded to as follows:
  - at the local level (say a local government), some people may object to local proposals for urban expansion. The response is that the broader city's strategic

plan provides for such urban expansion to accommodate future population growth, so the local plan has no choice but conform with the broader regional plan.

- at the city level, some people may object to proposals for the city to continue to grow. The response is that as long as the Federal government applies an immigration policy which enables a substantial number of immigrants into the nation each year, a significant percentage of those immigrants must be expected to seek to come to this city and consequently the plan for the city must seek to accommodate such continued population growth.

The above responses are all quite valid, and lead to the ultimate source of the issue which is the Federal Government's immigration policy. However, having identified the source, the position is taken of: 'well its out of our hands; all we can do is continue to plan to accommodate a growing population'.

Where the real problem arises is that rather than acknowledging that we are going to continue down an unsustainable path, it is argued that continued population growth and sustainability can go hand-in-hand. Some even argue that population growth facilitated through high immigration levels is necessary for sustainability, referring to a 'coffin' population pyramid which would result if we do otherwise.

It is agreed that we cannot turn off the 'population tap' immediately: it would need to occur over time (but not too long a time) to allow the necessary economic structural adjustments to be made. But at least the relevant strategies should identify this as our vision and start to put in place the necessary changes. The draft sustainability strategy does not do this, but it should. One of the key actions it should include in this regard is that the State lobby, on an ongoing basis, the Federal Government to adopt an immigration policy which will lead to a stabilisation of the nation's population. The State should similarly seek to lobby the other State's for their support on this matter.

I hope these comments may be of some assistance.

Yours faithfully

**PHIL THOMPSON**