

Quinns Rocks Environmental Group

10 March 2003

Professor Peter Newman
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
15th Floor
197 St. George's Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Professor Newman

STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The Quinns Rocks Environmental Group welcomes the State Government's efforts to develop a sustainability strategy for WA. We are a local community organisation promoting conservation and sustainability. To us sustainability involves reducing our ecological footprint, enhancing quality life for all and ensuring what we do contributes to a better future. Following are our comments on the draft State Sustainability Strategy.

Facilitating Change

The draft strategy proposes a range of positive measures, though many need to go beyond studies and guidelines to make a real difference. The State Sustainability Strategy must establish a framework for a sustainable future. The way we live, work and govern is, in many ways, not sustainable, as we see in too many cases of environmental decline and social disadvantage. The strategy must facilitate change and to work it must build broad community support.

The government needs to show leadership by putting sustainability into practice. Sustainability needs to be a guiding philosophy across government, business and the community. The State Government can take a lead through fair and effective community participation, improved environmental performance of agencies and using sustainability assessment to inform decision-making.

As Dr Stephen Dovers noted at the WA Collaboration's recent Sustainability Summit, we cannot pursue sustainability adequately through current structures. Proposals for a commission for sustainability should be considered to drive learning and change within and beyond government – this should be in the final strategy.

Promoting awareness and dialogue about sustainability is important. It is a big idea, and it needs to be understood and supported if we are to put it into action. A critical step is setting tangible sustainability targets and indicators to define where we want to be and measure what progress is being made. This should be a key action in the final strategy.

Local priorities

Quinns Rocks is on the northern edge of urban Perth. The local population has grown significantly over the past fifteen years and will grow further as more suburbs develop. Bushland continues to be cleared even though Perth is within one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Outer suburbs like ours are very car dependent; those without a car are at a disadvantage, household spend a lot on transport and everyone is vulnerable to predicted oil decline. People have limited access to employment and social services; most people car commute to jobs a long way from home. Water is scarce and energy use adds to greenhouse gas emissions, yet most new homes have water hungry gardens and few have solar hot water units or passive solar design.

Much can be done to make our local community, and other, more sustainable. The public and private capital being put into new suburbs and infrastructure could be used to enhance environmental performance and better meet social needs. Community and government could work together to address local issues like unemployment, opportunities for youth, public transport services and bushland conservation.

From this local perspective we see the priorities for a sustainable future as:

- Act to protect WA's biological diversity by ending land clearing (including clearing for urban development), tackling weeds and feral animals and supporting conservation efforts in and outside reserves. The proposed Biodiversity Conservation Act and strategy (action 2.7) should be a priority.
- Develop and implement a State Greenhouse Strategy that will actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions (page 87). Successive governments have avoided effective action, it is time to cut WA's growing emissions. Enhancing energy efficiency in industry, workplaces, houses and the transport system and facilitating much greater use of renewable sources is important (priority actions could include 4.22, 4.68, 4.71, 4.80).
- A growth management strategy should be prepared for metropolitan Perth. It should outline actions to stop urban sprawl e.g. urban growth boundary and full-cost headworks charges, and ensure more integrated development where it will do the most good, e.g. local population targets, precinct planning. The draft strategy says the Future Path study will promote debate about urban growth (action 4.3), but to date there has been little sign that alternatives to sprawl are being seriously considered. An important corollary of limiting urban growth is reviving established suburbs and country centres to, where appropriate, accommodate population growth (e.g. actions 4.7 – 4.12).
- Perth's outer suburbs face significant challenges such as transport disadvantage, lack of local employment and loss of bushland. Ways to enhance the sustainability of these areas needs attention too. Better integrating transport and land use should be part of this, including extending the northern suburbs railway and making stations at Clarkson and Brighton a focus for mixed use development (page 141).
- The draft strategy proposes progressive implementation of Bush Forever (proposed action 4.5). Protecting urban bushland is important, unfortunately Bush Forever includes too many compromises and failed to address so called

'locally significant' bushland. A local example is bushland on Lot 2 Burns Beach. The EPA has twice recognised four-fifths of the site to be of high conservation value but the State Government plans a compromise where significant bushland would be lost as it has not committed any additional funds to land acquisition. Merely implementing Bush Forever is not enough to protect urban bushland.

- Reducing resource use and waste is fundamental to a more sustainable society. The huge volume of solid waste dumped in landfills like that at Tamala Park / Mindarie shows that we have a long way to go. The Waste 2020 vision should be pursued through cleaner production initiatives, community recycling and composting programs, market development for recyclables and action on hazardous waste (pages 149 – 150). Some land councils offer comprehensive kerbside recycling, green waste collecting and educational programs to reduce waste, where as others (like ours) have a basic, inadequate scheme – encouraging best practice in municipal waste management is important.
- How can we promote less resource intensive ways of living? Challenging our materialist culture is difficult, but an ethic of “enough” rather than “more” is needed to reduce environmental impacts and inequity. Actions to reduce water and energy consumption are supported, especially 4.53, 4.58, 4.60, 4.71. Measures to better reflect real costs in the price of resources, travel and infrastructure should be in the final strategy.
- Social and cultural dimensions of sustainability need attention too. This should include supporting disadvantaged groups, giving people a chance to influence decisions affecting their lives, encouraging healthier lifestyles and building sense of place.

Other suggestions for action were made in our submission on the Focus on the Future discussion paper in April 2002.

Making it happen

The State Sustainability Strategy is a significant initiative. Making it happen depends on building commitment within government and throughout the community. Too often positive policy does not translate into action, let alone transform how things are done. The challenges we face locally, regionally and globally show that we need to make living sustainably on the Earth our priority.

We look forward to seeing the final strategy, as well as commitment and funding for the actions it sets. We also hope to contribute to its implementation together with others in our local community.

Yours sincerely,

David Wake

for Quinns Rocks Environmental Group Inc.