



State Sustainability Strategy Draft
Sustainability Policy Unit
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Government of Western Australia
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Perth WA 6000

“Submission to The Western Australian Stage Sustainability Strategy Draft”

Sustainable Development Facilitation is a private sector company with a focus on supporting businesses, government and community organisations in improving processes towards more sustainable outcomes. We also have a commitment to working with Aboriginal communities and young people.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The main thrust of the State Sustainability Strategy is ground breaking and in general SDF is strongly in support of the goals and strategic actions. There are two significant points that we believe should be given a higher emphasis. These are articulated below and would better enable sustainability processes to achieve nominated outcomes and targets.

Small-Medium Business

One of the most obvious omissions from this document is the lack of emphasis placed on the potential of small business in the sustainability process. There is little information in the document to show how the potential of small businesses can be harnessed to benefit from, and contribute to, sustainability.

A lot of the business that is focussed on in the Strategy relates to industry, however there is not a great deal of focus on the commerce, services and tourism sectors. This is a significant gap given that eco-tourism for example, is very important to achieving sustainable development.

Small to medium-sized Enterprises (SME's) not only account for 93% of all businesses and employ 42% of the total workforce, contributing 29% to GDP in Australia but are also significant contributors to broader social, economic and environmental objectives. Over 80% of the environmental and research and development sector is being progressed through SMEs. In WA, organisations such as the WA Sustainable Industries Group, the Australian Corporate Citizenship Association and the Chamber of Commerce do not only cover major mining industries but also include a wide variety of small commercial and service-orientated enterprises. Such enterprises provide a high proportion of the economic activity that contributes to the prosperity of the State, the employment to assist in producing quality of life for individual families, and resourcing (skills and funds) for community activities.

The Strategy acknowledges that small businesses "...have difficulty accessing ethical investment funds and that government can play a useful role in linking Western Australian innovations for sustainability with these funds" (Page 202, *Focus on the future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*, Consultation Draft). However it is not clear *how* the Government will do this. Specific strategies need to be drafted that will demonstrate how this might be achieved.

In fact it is admitted that "the majority of the issues discussed in this document in terms of sustainability assessment and greenhouse for example, are directed at larger businesses rather than small business." (Page 196, *Focus on the future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*, Consultation Draft). Given that small business is a leading employer in Australia today, far more emphasis should be placed on demonstrating ways that Western Australian small businesses can actively and realistically operate in a sustainable manner. Strategies need to be developed that address ways to include the small business sector. For example:

- Supporting marketing initiatives such as buy local campaigns for local produce.
- Rewarding small business that contribute to more sustainable processes, perhaps with a "sustainability" logo
- Support collaborative community, environment, small business partnerships – these exist extensively through local sponsorship, Rotary clubs, Chambers of Commerce, etc.
- Facilitating local small business contact with innovation in sub-contracting and export supply opportunities that contribute to more sustainable production processes.
- Increase awareness of best practice such as recycling, water conservation, renewable energy sources and land management through the small business sector.

Decision making processes

The Sustainability Strategy does not demonstrate the increasing importance of multi-stakeholder decision-making processes. We believe this is a critical aspect of progressing towards more sustainable processes and needs to be highlighted further in the document.

Government decision-making processes at present tend to be unilateral, although there has been an increase in consultation processes in recent years. However, to broaden understanding of the long term community, economic and environmental impacts, there must be greater participation of community and industry to government decision-making – and visa versa. Vennings and Higgins: (Towards Sustainability: Emerging Systems for informing Sustainable Development. UNSW Press 2001 (pp 8-9) suggest that “new systems are required to inform decision-makers in the context of sustainability.”

Multi-stakeholder processes are sometimes seen as being cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive. However, there is a growing appreciation worldwide that consistency, inclusion and transparency in decision-making across all stakeholder organisations in a decision-making process can yield huge benefits in sustainability. Hemmati (Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability; Beyond Deadlock and Conflict, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London, U.K. 2002 (pp 212-213) proposes an overall framework for stakeholder processes and describes the steps required for a successful multi-stakeholder interaction. Hemmati's work provides insight to the complexity of agendas, intentions and internal organisational processes that impact on achieving real outcomes in sustainable development. Linkage into official decision-making is seen as a nexus in the process.

A better awareness of how decision-making processes can respond to specific issues facing the various sectors and communities through multi-stakeholder processes, as well as relying on generic sustainability principles will improve decision-making processes. In *The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*, Consultation Draft, the process for understanding and responding to the different needs of each sector, and how decision-making processes can be improved is not clear.

We hope these few comments assist and wish you well in further work on the document and subsequent implementation of the Strategy.

Yours truly,

Dorothy Lucks

Executive Director
5th March 2003

