

State Sustainability Strategy – Consultation Draft

The current Government of Western Australia is to be commended on its attempt to consider the concept of sustainability – something by its very nature long term, and likely to cross the boundaries of terms of office.

The State Sustainability Strategy, as presented, contains many worthy visions, objectives and proposed actions.

However, an opportunity will be lost if there does not exist the political will to make the ‘truly tough’ decisions necessary to provide meaningful direction to the community. ‘Truly tough’ decisions will necessitate ability and desire to:

(a) Challenge traditional philosophies/midsets

Only by challenging traditional philosophies/mindsets will we bring about the major behavioural change now necessary to halt the very high levels of environmental degradation in our State.

Management of our water resources is a good example of this. As a community we are locked into a very European mindset. We currently waste ~50% of our water supplies on trying to maintain a landscape that is totally inappropriate to our climate. Lawns, grass verges, and exotic plant species soak up these vast amounts of our precious resource, and leave us in a permanent state of ‘crisis’. The phrase ‘local sense of place’ (p152) is a good one and it would be a step in the right direction if we could celebrate being Australia (with its own unique natural landscapes) rather than continually trying to imitate somewhere else.

There is much work to be done here. Corporate culture is still trapped in this European mindset, as evidenced when the Water Corporation promotes new developments such as Ellenbrook as being ‘waterwise’. The continued promotion of manicured lawns and reticulated flowerbeds is surely not the way forward.

As a community we should start to view the use of reticulation as something of a ‘last resort’, certainly not the norm. Organisations such as the Water Corporation should be positioning itself as a leader here, now. It is not sufficient to continue to exploit new water resources to compensate for current and continuing inappropriate water management.

Grass not only consumes vast amounts of our precious water resource, but has also been responsible for the severe degradation of our native bushland via its invasive nature.

(b) Discontinue the practice of allowing overseas interests/multinational companies to exploit and degrade WA's natural environment

An example of this is within the mining industry. Many mining interests are controlled by multinational companies, and although their activity provided employment and economic activity of communities – at what price?

A good example of this is Alcoa and Yarloop, a community now devastated by uncontrolled highly toxic airborne emissions.

There needs to be development, but it must be ecologically sustainable. Creating a regulatory and control body for environmental protection which deals with development proposals thoroughly, would be a step in the right direction.

Much more stringent controls need to be applied to business and industrial activity as we learn more about the natural environment and the integrity of ecosystems, as well as the adverse health effects of inappropriate industrial activity.

(c) Value the expertise of the scientific community, and respect and support their guiding principles

An example of where this has **not** been forthcoming is with the issue of forests, and specifically with the recently published Draft Forest Management Plan (DFMP). On careful analysis certain key strategies proposed are inconsistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable management. On key management strategy proposed, i.e. to **'undertake a comprehensive biological survey of the forest regions as soon as resources permit'** (p65), is fundamental to this point.

This particular strategy (i.e. to carry out scientific survey work **only** if resources permit, some time in the future) is a clearly **not consistent** with 3 out of the 5 principles of ecologically sustainable management, namely Precautionary Principle, Intergenerational Equity and Conservation of Biodiversity and ecological Integrity. Further it could also be argued that this strategy could not have seriously been **guided** by such principles either.

As in the case of logging high conservation value forests, governments need to think much more creatively to produce positive outcomes for each of the three key areas – environment, social and economic. Bearing in mind that with extinction of species and ecological communities there's no 'second chances', we must learn to work differently, more smartly and with fewer negative side effects. It's a question of priorities, but good, thinking leadership can provide and support a structure that both protects biodiversity as well as social communities.

(d) Show genuine respect for our remaining ecological communities

Establishing comprehensive (real) controls on clearance of native vegetation, as well as stopping potentially highly damaging developments in ecologically sensitive areas will go some way to arresting the severe decline in our unique biodiversity.

(e) Take a leadership role in significant global movements/issues

With respect to a number of highly significant issues, WA has golden opportunity to learn from specific experiences overseas, and from these make careful, enlightened judgements and decisions in its own right as to how it acts. 'Blindly' following the lead of other countries (often guided by corporate interest), is not the act of responsible government, and WA is in an excellent position to show leadership in key areas relating to sustainable futures.

An example of this is GMO's. The negative social, economic and environmental impacts of the USA's adoption of GMOs in its agricultural industry are well documented and understood. Corporate (multinational) goas would still like to see Australia take on these products, irrespective of the potentially disastrous consequences for our own society.

Again the well-chosen phrase coined in the Strategy document ('sense of place') rings true. This is Australia, not the USA, and hopefully we will be able to truly reflect this in our considered approach to such a vitally important issue. Never more would we be advised to consider the scientific precautionary principle – the precarious state of many of our threatened species and ecological communities do not need any additional pressure.

By government taking a true leadership role, thinking and acting creatively and responsibly, advocating the need for greater focus on our behaviours in terms of cause and effect across the full range of societal activities, other organisations and educational establishments will be guided and supported in the area of sustainability values, which in tern will promote a 'virtuous circle' effect.

Respectfully,

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