

# **SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPES**

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## **A BACKGROUND PAPER PREPARED FOR THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

### **Abstract**

An integrated approach is required to enhance sustainability to ensure environmental, economic and social goals are met. Sustainability issues need to be considered on a whole of catchment approach rather than in isolated pockets and need to be addressed by all sections of the community. Values the community places on cultural heritage and landscapes may include use and non-use values, and both should be factored into the decision making process regarding the socially optimal management of resources. It is important that communities assume 'a sense of place' like that being developed at the Kojonup Reconciliation Centre to maintain individual well-being. To ensure sustainability of our cultural heritage and landscapes protection from the unsympathetic use and development of our landscapes is vital and may be achieved through improved planning and community education. Provision could also be made for one organisation to accept responsibility for the listing of cultural heritage and landscapes sites.

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## **Introduction**

Sustainability is a concept, which has evolved over recent decades as a means to ensure consideration of the environment into all future decision making. It involves rethinking development to integrate environmental, economic and social goals. To be sustainable development must protect and restore ecological systems, improve economic efficiency and enhance the well being of the population. In the past the focus on sustainable development has tended to concentrate on conventional economic activity such as agriculture, mining, forestry, fisheries and manufacturing rather than population well-being. The loss of a 'sense of place' within sectors of the community is a factor of vital concern in this discussion of sustainability of cultural heritage and landscapes. It is recognised that changes of attitude and behaviour by both the community and planners are necessary.

## **Issue Analysis and description**

Landscape can be described as the way a person interprets, interacts and reacts to the natural and cultural elements of their environment so has an important place in our biophysical, visual and cultural experience (Water notes Water and Rivers Commission, 2000). Cultural landscapes are therefore considered to be about people gaining and maintaining a 'sense of place' in their community, and people in a place feeling confident in that place. Our recognition of a site as being pleasant or important is a first step in planning how it can be preserved and managed for the enjoyment of people.

The quality and values placed on the environment by the community are increasingly under pressure from rapid change in land use. Awareness of those elements, which result in valuing a landscape, can contribute to decisions about development which are sympathetic to the landscape and associated heritage values. For example it is possible to build a structure in keeping with the landscape and from sustainable

building materials. Value may be considered, as anything which adds to human well-being so does not restrict values to benefits from only the direct use of a resource.

Environmental goods such as cultural heritage and landscapes exist without organised markets, and are often omitted from the decision making process regarding the socially optimal management of resources. Often when governments do value the environment it tends to be valued by a cost approach rather than by estimating the benefits (Garrod and Willis, 2000). Cultural heritage and landscapes have use and none-use values and in order for these to be properly managed it is important that values be accurately estimated. Use values are generally those generated by individuals who use a specified resource such as walking through a park. Non-use values are those values which are often not observable, such as a person knowing a species has been protected even if they never see it, and are not able to be measured within a market situation.

### **Key sustainability issues**

The major sustainability issues relating to cultural heritage and landscapes include the need for protection from unsympathetic use and development of the landscape, and the change of cultural landscapes due to economic incentives to change. In rural areas some people have moved into areas initially seeking a lifestyle change, however as money is lost in the venture so are life choices until eventually no choice remains and these individuals may feel trapped and in a powerless situation. A feeling of a 'sense of place' amongst the population is critical in wheat belt areas, where declining use and productivity of the land has resulted in numerous members of the community leaving these regions. Serious health problems arise, as people see no future in the landscape or have lost touch with their landscape (Hopkins and Horwitz 2001). Similar problems occur within the rangelands, where decreasing populations also occur. Where once perhaps 10 families made up a small community, properties are now managed by an owner and family and traditional land use has become marginal. Generally in each of these examples a massive landscape decline has emerged with an accompanying loss of empowerment to the landowner and a diminished sense of well being within the community. A further example where changes to the cultural heritage and landscapes due to economic incentives have resulted in losses includes

the Capes area in the South West of Western Australia, where pastoral practices are now being replaced by investment in viticulture.

Several barriers exist which restrict sustainability in regard to cultural heritage and landscapes. The most important of these is a serious lack of community, local government and industry awareness and education, about the concept of sustainability. No organisation or body is responsible for cultural heritage and landscapes, although the Heritage Council takes responsibility for registered parks and buildings and the National Trust of Australia has an interest in buildings and bushland. ([www.ntwa.com.au](http://www.ntwa.com.au)) Inadequate funding has been allocated by state governments as the issue has not been regarded as a priority to date and Cultural Heritage Advisors are not common.

### **Existing Action**

Currently the Heritage Council provides professional expertise through the employment of five Regional Heritage Advisors and Government support is provided through the Regional Heritage Advisory Service. Information is provided on heritage assessment, conservation, review of Municipal Inventories and the establishment of local incentive schemes. Local government bodies have the planning control to protect and conserve cultural heritage and landscapes in partnerships with local communities.

A local example of a best practice situation to enhance the 'sense of place' within a community exists in the town of Kojanup where the Kojanup Reconciliation Centre has been established over the previous eighteen months. This centre, to be officially opened shortly is named 'Kodja Place' after the stone axe local Aboriginal people used in the past. This represents a combined reconciliation/community based project where a combination of facilities is provided for all members of the community to access.

Resources are being gathered to demonstrate the evolution of the landscape through to the present day within the museum and multi media laboratory. The facility enables interested members of the community to scan photos, create video and DVD resources

in an attempt to create a living picture story. People have the opportunity to tell their own story, and describe their own sense of place. The use of multi media facilities was intuitively expected to appeal to younger members of community so that fewer non-productive activities were engaged in and it was hoped to also engage the imagination of the older people. Positive outcomes have been achieved to date where members of the community are seen to be working together so that capacity building is occurring within the community.

### **Strategies for Change**

To enhance the sustainability of cultural heritage and landscapes a whole of community approach should be undertaken. The greatest changes could be brought about through education to provide training in sustainable practices for community members, and government bodies. Strong partnerships and effective collaboration between interested parties such as local government bodies and community organisations, if developed further, would enhance sustainability practices with regard to the cultural heritage and landscapes issue. These strategies could comfortably be put into place in the short and medium term provided funding is made available through local government, community and museum workshops.

With a community development process in place, some of the negative effects of massive landscape decline could be minimised and these processes would also partly meet the need to empower landowners and community members.

Community development processes could be undertaken to interpret a 'sense of place' in terms of the entire catchment rather than simply be related to buildings or a small township. If the whole community and changes made to cultural heritage and landscapes were be viewed as parts of the same situation, then a well-integrated approach could be developed. The State Heritage Register already in existence to list heritage sites could also be useful to register cultural landscapes and recognise any overlap. If this remained vested in the control of the Heritage Council with adequate funding and appropriate expertise then an integrated approach could be maintained.

## **Measuring Progress**

In order to ensure the correct pathway has been taken towards sustainability of cultural heritage and landscapes, progress measurement should be continual.

Currently, State of the Environment reports are written annually and may provide a regular source of information for comparison. Surveys focussed on community wellness could be implemented to measure attitudinal shifts and ensure cherished memories and experiences are valued. Surveys and census data could also indicate changes in population trends and assist to monitor progress.

While members of the community feel they have nothing to hope for and no 'sense of place' the social aspects of sustainability are not met, however, once that perspective is changed so that community members are more appreciative of and value aspects of their cultural heritage and landscapes they are likely to share a greater sense of well being.

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