

# SUSTAINABILITY: THE WAY AHEAD?

**15 April, 2002 Professor Peter Newman, Director, Sustainability Policy Unit, Department of the Premier, 15th Floor, 197 St George's Terrace, PERTH, W.A. 6000**

Dear Professor Newman

FOCUS on the FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES for SUSTAINABILITY in WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The PEEL PRESERVATION GROUP welcomes the chance to comment on this document and, as directed, will endeavour to fit our submission into the patterns prescribed:

## **Box 1 Key Questions**

*Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?*

Yes - The essential point is that it must be pursued with determination by all sections of the community. While it is commendable that individuals adjust their lives to this end, the good derived is soon dissipated if local government is slow to give a lead and the next level - big business, land developers, forestry and mineral and energy resource consumers are beavering away at ever increasing use of all resources, aided and abetted by some state and the federal government who apparently believe MORE IS BETTER.

*What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?*

The benefits would mean ongoing scientific research followed by governmental will to action the findings and provide the infusion of funding to bring about true sustainability for this generation and those to follow. Implementation must be led from the top. To expect funding of research to be in the hands of local and international big business is to close one's eyes to the fact that such research often has the result for which such enterprises are paying - primarily to benefit themselves, and any benefit to the rest of the world community is purely coincidental.

A better question may have been What detriment will there be if sustainability is not taken seriously? The list is long and frightening.

*In (our) experience what opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?*

Every opportunity exists, but will is required to bring it about. A huge opportunity existed at the time of the of the Kyoto protocol, but miserable responses by USA and Australia were big disappointments to conservation groups throughout the world. So, the first 'dot point' in Box 3 "Economic strategies for sustainability" should read truthfully that 'Part of the world is committing to greenhouse targets leaving behind two of the greatest consumer nations on earth, with Australia set to lose the most in biodiversity'. Had Australia and USA committed to the reduction of greenhouse gases at the time of the Kyoto gathering, we would have seen progress towards sustainability already under way and consultations such as this redundant. Immediate commencement to phase out and positively discourage the use of fossil fuels, the main source of harmful emissions. Provide incentives for their replacement with alternative energy sources.

*What is the role of government, business and the community in facilitating change to be more sustainable?*

Government has to lead and to do that must legislate. What appears to be happening here is that Western Australian government is about to introduce a 'Strategy'. Perhaps we should ask a question. Where does a 'Strategy' lie in relation to a 'Policy' or a 'Plan' ? We pretty well know by now that all are just guidelines and unless something becomes law, nobody takes very much notice. There are enormous piles of expensive documents containing idealistic ideas, beautifully worded, probably are gathering dust and we can but hope that the promised publication to arise from this paper will not just add to that volume.

Business will have input and we trust innovative ideas, but it must also listen to the needs of the existing community when addressing sustainability and not just heed its own profit target. This may require a reversion to more labour intensive ways of production to save energy but should, at the same time, go some way to solving the high unemployment problem which has been with us so long and has

to be credited with other social ills, i.e. drug use, crime and the suicide rate of the young. The general community, PPG believes, is already responding to the call to sustainability by reducing its consumption rate (our ecological footprint) and waste creation. Inevitably, more will be called for.

Prof. Ian Lowe (School of Science), Griffiths University, at "Sustaining Our Communities", Adelaide - 3-6 March, 2002. There is confused debate - 100 definitions = 'Ability to be sustained', anything else avoids the question - gives no real strategies for coping with population growth - World oil production will peak in 20 years; within our lifetime it will be scarcer and more expensive - to illustrate the scale of the problem - consumption = 40-50 years for the entire world. At the Australian rate of consumption world wide = only 1-2 years; predicted on the assumption that there will be a global underclass; that there will be cheap and readily available petroleum.' 'One Australian summer day produces the same amount of energy as the world's usage. So, there is no shortage of energy; just a prospect of managing the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy.'

*What best practice examples exist, if any, to demonstrate how sustainability is being progressed?*

PPG believes the examples of Denmark, Sweden and Germany, all progressive and industrialised countries, should give a lead to other developed nations. Copenhagen has reduced energy use by 22%, car 291%, bus 1.56% and diesel train 1.44%. Denmark for its promotion of wind-power, produced by labour intensive methods. Germany for its high level of environmental input into its law making.

*What research and development is needed to ensure sustainability outcomes can be achieved?*

Financial incentives are required to encourage research into alternative energy sources, non-polluting agricultural practices and answers to the extent to which Australia can afford to continue to consume its biological resources. Building and construction industry should be obliged to incorporate latest research and be rated on its ability to produce ecologically efficient housing, commercial and industrial buildings. Solid scientific research, not debate, must be initiated into what is a sustainable population for our unique Australian conditions.

*In a more general sense, what else should Western Australia be doing to contribute nationally, regionally and globally to progress sustainability?*

Though our capital city is the most remote in the world, Western Australia can still take a lead in protecting our natural resources, reducing over-consumption and beginning to operate in a way which is truly sustainable, thus ensuring the future of our natural environment together with the flora, fauna and human load it supports. Accepting responsibility on such issues as uranium mining and greenhouse gas emissions; acknowledging that they contribute to problems well beyond our national boundaries.

## **Box 2. Different Perspectives**

In order not to become repetitive, all those listed in Box 2 will have a contribution towards sustainability; professionals through scientific study, schools through education, indigenous groups because they understand sustainability from their hunting and gathering past, when it was imperative that nature's bounty was used and not abused. Among community groups, Peel Preservation Group, as the leading environmental group in this area, with its stated commitment to preserving the natural qualities of the Peel-Harvey Catchment and Estuary and the natural bio-diversity and integrity of life, is doing its utmost towards sustainability.

Mandurah is fortunate in its local government in that City of Mandurah has been a leader in implementing Agenda 21 principles and has achieved Stage 3 in Cities for Climate Protection. Government Agencies have not been included in the list, but agencies like Peel Inlet Management Authority, Water and Rivers, Fisheries and CALM must be adequately funded in order that they may continue their vital work in catchments, waterways, national parks, reserves, natural bushland, coastal and marine habitats. PIMA and Water and Rivers 'Economic Development and Recreation Management Plan for the Peel Waterways' (in draft) is a document that pulls no punches in stating very clearly '....Peel Waterways will not be able to sustain the increased recreational demands of expected population growth. Under such stress, the environment will decline further unless resources are found for action in the catchment to improve water quality throughout the system, and affirmative action to restore the environment and habitats of the rivers, particularly the Murray'.

Social welfare groups are most aware of inequality in our society. It has been one of their roles to state the realities and they are telling us of the ever growing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

## **BIG GAP No. 1**

Before advancing to BOX 3, PPG draws your full attention to the huge gap in your document in that it makes no comparison/relationship between population - resources - consumption - sustainability. Such a relationship cannot be denied, avoided or dismissed when discussing the whole question of sustainability. Immediate scientific research must hone in on to what extent this dry, infertile land of ours can be exploited. Dr. Barney Foran (eminent scientist with the CSIRO at 25 Feb Population Summit, Melbourne) said "Australia needs to reduce resource use to 30% of the current levels (i.e. a 70% reduction) before population growth would be sustainable". That analysis was lost or ignored amid enthusiastic calls by those pushing the population growth line. Growth must be related to population - an increase in population leads directly to an increase in consumption levels. Economists and business interests may see increased population as equating to an increase in GDP, but what happens to the environment and sustainability if this attitude is endorsed? There are no answers right now, and until there are scientifically researched answers all immigration (or encouragement by religious groups for increased fertility) must be 'on hold', unless those arriving and those already here in Australia are prepared to accept a dramatic reduction in our standard of living and the decimation of our environment. There will be no chance to turn back if this is allowed to happen. David Suzuki said "If you don't know how to fix it, don't keep breaking it." Media Statement issued on the 25.2.2002 from the Hon. Geoff Gallop states;-"It is critical for the long-term future of Australia that we ensure population is maintained at ecologically sustainable levels..... Population policy and sustainable natural resource management are intimately linked." N.S.W. Premier, Bob Carr, said on 18.3.2002 in answer to a target growth of 50million for Sydney "Small and well formed ... let's leave it that way...More and more of them, I believe, understand that Australia has problems with water and soil. In other words we have limited carrying capacity. I sense Australians are smart enough to want to be one of those clever nations that creates wealth with a relatively small but highly educated population." Later in his article he said "population size is not the determinant of economic prosperity. Think of Indonesia (212 million) and Bangladesh (137 million) Competitiveness is not determined by population size. Last October the world Economic Forum rated Finland as the world's most competitive economy. With a population of 5 million, it is smaller than NSW." Graham Harris (CSIRO) at Enviro2002, 8 April, commenting on the possibility of human population levelling off in the next fifty years "...we will require double the present supply of energy, materials and water... Water is the big issue for the next 50 years."

## **BIG GAP No. 2 WATER**

Water requires a chapter of its own. We are running out of time to deal with the problem. PPG believes your document has not given water sufficient prominence and requests that during Phase 2 and particularly the implementation of Phase 3, this will be rectified. Apart from water being mentioned in the body of your introduction, under "Global and local sustainability issues" where it advised that 'more than half of the earth's accessible fresh water is now being used, directly or indirectly', water only gets a mention in the invitation to comment at the end of Box 3 and then it is bracketed with waste management. Currently, Australia's use of water is far from sustainable, and will continue to be so, while we use potable (drinking) water to flush our toilets and water our lawns. Neither can the use of groundwater, via private bores in Western Australia, be allowed to continue without cost (other than normal maintenance of pipe and pump) to the user. This is even more important in Mandurah, where the supply is finite; the aquifer is not replenishing. Meters will have to be installed and a charge made. Don McFarlane (Water and Rivers' Director of Science and Evaluation) has stated the 25-year dry spell is expected to continue, with groundwater supplies falling since 1969 and dam levels declining since 1974. Following on the advice of Simon Toze (CSIRO) that storing of recycled water under ground in natural aquifers has been found to purge it of disease-causing organisms, this information must point the way to the desirability of recycling grey water and waste water instead of disposing of it via ocean outfalls. We now need to know the cost of infrastructure and feasibility of doing so. More importantly we need to know the cost, environmentally and socially of not doing so. We must conserve and not waste our drinking water. Rights in Water legislation made it adamant that sufficient water must be reserved for the wellbeing of the environment. More research and advice as to where compostable toilets are an acceptable alternative for new developments is an urgent requirement. The question must be asked, if our population is to treble, will there be sufficient water to satisfy all demands? Will it be distributed equitably or will some people or something (most likely the environment) go without? The Western Australian public needs to know the comparative costs in the way of taxes to provide the infrastructure to bring water from the Northwest as against desalination and the ultimate cost to the user. Will wasteful users have to pay more per kilolitre than those who are careful, or have smaller properties and lawns?

One thing is certain, Western Australia's water must never be privatised. Nor should water be privately owned in any part of water-short Australia. It is understood the United States has financially flourishing water corporations that earn revenues greater than Microsoft. Any moves by our federal government to aid and abet the privatisation of water here or elsewhere in the world is quite immoral, though it appears private ownership of water is being fostered in developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through the coercion of loans depending on the 'restructuring' of the water sector; meaning that they favour commercially owned commodities in order to reduce public debt. Australia has made commitments through the section labelled 'environmental services' of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) currently covering sewerage, sanitation and waste disposal, which our Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is negotiating to have extended to 'environmental media, i.e. air, water, solid and hazardous waste, noise, etc.'

The right to water must not be signed away in this manner. Having written the foregoing, there was the TV news announcement that W.A. dams are at 18% of capacity with no improvement expected as we enter another El Nino weather pattern and that sprinkler bans will come into force for the rest of the year. WE ARE ALREADY AT CRISIS POINT ! The Minister's response to this crisis, i.e. the putting of more bores into our groundwater (in order to ensure his popularity and continued wasteful use) is anything but satisfactory.

### **Box 3 Responses to Questions on Sustainability Issues**

Sustainability, Governance and Society. We trust our governments will continue to be elected democratically. Here in Western Australia, the forestry issue played a large part in the 2001 election result, giving a clear indication of the community's appreciation of the importance of our environment. Therefore, it should naturally follow that government agencies, established to protect those values, should be funded in a way to fully facilitate their operations and ease the pathway to sustainability. Ways and means :-

- \* Legal framework for law reform towards sustainability : i.e. compulsory reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, with big penalties for non-compliance.
- \* Review and restructuring of outmoded planning laws
- \*Scrapping of Amarillo development, which goes against sustainability on all counts. (environmentally unsuitable - on wetland and palusplain, socially isolating and economically unworkable).
- \* Simplification of land clearing Law (see Environmental Defenders Office recent document).
- \*Land clearing without permission being treated as 'unauthorised development' and heavily penalised.
- \* Early updating of System 6 outside the metropolitan area, along the lines of Perth Bush Plan.
- \*Ordering removal of contaminated sites from urban areas with full and immediate rehabilitation at perpetrators' expense.
- \* Legislative controls and enforceable penalties for water pollution.
- \*Aim for nil waste by 2025.

### **Sustainability, Natural Resources Management and Biological Diversity**

First, the coast must have an Act of its own. The size and importance of Western Australia's coast demand a legal framework to cover :-

- i Future urban development and re-development along coast, estuaries and adjacent waterways to have minimum foreshore reserves of at least 150 metres, with similar protection for significant wetlands and mud flats.
  - ii Marine Parks to protect marine species and ecosystems
  - iii Limits on fish size and take for professional and recreational users
  - iv. Total banning of pollutant discharge into rivers, estuaries and ocean (this includes government operated wastewater outfalls)
- \* The future of our productive agricultural and grazing land will be enhanced by education and encouragement of sustainable farming practices by researching alternative, more diverse cropping and

adoption of farming methods suitable to Australian conditions, rather than continuing to pursue European style farming in our dry conditions and less fertile soils.

\*The introduction of harsher penalties for over clearing and support of EDO's proposed land clearing reforms.

\*Immediate steps to reverse loss of agricultural land to salinity.

\*Improve access to technologies which can locate, predict and warn localities of the likelihood of expansion of salinity if unsustainable agricultural practices continue.

\*The introduction of land tax relief for farmers, graziers and environmentalists to encourage the setting aside of native bushland for conservation.

\*State government support of local government in their desire to protect regional bio-diversity, the retention of wildlife corridors, nodal development and the maintenance of tourism potential

\* Confining wood chipping to plantation timber.

### **Economic Strategies for Sustainability**

\*Financial incentives by government (possibly in the form of Tax relief) for the early development of alternative sustainable energy sources, i.e. solar thermal, biomass, wind and photovoltaics. These are the keys to the West's prosperity and a healthy future

\*Western Australia's bio-diversity offers huge scope for research and development into its medicinal use.>

\*Establishment of Waste Management Authorities. The correct handling of waste, recycling and re-use saves money and provides employment. Aim for zero waste by 2025

\* Australia's high incidence of asthma tells us that the implementation of Air Quality Management Plans will be socially and economically beneficial

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\* The road toll amounts to a health hazard, which must be reduced. The integration of public transport will ultimately save the cost of more and more freeways guaranteed to increase the use of the car to carry persons one at a time to his/her place of employment

\* Public transport should be the determinant of region form.

\* Discourage the present wasteful purchasing practices of supermarkets, whereby produce grown locally is by-passed in favour of buying at a central market, thus reducing freshness of the product by transporting it long distances (very long distances in the West) and then returning it to the area where it was produced to retail at greatly inflated prices because of the double handling. Wherever possible, locally produced goods and produce should be sold and consumed locally, not sent to a city market

\* Encouragement of new technology (by government subsidy for research or tax incentive) plus increasing the interest in the use of 'green' power, must go a long way to decreasing its cost to users and increasing interest in producing it

\* Enforced reduction of expensive, wasteful and misleading packaging and advertising.

\* Encouragement of the consumption of naturally produced food and accurate labelling of genetically modified foods.

\* Thorough and immediate clean up of contaminated sites around the state, at the expense of the contaminator, will make available currently unusable land for housing or clean industry.

### **Social Strategies for Sustainability.**

The bogey of the future young generation having the burden of supporting an increasing ageing population should immediately be dispelled by allowing people, who would otherwise have no alternative but to go on the pension, to choose when to retire and not making retirement for them compulsory at 65. Better health and living conditions will result in a fitter old age for most. It is, therefore, waste of the worst kind to throw people on the scrap heap who would prefer to continue working, when they are capable of supporting themselves and benefiting from the dignity that brings.

These days many older people are expending time and effort doing voluntary or charitable work for the community. In fact, all levels of government expect it and would be worse off without it. Allow them to get off government support and earn a living wage if they prefer to do so.

Through education, the removal of stigma towards physical work; a strategy to promote health and reduce obesity.

Counter to advertising that promotes 'big label' goods produced at below living standard wages in third world countries.

Ensuring disadvantages faced by country dwellers are not reinforced by legislation guaranteed to increase the drift to the cities.

Remote settlements are ideal for the implementation of alternative energy sources with resulting improvement in economic benefits, health and well being.

Western Australia's climate, clean seas, marine life, diverse and profuse flora, fauna and migratory bird life, makes it an ideal eco-tourism destination which should be promoted as such with precautions in place for the protection of all elements.

Ecologically sustainable housing, will promote health and wellbeing and, in the long term, be of economic advantage because it requires less energy to keep it liveable and should achieve lower maintenance.

The whole community must ask itself, if it is willing to accept a much lower standard of living in order to continue the religion of consumerism by an uncapped population

The huge cost of infrastructure for such items as a Kimberley pipeline to bring additional water to the City (as outlined by Jim Gill of the Water Corporation - "West Australian" 8.3.2002) resulting in a cost of \$4 per kilolitre as against the present 70cents for scheme water, should indicate to any thinking person that conserving water by every mean possible is the better way to go.

## **Conclusion**

Peel Preservation Group would like to believe that the launching of this consultation paper, indicates that the Government and the Sustainability Policy Unit in particular, are well aware of the significance of the points raised and what the answers in response will be.

That anticipation should amply prepare the Policy Unit to come up with a well focussed and balanced policy, which we trust will lead the way, in this State at least, to sustainability. We must be able to leave a message for our descendants that we did what we could to ensure they would not have less of everything than we had.

Our best wishes, for PEEL PRESERVATION GROUP (Inc.)

K Malta J Te Puni

Secretary and Executive Committee Member.