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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Reference: Sustainability charter

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Thursday, 24 May 2007

Members: Dr Washer (*Chair*), Ms George (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Broadbent, Mr Entsch, Ms Hoare, Mr Jenkins, Mr Kerr, Mr McArthur, Mr Ticehurst and Mr Wood

Members in attendance: Mr Broadbent, Mr Entsch, Ms George, Mr Jenkins, Mr Kerr, Mr McArthur, Mr Ticehurst and Dr Washer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Key elements of a sustainability charter and identify the most important and achievable targets, particularly in relation to:

1. The built environment;
2. Water;
3. Energy;
4. Transport; and,
5. Ecological footprint.

WITNESSES

COLLIER, Mr Grahame Wilfrid, President, Australian Association for Environmental Education 1

CONSTANCE, Ms Sophie, Director, Societal Business; and Director, Eco-Society.org..... 1

CRAWFORD, Mr Julian, Director, EcoSTEPS Pty Ltd..... 1

EDE, Ms Sharon Anita, Private Capacity..... 1

LOUYS, Mr Pierre, Public Officer, Ways and Realistic Development to Sustainability Association 1

TILBURY, Professor Daniella, Director, Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability 1

Committee met at 10.44 am**COLLIER, Mr Grahame Wilfrid, President, Australian Association for Environmental Education****CONSTANCE, Ms Sophie, Director, Societal Business; and Director, Eco-Society.org****CRAWFORD, Mr Julian, Director, EcoSTEPS Pty Ltd****EDE, Ms Sharon Anita, Private Capacity****LOUYS, Mr Pierre, Public Officer, Ways and Realistic Development to Sustainability Association****TILBURY, Professor Daniella, Director, Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability**

CHAIR—Good morning, all. Thank you for coming today and joining in this final roundtable discussion for the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage inquiry into a sustainability charter. We are very interested in hearing your views on the formulation of a sustainability charter for Australia, and we are taking a more interactive approach today to allow for more discussion across the table. Specifically, we would like to involve you all in discussion on education and community engagement in the context of a national sustainability charter.

This roundtable will begin with a five-minute presentation from Professor Daniella Tilbury from the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability to kick-start discussion. Although I have indicated that we hope that this roundtable will be more interactive than our normal proceedings, I should still advise you that Hansard is making a record, which we propose to publish, and that the roundtable is considered to be a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The committee will not require you to make an oath, but please be aware that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. This should not, however, prevent you from putting forward your opinions or speculating about the best way forward. To start the discussion on the education and community engagements aspects of the sustainability charter, I invite Professor Daniella Tilbury from the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability to make a five-minute presentation on this topic, after which time a discussion among invited participants and committee members will ensue.

Professor Tilbury—Thank you very much. I would like to start by saying how grateful I am for the opportunity to talk to you about something that is a passion for me and those who work with me in my institute. I would also like to start with a statement: no country is sustainable or has come close to being sustainable. There is no proven recipe, there is no checklist that we can go through, and therefore there is no clear messages that we can give our people as to how to move towards sustainability. A very famous sustainability informant from overseas, Robert Prescott-Allen, reminds us that making progress towards sustainability is like going to a country we have never been to before. We do not have a map, we do not know what the destination looks like and we are just slowly making our journey there.

This realisation has huge implications for education and learning, because what the international community has come to realise is that sustainability is essentially an ongoing learning process. If we do not know where we are heading, we have got to learn in the process of making advances for sustainability. That sort of redefines a little bit how we have understood education—because in the past, we have seen it as curriculum content, as knowledge that we put in our schools, in our universities, as things we need to know. Sustainability challenges that. It is basically saying we need to learn by doing, we need to start taking steps and we need to start thinking about the alternative futures that we want because our current practices are not getting us there.

So, education needs to provide some space for people to work out the future that they want, and it needs to provide some space to take initial actions and reflect on whether they are getting us closer to sustainability or not. At the moment it tends to be able to prepare a lot of professionals and technical specialists in sustainability—our science particularly on climate change is very good in Australia and our science in terms of waste management is also a world leader—but what about the response? I think we are all aware that climate change is important, but how should we respond as an organisation, in our corporate sector, as a government agency, as schools, as universities. So I am talking not only in terms of the learning that we need to do as a group of people but also in terms of the implications for our organisations. Education and sustainability need to be more closely aligned.

I come from the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability, which is called ARIES. It is funded by the Australian government, because it is acknowledged that there is a need to tie learning more closely to sustainability. To actually achieve sustainability outcomes, we need to have learning embedded in policy and practice. The key goal of our institute is actually to find out how we do that. Our research has identified that there are a few problems, as well as some terrific practice. I would like to share with you some of the issues that have come up through our research. We find that there is an increasing number of people engaged with taking action for the environment in particular. As you know, the Clean Up Australia campaigns have involved more and more people every year. But, I am sad to say, the levels of litter are also increasing every year. We have a situation where there are more people realising something needs to be done but the problem is still there. Statistics are showing that the type of education and awareness raising that we are doing at the moment is not hitting the mark; it is not stopping these threats to the environment and our society.

A lot of the education that we are using at the moment is very much trying to stop pollution, trying to stop harmful activities and to stop detrimental ways of engaging with our world. It does not actually look at creating a better way forward. We need to stop and think about what the alternatives are. Having said that, there are some very good examples of how sustainability and learning can come together to deliver outcomes. In New South Wales, for example, the New South Wales government has done some terrific work with the emerging communities in Australia, the recent migrants, on how they embed sustainability in their thinking and practice. This is done not just by translating messages into their work, but actually thinking about the cultural implications, their understanding and what type of future they face within Australia, and using learning as a way of getting sustainability outcomes.

Local government agencies across Australia have done some terrific work in embedding what we call education for sustainability, which is this new type of education for change, within their

practices and raising the capacity of local communities to address sustainability. Corporate agencies have been terrific, and there are some wonderful examples of that. Australia is almost leading edge in that area of using learning as a way of getting outcomes—not just as a way of knowing more about the issues, but learning by doing to actually achieve some change, reducing their ecological footprint as well as looking at their contribution to society.

I guess the slowest sectors to respond have been some of the government agencies that are still investing very heavily in social marketing and using the old techniques of education—that if we pick up four or five key messages that are important and we pump them out and communicate them, people will understand and therefore change the way that they react and engage with our issues in society. Our research is showing that, unless social marketing is backed up by other ways of building the capacity of people to respond, it is not getting there. A huge amount of money has been invested in certain techniques that are not backed up by more meaningful ways of embedding learning and sustainability.

To sum up, because I realise my time is almost up, I would like to read to you a comment that was made in the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, a committee similar to this one that was run in the UK. Part of the conclusions of that committee was that: ‘Our fear is that current practice in education for sustainability is like expecting a dot-to-dot picture to yield a Rembrandt portrait.’ There are some examples of great practice around the country, but they are not widespread enough and they are not heading in the same direction; they are not looking at the bigger picture about the type of future that Australia is looking for. This is why the work that you are doing in terms of promoting a sustainability charter is so critical, because it will help us understand what it is that we are contributing to—these little dots in the bigger picture. Thank you very much.

Ms GEORGE—Sharon, yours is an individual submission, isn’t it? So it is not made on behalf of anybody in particular?

Ms Ede—It was written in a private capacity, but I am being supported to come by my employer to come here, which is the Office of Zero Waste in South Australia. If we are going to engage the Australian public on this, one of the things we need to do when we talk about sustainability is to get a bit more specific about it. If we cannot really clarify what we are talking about when we are talking about sustainability then we will not be able to get people engaged in this whole debate. I think people have a general idea that it is something to do with climate change, ozone layers, water and various other things, but I do not think they have a big picture sense of how this all fits together. We really need popular understanding of sustainability because that is the prerequisite to doing anything about it politically. This has been evidenced with Hurricane Katrina and Al Gore’s film in the last year; there has been a lot more chatter and a lot more urgency about climate change in the last 12 months than what there has been in the last 12 years. I think we need to get specific about sustainability and we need to understand it in terms of a threshold. So what are we trying to sustain and for how long? We need to start asking these questions.

I think we can say that it is about living within the biophysical limits of one planet, and that means avoiding ecological overshoot. We do not hear this word ‘overshoot’ very often because we are not talking about sustainability in terms of a threshold. Overshoot is how much of the planet’s regenerative capacity of the biosphere we are using in excess of what it can produce. It

is only the minimum condition, so avoiding overshoot is only a minimum condition of sustainability, but sustainability is impossible without avoiding overshoot. I will use a quote from the creator of the ecological footprint. I am an advocate of the footprint; I know there are differing views about it. He likened sustainability to buying a chair. He said, 'There is no question whether the chair should be strong enough to sit on or not. That is the non-negotiable condition. The questions are: do you want a red one, a green one, a wooden one or a metal one, but not whether the chair is strong enough.' So avoiding overshoot and living within the limits of one planet is the non-negotiable condition. Once you have checked that off then you can start dealing with some of the other issues that are equally important when it comes to sustainability. If we cannot do this then we are going to fail ultimately in the long term.

The threshold for sustainability, the limiting factor, is the regenerative capacity of the biosphere. If we use resources faster than nature can regenerate them, we have breached that limiting factor and we are eating into nature's capital, into the stocks, instead of living off the interest or the flows. It is possible to exceed ecological limits. They are easily transgressed because you do not suddenly hit a wall; there is no big warning sign. Also nature reacts with inertia so there is a time lag between cause and effect. Apparently there are no consequences to exceeding ecological limits, but we find them down the track when we start to get fisheries collapsing and all sorts of other consequences. The notion of limits is a bit scary to people, and this is why we have to have ways to talk to them about sustainability. It can be interpreted as a deprivation, a constraint, an imposition, a loss of freedom; but it is equally true that there are already many limits in society that we recognise for how they help to define our existence and make our lives more meaningful, challenging and interesting. The limits might be in relation to marriage, religion, architecture, government, engineering or even the boundary lines of playing fields. But people do not typically encounter ecological limits. This idea seems absurd in a consumer society which promotes abundance. We are psychologically as well as physically divorced from our dependence on nature. We need a way to communicate limits to people.

We need to know if we are breaching this non-negotiable condition of using more of nature than nature is making available to us and therefore undermining our life support systems, which is ecological overshoot. The footprint is not just a term for environmental impact; it is not just another general term. The carbon footprint, for example, is not the number of tons of CO₂ emitted; it is the surface area of the planet needed to sequester these emissions in order to maintain a stable climate. The footprint is not just a nice educational tool—as some have discussed, arguing that it is not all that useful as a measure. I think this underestimates the use of the footprint as a biophysical accounting method. The footprint is based on scientific principles, in spreadsheets, with lots and lots of data points tracking the consumption at the national level. It is a way of accounting for ecological assets and it is based on ecological realities rather than monetary data. It is providing us with crucial information about limits that is absent from conventional economic analysis. It is measuring potential risks to development and economic progress that conventional indicators do not reveal.

The Global Footprint Network are currently working with the Swiss government. They have done a review of the data that they use from the Swiss equivalent of the Bureau of Statistics, because to adopt the footprint as a national indicator, as a complement to GDP, that agency needs to agree with the data and the methodology. They have just completed that review and realised that it is actually quite consistent. Perhaps this is something Australia could do: undertake a review and look at adopting the footprint as a national indicator, because it will help

people to understand this idea of limits. I think, before we can even start talking to people about sustainability, we need to be able to communicate what it is.

CHAIR—Sharon, I will stop you there but we will come back to this in the discussion.

Mr Louys—My speech is being distributed. I am not a native English speaker so I am relying on the document which I have prepared. The term sustainability has recently been overused and misused. We feel it is important to state how we understand it as a community group. For us, a sustainable community is one that is able to satisfy its needs and aspirations without diminishing the opportunity of other communities and future generations. A sustainable human community must be designed in such a way that its people and its way of life, technologies and social institutions respect, support and cooperate with nature's inherent ability to sustain life. Can we educate our own community to become sustainable? Can we flourish, like a natural systems, with an abundance of energy and without waste? Can we engage other communities and guide them on pathways to sustainability?

Education for sustainability must challenge individuals, institutions, government and society. Our problem today is the scale and complexity of such a task and the turnaround time for change demanded by scientists, engineers and economists to counter the threats of global warming and its dire consequences for the planet and the next generation. The resistance to change is mainly caused by an increased centralisation in many areas of government, globalisation and the pressure of the market on many areas of social life. It is not surprising to find that the dominant conception of social progress is strongly associated with economic progress and technological change. The predominant model of decision making in Australia gives primacy to the economy and assumes that social and environmental problems can be solved if the economy is sound. It has also confused sustainability and progress. This conceptual view of sustainability is prevailing because the GDP is the official indicator of progress and good government.

This factor undermines the community engagement initiatives and the quality and value of local social systems. It obstructs human relationships and our sense of connectedness with natural and cultural landscapes, which is so familiar to the Aboriginal way of life. The model needed for sustainability must recognise that the economy is a subset of society and that society is constrained by the natural world. It is predictable that expansionary financial goals and associated perceived increased standards of living will not be sustainable. A proactive approach to managing these goals in accordance with a redefined social model would seem to be preferable to the current reactive approach.

Education for sustainability requires the integration of ecological literacy into social and economic planning. The community is where this integration begins. Respected and well-known American educator Robert Putnam's central message is that interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other and to knit together the social fabric. Putnam stressed the importance of the education environment, including child development programs, availability of public spaces and forums, economic prosperity and public health. Another famous educator, the Brazilian Paulo Freire, insists on situating educational activity in the lived experience of the participant. His directive has opened up a series of possibilities for informal educators. The acceptance of this—

CHAIR—I have to stop you in about 30 or 40 seconds. We will come back and discuss this.

Mr KERR—We also have the text of your opening statement.

CHAIR—Yes, we have the text. We will be discussing this further, but you might end your formal presentation.

Mr Louys—In conclusion, I would like to challenge our scientific and economic experts and our politicians, who still advocate the use of technological solutions to counter the threats of global warming, to turn to real solutions based on education and community engagement. If we, in the developed countries, continue to consume at an excessive level then we can expect that developing nations will demand the same unsustainable standards of living. Thank you.

Mr Crawford—I have prepared a one-page handout. I will pass that around. It is an aide-memoire for what I am saying really. I would like to start by complimenting the committee on its progress and work so far. This inquiry came out of the sustainable cities work. My colleagues and I read with interest the original discussion paper from a year ago. I know that today is just part of a series of roundtables and other inputs that you are getting. I thought I would just focus on bringing up a few things that might add some alternative or additional perspective to things that you are probably already considering.

I think in the big global picture it is fair to say that the global generic principles of sustainability have become pretty well understood, and with the advent of the Google information age it does not take too long to establish what best practice is anywhere around the world. It think the challenge has moved on now to the more localised, context specific application of those generic sustainability principles. The task at hand for the committee here is: how do we take those global generic principles and get them into an Australian context that is able to be disseminated and to be useful to the people and productivity of Australia in the future? In that regard, I want to touch on a number of different things.

One of the key challenges, which the discussion paper itself identified, and I am quoting from page 15 of the discussion paper, is:

It is difficult, and perhaps inappropriate to compare different communities' objectives for sustainability. An issue of extreme importance to one community's view of sustainability may not necessarily affect another community in the same [way].

The word 'way' is missing from the discussion paper but I have put it in for you. I assume that is the right word. The tree diagram below is too detailed for me to talk you through now, but suffice to say that this is one of a number of models and frameworks that seeks to integrate basic scientific principles and a crossover into values and some other things which might be characterised as the roots of this tree. Then as we go up the tree we become familiar with international frameworks such as the Natural Step, which was originally out of Sweden and is now pretty widely adopted. There is also Australia's own work on ecologically sustainable development. There is particularly the corporate articulation of ESD principles into the now well-known mean of the triple bottom line, and then moving through that into management systems and processes, indicators, and up into the actual day-to-day reality of the way in which people behave. Do I turn off the light? Do I flush the toilet full flush or half flush et cetera?

Flipping over the page, Daniella Tilbury from ARIES has already outlined the movements towards this concept of education for sustainability. I fully endorse and promote these concepts. Daniella Tilbury herself has been at the forefront of defining various elements of education for sustainability including the need to envision a better future, a different future; the requirement for systemic or systems thinking to get an integrated and holistic approach; probably combined with critical or reflective thinking—if we keep on doing what we have always done, are we going to get into the situation we want to avoid? I think this then goes to the crux of the challenge: how do we improve our decision-making processes? This applies at all scales: from an individual, asking do I change my light bulb or do I water the garden, through to BHP and Westpac. I think we are also realising that we need new and different partnerships for change. Some of the old institutional organisational structures are going to have to meld and change over time, and I think we are already seeing that.

In terms of a number of tools and frameworks that I think did not get sufficiently explicit consideration in the discussion paper I take this opportunity to reinforce three. We can always research these offline. I think the idea of the Natural Step is particularly valuable in terms of clarifying biophysical limits to this finite earth. The extensive work of the Earth Charter is well worth having a look at as a progenitor model for any further work that we might do here in Australia. It has been signed onto by literally millions of people and tens of thousands of organisations. I would also like to echo Sharon Ede's comments about the potential usefulness of the ecological footprint, which again did get quite a nice mention in the discussion paper. Finally, I would like to mention our work at EcoSTEPS. We are a sustainability consultancy that works across a wide range of organisations—communities, local governments and big and small corporates. To give a practical, real example, we have recently been working with the Blue Mountains community west of Sydney, where I come from, to develop a sustainability charter particularly targeted at local businesses there, which tend to be fairly small. We have had to go through the thought processes of how you take these global generic principles and get them context specific—in that particular case, the context of the Blue Mountains—to start to get people to change attitudes and then consequently change behaviours. That is some work that has been going on there.

Ms Constance—Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I am going to talk about two key areas: sustainable leadership and citizen engagement. *Sustainable Leadership* is a new book that I have come across recently which talks about the changes in education required not just for schools but also as an ongoing relationship for businesses and learning communities. It says, 'The purpose of sustainability is to develop what matters and lasts for the benefits for all.' I started my journey looking at what the terms meant and how confusing they were. I found that, by refining that process down and deciding the issue was more about scale than small communities—many communities make up sustainability's societal aspects—the societal framing was more appropriate to getting the understanding of sustainability. What we have at the moment is 'repetitive change syndrome'. This consists of initiative overload and change-related chaos. That is the way it has been termed. This means there is a continual state of upheaval. There are constantly new initiatives coming out but they are not aligned. The people who are implementing them do not actually have any idea—by the time they start to learn about one the next one comes along. So they are not grounded in their purpose.

The main point is that they have identified seven key characteristics about sustainable leadership based on educational change and leadership. They are: depth, length, breadth, justice,

diversity, resourcefulness and conservation. Commitment to this is going beyond micromanagement towards developing a compelling sense of purpose. Sustainable consumption is an area that I found we had not covered at all in the charter so far. It is about the way we create a collective framework for progress. In two weeks time I have to present at the thirteenth international sustainable development conference—and that presentation is the handout which I have just given you. I start there by saying that the cornerstone of any shift or transition towards sustainable development is based on effectively engaging the public. There are major differences about that. We have a public that is very disengaged in many ways. They want to make a difference but they are overloaded by a lot of communication which is not making the connection with them about how they can do that effectively.

One thing which I have been working on—and some people here would know of the developmental framework, which took some time to develop in this category—is how we actually, beyond the little campaign to campaign, create a compelling proposition. That is the creating social capital initiative. It builds on what Pierre was saying before about rebalancing. It is about creating empowerment through an anchor or a leverage point. I believe the citizen is such a category to do that. It is issue neutral so it can be applied to almost any situation. It is a way of looking at our purpose beyond being just consumers. It tackles the social sustainability aspect and it is a way of framing the dialogue. Most of the time when we have communication we tend to go to consultation. This is not about using the old model; it is about doing it more collaboratively with people—by the people and for the people. That way they start to get involved in the buy-in process because they understand that they are co-creating it. I think that is a major difference.

We recently had a major event in Melbourne where the City of Port Phillip commissioned some people from the United States of America to run an event. About 700 residents attended a day-long workshop on revisioning the city—where we are going for the future. Who would have thought that they could get so many people to give up their day voluntarily to do this? If you give people not just a tick-the-box exercise but an opportunity for their contribution to be heard, where they can see that it is going to be relevant to what they are about, then they can actually make that transition and be very involved in the co-creation aspect. I hope that covers it.

CHAIR—We might stop you there, but we will come back to you in the discussion.

Mr Collier—Good morning. I am the President of the Australian Association of Environmental Education. It is in that capacity that I appear this morning, although it is a voluntary role. Privately I work for myself as a consultant running sustainability education programs, training, developing them and so on. I have two hats but I am wearing the association's hat today. I too have a handout to be passed out. There are three key messages from our point of view in terms of sustainability education and community engagement. Firstly, the association really represents the needs and aspirations of people involved in delivering education for sustainability or environmental education—those terms are sometimes used synonymously, but they should not be. We are deliverers; we are designers, deliverers and evaluators of that particular activity. It is with those people's thoughts and feelings about this issue that I speak.

The issues of water and climate change demonstrate to us that there is a need for us to really put sustainability on the agenda. We can talk about water and we can talk about climate change but in reality what we are talking about with our community now is sustainable practice. That is

a tough challenge, because people do not understand sustainability. There was some research done a few years ago where some in-depth interviews were run with people in the New South Wales community about what sustainability meant. Over 50 per cent of them said it meant a breakfast cereal, rather than anything to do with what we might think. It is old research, but it still says to me that we are dealing with a challenging concept here. People understand water restrictions but they do not necessarily understand sustainability. We have a real challenge to make that happen.

The first challenge is, as Daniella said, we have increasingly been taking on education for sustainability as our way forward in education terms—not perfectly and not absolutely, but there has been movement over the last five or six years to do that. Education for sustainability is happening without the context of sustainability in a public policy sense at a national, state and territory level. The education side of moving towards sustainability is going ahead, but there is no real drive in a public policy sense for sustainability per se. It strikes me that that is a bit like the cart leading the horse rather than the horse leading the cart. Point number one is that we really are very supportive of your efforts to build a sustainability charter, because that is the public policy context in which the education and community engagement will happen more effectively.

Point number two is that the charter really has to have an engagement and education capacity within it, because a charter is only as good as the piece of paper it is written on unless it has a real drive forward to what we are trying to do with our community. From the point of view of the association, that movement towards engaging and educating the community is absolutely essential to carrying a charter forward. There might be some other things that happen out of that charter, but the education part, the engagement part, is essential.

The third point is that our education will actually work better with that charter in place. What we have actually been doing as an activity in the association for a number of months now and what we have tried to do in this handout is to establish a vision for where we think education and sustainability should fit. The bottom two-thirds of the handout basically puts that vision on the table for you. It puts that vision on the table for you as our dream of seeing things like every Australian government—federal, state, territory and local—recognise sustainability as an essential goal. We do not see that at the moment. We see some recognising some parts and we see some great examples, but not every Australian government recognises sustainability as an essential goal. That is a challenge. We understand it is a challenge, but educating and engaging the community will work much more effectively if that particular challenge is taken on.

We see that there is a need for business to take this on. We can cite great examples of some businesses doing wonderful work but across the spectrum we do not have business taking that on. We have tried to establish an ‘every’ statement about business. We have tried to establish an ‘every’ statement about schools and academic institutions in the sense that they provide both a learning climate for sustainability and also an example to the community about sustainable practices. For example, where schools have water tanks, the community know that and they see it. The community also see where a university is actually doing sustainable practice in its management and how it runs itself; that is how it connects with the community.

We have seen in the ‘every’ statements down the bottom of this page that everybody in the community needs to have access to education about sustainability for us to really make the

changes at work, at home and in our recreation that need to happen to make sustainability a reality in our community. None of that is easy. We are not, in any way, saying that; we are saying that we need a charter that articulates some of those visions and directions in order to make community engagement and education more effective, have more impact and for us to see some effect on climate change, water use and so on.

CHAIR—We might stop you there because this will come up in discussion. Basically the problem alluded to by all of you is that education is one thing but behavioural change is another. Australians are great delegators and great consumers. We are driven by commercialism which says ‘consume, consume’ and by governments who count GDPs et cetera, which encourages consumption to keep our economy going. The issue I see commonly when I go and talk to people is: what am I going to do to fix the problem? It is not what they are going to do to fix the problem. How do you get this change where we educate people but they understand that this is their problem as much as it is my problem? Governments cannot solve this alone. Professor, we might let you reflect on that first.

Professor Tilbury—I think the answer is to show leadership. When government agencies are doing themselves what they are preaching then others can see the value of it and communities feel they belong to something which is bigger than their immediate action. The problem is that those champions who do take positive steps feel that their little drop of water is not contributing significantly enough, because they see agencies and others responsible around them not actually practicing what they are preaching. I think they are wanting that to happen, to be able to take it to the next step. It is also the problem of communicating messages. Messages only raise awareness; they do not help people make choices that are more sustainable. We have got to understand that education is more than marketing ideas, and that is a key problem.

Ms Ede—I would like to support that. My official role is greening of government operations with respect to waste. We are finding, particularly talking to other agencies that are dealing with energy and water, that trying to crank business up on this stuff is very difficult because the first thing they say is: what is government doing? We definitely need to be showing leadership. It makes the task a lot easier.

Mr JENKINS—I would like to ask Julian about the point about sustainability meaning different things to different communities. Could you expand on that? Because if that is the case, it just strikes me that we have a humungous problem.

Mr Crawford—It is a very interesting challenge that there is a plethora of scientific and other academic definitions of sustainability. In the last ten years or so, really since the Brundtland commission in 1987, people have been grappling with what sustainability means. In the work we have done with a range of different organisations—and a couple of water utilities I have been working with recently: Yarra Valley Water in Melbourne and Water Corporation in Perth—the challenge has been how to reconcile the individual employee’s values and ideas around sustainability with the organisational values and aspirations around sustainability. I think to a large extent it is about having a discussion and conversation around it. Going back to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and visioning exercises, people tend to want the same sorts of things. I think it is a question of how we reconcile that in an optimal way to generate the synergies out of this whole process, which echoes what Daniella and Sharon have already said about leadership and the opportunity for organisations and individuals in a leadership position to start talking

coherently about what sustainability means for them. There is no shortcut to that other than having a fairly comprehensive community engagement and discussion process such as something like the Earth Charter or the Natural Step. People talk about sustainability being the journey not the destination, but it is that discussion around it that will enable us to start to review and reflect on our current priorities as a nation and what we may need to do in terms of changing our decision-making processes for the future.

Mr JENKINS—Sharon, have you got a response to that? You clearly said that we have to communicate what we mean by sustainability. Quite rightly, a number of you have mentioned the work the committee has talked about on ecological footprints and the like. Is it what sustainability means for them or is it that sustainability means something?

Ms Ede—I think it is perhaps the case that sustainability means living within the limits of one planet; it is the quality of life for all within the means of nature. How people go about achieving that might be different from one community to another. We all live on the one planet and we have got to fit. The question we need to consider is: if everybody lived like us would we fit on the planet?

Mr JENKINS—Would we change the name for the journey and make sustainability the outcome? Can you help us?

Professor Tilbury—I think that we need to have a common vision for sustainability rather than having a variety of ways of interpreting what it means. I think the charter would be very useful in helping to define that vision for Australia. There are lots of documents out there so it is not as if you would not know where to look if you had an interest. It is just that it has to be relevant to the Australian context. Having said that, different communities across Australia can respond differently to meeting that vision; there are different needs. A community in the peninsula of southern Victoria would meet different challenges and need to take different actions to a community in Alice Springs. Their responses need to be different, but they all need to be seen to be contributing to a common vision, a bigger picture. Disparities occur when people do not feel empowered or do not feel that they are contributing to something that is worthwhile, and the charter could do that.

Ms Constance—One of the key things I have found with the sustainability concept in Australia predominantly is that it has been boxed into being mainly just about the natural environment. I think that it really needs to get well beyond that definition. Some people think it is just too narrow; they do not understand the social sustainability and the economic requirements as part of the whole. On the other level, it is also about acknowledging the different changes in the relationships of government. Government needs to be more of an enabling mechanism rather than the answer. People need to be given the opportunity to make the decisions together and see the part that they can play; that is the role that sustainable consumption and production can play. The UK government has been quite a good leader in that area with the sustainability commission it established quite some time ago. Working in that frame has helped them suggest some habits and things that people can do, which takes them towards the common vision. Of course they are going to be localised for everyone's regions and whatnot, but the common framework does not have to be micromanaged; it has to have a loose framework that they can be steered towards going in the same direction. I think that is really important.

Mr Collier—I just want to agree with a whole lot of things there and go back to the original question. If you are an irrigator in the Murray-Darling Basin and you are not getting water as part of the deal this year then sustainability for you is very much focused on your economic bottom line and the social realities of your life and whether your family can live there. If you are a baker at the Goodman Fielder bakery in Lidcombe in New South Wales then sustainability issues for you are very much around how you deal with the fact that you get complaints from neighbours about noise in the middle of the night and about odour. So how you deal with the community effectively about sustainability issues environmentally is one side of it. The other side is how you make your bottom line better in terms of taking on some of the environmental changes that will need to happen—not impacting negatively but impacting positively on the bottom line. People do relate to the concept of sustainability from what their perspective is, personally and professionally. It is very much a mixture of social, economic and environmental factors. The challenge for the communication, education and engagement part of the charter is how we maximise environmental sustainability and still take account of the fact that communities need to live, work and relate to each other effectively. That is common sense. There will have to be different messages or different efforts for different communities and an acknowledgement of that.

Mr BROADBENT—Grahame, I will bounce off where you have come from with my question. It is harder to be green when you are in the red; that is the general approach you are coming from. If you are a low socioeconomic community then you have different values. I think you all touched on that a bit. If you drew a line around the area of Yarra Valley Water and said, ‘Here’s what comes into this area and here’s what we consume, what do we do with this stuff now?’ I know on my own property we do not pay a drainage rate because there is no run-off on that property. We pay a small drainage rate for what might run off. It does not make it sustainable, because I bring a lot of rubbish onto the property and consume it. Would you all consider what is unsustainable? If we are heading for a sustainability charter then we need to consider what we are doing that is unsustainable. I know there are things I do that are unsustainable, and we should not go into that now. I would be guilty, along with a lot of others in the room, but we have to work that out as a community.

I think a very good base is: what is unsustainable for a community and how are you going to educate that community? I heard very clearly what you said, Sharon, but I did not know whether you were talking about my health habits or sustainability. In health it happens exactly the same way. Whilst some of the things I do are not going to kill me today, if I keep doing them they are going to kill me in the long run—but something has got to get me anyway.

We talked about that with the environment; we are not going to see the problems today, but we are going to have to deal with them sometimes in the short run, and most assuredly in the long run, and that is why to me this sustainability charter is so important. The education goes along with it. Julian, I no longer like the line, ‘It’s a journey, not a destination’, because if as part of the journey you burn the paddock you have just walked through, you have not left anything for the next generation or the next person that comes to the paddock. Part of the journey has to be that, when you have walked through that paddock, you have left it in better nick because you have a more sustainable frame of mind than you would have had perhaps even only ten years ago. There has been a huge change in ten years.

CHAIR—We must let them answer that and the answer must be shorter than the question.

Mr Crawford—I think that sustainability is made up of a number of different dimensions; we talked about economic, social and environmental. One of the areas of current debate internationally is about the fungibility of different sorts of capital: can you convert one sort of capital into another sort of capital. The classic exemplar of that is, if I have an apple and you have an apple and we both swap apples, we have one apple each still, but if I have an idea and you have an idea, Russell, as we have now, and we swap ideas, we both are the richer. I think that is part of the essence of the challenge, as Sophie Constance has said. We have the environmental dimension of sustainability of a finite planet and a burgeoning population and things like the Natural Step can help us identify biophysical limits. But, as you were saying, how do we know when we are coming up to the buffers? I think the great opportunity is on the social sustainability side vis-a-vis that sharing of ideas and moving from a quantitative materialistic based value system in society to a qualitative experience rich society. We have to move from product to service, and you have probably heard the rhetoric on that.

Ms GEORGE—Based on the input this morning I see a little bit of a dilemma in that if we can frame some common principles in common language, then we say that communities, regional variations and industry will handle that in a way that is applicable to their frame of reference. That could lead us into a situation where we end up with something which is not much more than a motherhood statement. If it is to be more than a motherhood statement, how do we then define some national goals and outcomes that people work towards in their own way in terms of the broader national picture? Does that make sense? I can see Daniella nodding. If it is too prescriptive at the national framework level, how do people fit into that policy prescription?

Professor Tilbury—I think there is a problem when we have motherhood statements because people start trying to psychoanalyse the terms you put in the statements and they interpret them in many different ways. There are some charters, particularly from overseas, that have led to problems as a result of that vagueness. Being as specific as you can about what sustainability will mean for Australia would be very useful. The strategies that you use to then achieve that is what the locally relevant and regionally relevant responses need to be based on.

If smaller medium enterprises are struggling to survive because they are in the red, they will have to respond very differently to a company such as Westpac or ANZ, which are making profit and are judging the equator principles as to how they invest their money. A charter needs to say very concretely that it will look at the economic side of sustainability. There is a certain direction in which we want to be heading. I do not want to determine that myself; I think that is part of the committee's role. Then we need to say, 'The strategies by which you achieve this will vary according to where you work and in which area you are engaged.' Absolutely it needs to avoid motherhood statements; no more principles. We have enough of those.

Mr BROADBENT—I probably did not put it to Julian properly but can I ask you to address this issue: if you have an unsustainable outcome, someone has to go back to the beginning and say, 'We've got to change our practices so we don't have that unsustainable outcome.' It is a practical direction of turning everything around, going back the other way and looking at how we can have those goods or services come in but in a different way so that when it arrives it is used in a sustainable way.

Mr Crawford—Yes, these are great points. The work that people like Barney Foran and Manfred Lenzen did a couple of years ago with a report called *Balancing Act, a triple bottom*

line analysis of the Australian economy is probably relevant and pertinent to that debate about flows within the community. On the charter, I share Jennie George's concerns about how much flab there will be and what are we going to do. We are not starting from a blank sheet of paper anyway. Back in 1992 we had the ESD principles which then stacked up very well. They probably got a little bit dated over time, but they have infused a whole lot of other state and local government rules and regulations and legislation. I think we can build forward from there.

There has also been other work that I think the former Department of the Environment and Heritage did when Robert Hill was the minister on headline sustainability indicators. In 2002 the Australian Bureau of Statistics put out measures of Australia's progress. We have quite a lot of momentum and good things on which I think we can build. It is a question of getting an aspirational charter—and I think what Grahame Collier from A2E2 suggested is a nice little start as an aspirational way to go—but backed up by the harder indicators and the understanding from things like ecological footprint.

Mr TICEHURST—I think you, Daniella, started off by saying that no country was sustainable because there was no definition of it. When you are trying to educate people and you look at the way issues rise in society, you find so many issues are either media driven or politically driven, or a combination of both. We have two major issues running now and, depending on the power of advertising and how many dollars are put into it, you can push a certain line. Whether that line is right or wrong of course becomes debateable. I think we are seeing a swing around now in the climate debate. I see the ABC are going to run a program that was run on Channel 4. Anybody who took the opposite view of this popular view was almost a heretic.

CHAIR—I think you might have to put that on notice until we return from the division in the House of Representatives. We will be back.

Proceedings suspended from 11.43 am to 11.57 am

Mr TICEHURST—How you get the education out will be the responsibility of the media, because a lot of issues tend to be media driven or advertising driven. Over the next six months we are going to see who has the biggest fund of money and whoever does is going to try to control the issues. Of course, there are two major issues running now. Whether there is validity in what they are actually promoting and truth in it is, of course, another story. How are we going to get the truth to the surface and educate people as to what sustainability means and how they can practically contribute?

Ms Constance—One of the things that has happened with governance and things in that area is that, when you hear talk from government to people, it is about doing. One of the changes that needs to happen, and is happening more so in North America and places like that, is working with the people to create the answers and the solution. You do not need to be the key organisers of everything; you need to be part of the process, as do the people. They need to be engaged at the beginning; they do not need to be the receivers. That is the major difference that needs to take place. None of us know all the answers, but together we will work them out. These deliberative processes and dialogues which I was referring to earlier are very dynamic, they do achieve solutions and they can work through issues where people obviously have their own vested roles. As it happens and they go through the process, they build up an understanding of

the whole and then they weigh up decisions and solutions on that level. That is the kind of approach that needs to happen.

Mr TICEHURST—You talked about rights and responsibilities or duties.

Ms Constance—Yes, duties.

Mr TICEHURST—The current government has run a very good economy and we have quite a substantial surplus, and a lot of that has been allocated. Issues are now thrown up that may be the state government or local council responsibility but because they are of a different persuasion to the government, they swing around and say, ‘The federal government’s got all this money; they should be funding it.’ This is where, in the next six months, reality is just going to disappear.

We have this very situation on the Central Coast, where I am living, regarding water. We are finding that the state government have backed the wrong horse in their solution; it is sort of a never never, pie in the sky type of thing. Even if they did build this huge dam in the Hunter, it will do absolutely nothing for the Central Coast. When we try and put up the realistic story which was designed by the public works state government back in 1975, people switch off to it. They think, ‘We don’t not care who does it; you just do it.’ This is where education needs to come in to say, ‘Responsibility exists for this particular purpose; it’s there for that area.’ In some of our brochures we try to define the responsibilities of local, state and federal government. The sustainability issue is much the same; you have got to start with the individual—for example, starting at school with littering. If we look at the obesity issue, we are seeing now that we have so many fat kids around that it is going to impact on our health system as time goes on. Education to me starts down low in the school age years, but then we have a huge amount of the population who are being persuaded by media messages or politically driven messages.

Professor Tilbury—I just have a brief response. The problem has been the way we educate. We have been educating answers by saying: here are the answers to the sustainability problem. The messages and the campaigns that have been heavily funded at the moment are saying, ‘This is the answer to climate change, this is the answer to the water solution, these are the answers, now buy into it.’ But we are not educating people to develop those critically reflective skills of which Julian was talking: to be able to make up their own mind; to be able to judge in their circumstances what it is that is going to contribute more generally to sustainability. If we give people answers and solutions that are just not widely applicable, people will just jump onto the next bandwagon. I think that is a critical problem with our current education, not just the system but the way that we pump those messages out to the public through those campaigns.

Mr Louys—A model that exists already in Australia and that has been widely successful is Landcare. In the implementation of a sustainability charter or the education of the community for sustainability, I think we would very much be inspired by looking at how these Landcare ethics have been propagated through the community and the result they have got to date. You will find that this model would definitely work and can even be exported. The Landcare model is currently exported overseas. This is a very Australian process that has been widely successful and is what I speak about in my paper. There are people such as Tim Smith from CSIRO who have worked long and hard on this process and have solutions that could be used in implementing sustainability.

Mr TICEHURST—That is a good point. On the Central Coast we have lots of Landcare groups. Some years ago the local council set up a group and called it Wycare, for Wyong care, and they provided a house to the group. Now we have Coastcare, Rivercare, Bushcare and Landcare; all of these groups come together and are very active across the area. In fact, they had a conference called ‘Mountains to the Dunes’ that brought all these groups together. We have to make that broader.

Mr Collier—I have two comments on the issue of how you educate. The first comment is that the Department of the Environment and Water Resources are at the pointy end of the development of the second national action statement around environmental education and what should be happening on education of sustainability. That will deliver some answers on where we ought to be going in terms of education around the whole issue of sustainability. The pointy end is that there has been a discussion paper on that process, there has been interaction across all of the stakeholders in every state and territory, and the national action plan should be finished in the next couple of months. I think it is important to place that on the table; there is some activity that can support the sustainability charter in the education area. That is the bureaucratic part of the answer, the systematic part of the answer.

Education has to be a combination of locally based community involvement, community education, Landcare, council run education and training, and schools where children and teachers get educated. For my money it has also got to have some presence in social marketing so that you start to try to counteract some of the messages of consume, consume, consume. That may be done by government taking a line and using their opportunity to talk to people, Not so much in a paid advertising sense—for example, a minister making a statement about what education for sustainability is about and where we are trying to get to in this country. It has to have a mass media presence to it, but it is a combination of activity. At the moment the challenge is to integrate all that together so you have the same sorts of messages going out to people. I would agree totally when Daniella says that you cannot just have a message that says, ‘Change your showerhead,’ because that just gets people to change their showerhead, however that message is carried forward. You need a message that says, ‘Sustainability is about these things, folks, and we’ve all got to do some stuff about leaving our paddock in a better state for the next generation, or leaving our business in a better state.’ You have to get people to take on an understanding of sustainability so they can then make some decisions about whether the showerhead is important, or whether the crop they sow or do not sow this year is important, or how much water they use. Otherwise, you have so many messages that you do not have capacity to take in every one, one after another. I used to work on HIV-AIDS and it was relatively simple there: use a condom and do not share a needle. There were two messages, but sustainability has 579. You really need people to take on an understanding of sustainability and then be able to put that into practice in whatever part of their lives is important for them.

Mr ENTSCHE—I think we are going into an area here which is one of the keys. You are right. One of the problems you have is that there are 5,000 messages out there about sustainability. The problem is siphoning through those and dealing with issues based on facts, and prioritising based on facts. Too often there are interest groups out there, albeit very well meaning, that tend to become quite hysterical and argue purely on emotion. In doing so they tend to grab the headlines and the attention of the media and subsequently the attention of government because there is an issue raised by a large section of the constituency. Decisions are made and large amounts of

money are spent on things that really have no relevance at all or are of no consequence to sustainability. Somehow or other we have to deal with these things as a matter of fact.

Another area is credible sources and the point that Pierre raised in relation to Landcare. I think the Landcare workers are up there with nurses and the doctors in relation to credibility. Landcare is something that has been established by government through resourcing but the credibility has been established by the enormous amount of voluntary work that is done within the community and the outstanding results that they have achieved. It is not just about fixing up a particular river system or a coastal system; it is also that they are able to raise awareness about activities that the local residents may be doing that is going to impact on them. People listen to them. Utilisation of a group like Landcare would be able to get a much stronger message across to people to change their actions.

I think it is important also that the message needs to get out to a lot of these green groups that are continually working on scare campaigns based on emotion. They are really doing a lot of damage because they confuse people. Regarding the shower issue, it is all right to reduce the flow of the water, but if you take a longer shower you are still going to use the same flow of water.

CHAIR—We need to finish at 12.15. I am sorry that we had to leave for a division but that is beyond our control. I know Russell is burning to ask a question which is going to be short so you can have a longer answer.

Ms Constance—Regarding your point about vested interests, the deliberative dialogue processes are very effective because they do not exclude vested groups but they do not maximise their influence or allow them to take over the process. They are given an amount of time, like everyone else, but they are not allowed to inflate the arguments or anything like that. I think that more and more governments are starting to explore this as a tool that helps them with their governing decisions and their accountability.

One of the initial problem areas with Western governments was their fear of letting go of control; not controlling the outcomes. Last year a Stanford University professor did a deliberative poll in China, of all places. A Chinese minister managed to pull it off! It got massive coverage internationally in *Time*, *BusinessWeek* and the *Harvard Business Review* because he managed to use this deliberative polling to enable his constituents to not only make the decisions for themselves but actually push and make decisions much further up than he was willing to go. There is a lot of good to be done by embracing that. I think that is something that the federal government has not really started to explore as yet. It could be a way to really engage people in the process and help you to co-develop the decisions.

CHAIR—I am going to make a comment on that. China is faced with a problem. Its most common cancer used to be liver cancer due to hepatitis B, which Grahame is aware is transmitted in the same way as HIV-AIDS. Liver cancer is now surpassed by environmentally induced lung cancer and other cancers. They have got some serious problems.

Mr BROADBENT—I just wanted to hear from all of you regarding the concept of ownership in sustainability. I know you probably all come from different aspects, but unless there is

national ownership of the strategy or whatever we put in place, it will not be going anywhere. Would anybody like to comment on that real or perceived ownership? Sharon?

Ms Ede—I would just like to support what Daniella and Grahame said before about how to bring about change. We are out there trying to sell a set of values to the community, and there might be different values in different communities around Australia. There is a wonderful street artist and philosopher called David Engwicht who wrote books like *Towards an Eco-City: calming the traffic* and *Mental Speed Bumps*, which is a whole other story. He also invented the walking school bus. He has done a lot of thinking around the psychology of how you get people to change, and I think that is an area we have not got into far enough. We are not going to get change by providing people with laundry lists. We have had top ten lists saying things such as change a light bulb or change a showerhead for 20 years and we are still producing them, which says to me that they have not been very effective.

When people who are working with footprint talk about it, they face a lot of denial, fear and anger, all the sorts of things that we may encounter when we are trying to talk about this message. One of the things they do is separate the fact from the analysis; they separate what it is from the judgment of what we can do about it. They are trying to internalise the conflict and get people having that dialogue in their own head rather than trying to tell them what to do. I would like to read a quote about that:

... 'promoting solutions' without full commitment to participate in their implementation may ... give the impression that a magic 'they' will solve the problem. It can deflate creative tension with the notion that 'the solution will automatically take care of the problem', and put people on the defensive rather than allowing them to be heroes and develop solutions themselves. Also, solution salesmanship has the danger of becoming argumentative or making people focus on why they do not like a particular solution, rather than getting fired up by the need to resolve a problem.

We need to communicate as a challenge to the Australian people that we have a 6.6 hectare footprint per person. That is 6.6 hectares all around the world that supports each of us in our lifestyle. We currently have a lot of nations coming up and wanting to improve their standard of living. If we even had a 3.3 hectare footprint for everybody on the planet, we would need 2.65 planets to sustain nine billion people in the year 2050.

Mr BROADBENT—At our level of consumption?

Ms Ede—Yes. The level of consumption is that footprint. A footprint of 3.3 hectares would be currently half of what Australia has at the moment. So even if we halved our consumption and everybody lived like us on a 3.3 footprint, we would still need 2.65 planets, assuming the optimistic UN scenario of nine billion people on the planet by 2050. What can we do as a country to show leadership? Maybe we can have a competition about what a good quality of life looks like on a 3.3 hectare footprint. Maybe we can have design competitions on how we can progress our city so that we can live on a smaller footprint and still have a great quality of life. A lot of the European countries have lower footprints than Australia but they still have a great quality of life. I think we need positive examples so that people hear sustainability not as, 'This is taking something away from me. It means reduce. It means something I don't want to do,' but as something positive that is going to enhance their quality of life.

Mr ENTSCH—One of the benefits of European cities is that most of them are the size of a postage stamp. When you start looking at the logistics of the size of our cities from here to Western Australia and for people living outside a centralised area—

Mr BROADBENT—See, we have an excuse.

Ms Ede—We have got an excuse, with a tyranny of distance—

Mr ENTSCH—But distance is an issue.

CHAIR—I might have to stop it there because I am supposed to be somewhere at midday. We thank you for your input and effort and for your contribution. Let us hope we can get out a reasonable charter.

Mr BROADBENT—I would like you all to think about that concept of ownership and how, in all your areas of activity, the ownership issue just might come into the sustainability charter. It does not have to be written down, but just as an end point.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Broadbent**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.18 pm