

Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

**Committee Secretariat
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Dear Sir,

I contribute the following as my submission to your enquiry. I thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution.

Regards

Graham Williamson

23rd Feb 2018

SUBMISSION

This submission will consider the 2030 Agenda and the SDG's in relation to the following Terms of Reference

- (a) the understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community;
- (b) the potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDG;
- (c) what governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes;
- (h) examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.

1. Australia learning from other countries (h), & understanding & awareness of the SDGs across the Australian community (a)

Fundamental to the 2030 Agenda process is [public participation and an informed public](#)

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/information-integrated-decision-making-and-participation>

"opportunities for people to influence their lives and future, participate in decision-making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development"

This of course means the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs must be fundamentally democratic, being driven by the voices of an informed public.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

"Democracy, good governance and the rule of law as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development"

[This is further reinforced by IDEA:](#)

"accountability to citizens, and in particular accountability through democratic political processes, is a crucial enabler of the SDGs.....There can be no sustainable development without respect for democracy and human rights."

Yet, in spite of all this there is a high degree of community ignorance about the 2030 Agenda, and, as will be noted below, Australians are actually being misled and misinformed by government. [According to the OECD](#) “across 24 countries, only around 1 in 100 citizens know the SDGs ‘very well’

[The IPU has called on](#) “political leaders everywhere to strengthen connections between the globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and citizens’ demands for greater transparency, accountability and inclusive decision-making.” [IPU continues](#): “Parliaments must ensure that the voice of the people is taken into account when countries establish priorities, targets and indicators for the SDGs at the national level”

This being the case Australia should look to the experience of Germany, commonly considered one of the world leaders as far as the global sustainability agenda is concerned. [Germany has found that one of their major problems](#) has been their failure to give the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs a democratic basis by granting the people a democratic vote during the elections.

“You would have expected the universal 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to have served as a central point of reference in the 2017 German elections. The reality was quite the opposite.....How will we achieve the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and the goals of the German Sustainable Development Strategy if they are not transparently addressed in election manifestos and in campaign debates?”

In Australia too, it is odd that the people have been denied the right to vote on such a massive far reaching initiative that fundamentally depends upon democratic participation. This is true at Commonwealth, State, and Local Council levels.

The entire 2030 agenda must be taken to the people and the people enabled to cast an informed democratic vote.

Since it is [the aim of the United Nations](#) “to embed sustainable development and global citizenship themes and concepts within all areas of teaching and learning”, awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs should extend to all aspects of this far reaching agenda, including UN driven attempts to “globalise” education of our children. According to SDG 4.7, all learners must be educated to ‘promote’ global citizenship, NOT Australian citizenship.

“4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”

[Foreign Minister Julie Bishop indicated that she is](#) “particularly delighted with the emphasis on learning in the Sustainable Development Goal for Education”, and [she emphasised Australia’s commitment to ‘global’ education and the UN’s Global Education First Initiative](#). Further, [according to UNESCO](#), the use of teachers as change agents rather than educators, is vital to the success of their global sustainability agenda endorsed by the Foreign Minister. Politicisation, and [globalisation of the school curriculum](#) however, utilising so called “[cross curriculum priorities](#)” such as sustainability, which is said to be an essential part of global citizenship, have already been [embedded across all school subjects in Australia](#). [Embedding of these UN driven global concepts though, is political, not educational](#).

According to [the study by Stuhmcke](#), even kindergarten children could be utilised as agents of change in pursuit of the sustainability agenda:

“In this study it was found that using a transformative Project Approach encouraged children to be agents of change for sustainability. This study challenged traditional views of children and supported notions of children as competent, capable and able to enact change.”

These matters are not well known amongst the wider community and certainly have no democratic foundation. Parents, and the wider community, should be informed about these initiatives, and their end goals, and given a democratic choice.

SOLUTION: These matters can be easily addressed by including the people in the 2030 Agenda process and enabling everyone to cast an informed vote, on all aspects of this far reaching agenda, and at all levels of government.

2. Governance structures and accountability measures at the national, state and local levels of government (c)

Clearly, as noted above, democratic accountability is urgently required at all 3 levels of government. The fact that [decisions have already been made to implement the far reaching 2030 process](#) without any democratic accountability whatsoever is alarming and counter to the entire 2030 process, and requires immediate rectification. This urgency is highlighted by commitments already given by our government to foreign institutions such as the UN, commitments from which the Australian public have been prevented from having any democratic participation in. [According to the Hanoi Agreement](#):

"We, parliamentarians from over 130 countries and 23 international and regional parliamentary organizations, gathered in Hanoi, Viet Nam, reviewed the emerging sustainable development goals and considered our role in attaining them.

This is our declaration.....

*At this critical moment, we, the parliamentarians of the world, reaffirm our vision for people-centred sustainable development based on the realization of all human rights,,,,,,,,, All government institutions **must be representative and accessible to all**..... We commit to doing our utmost to strengthen national ownership of the goals, particularly by making them known to our constituents. People must understand how the goals are relevant to their lives. As representatives of the people, we are responsible for ensuring that each and every voice is heard in the political process without discrimination and irrespective of social status. **We commit to translating the goals into enforceable domestic laws and regulations**, including through the critical budget process. Each country must do its part to ensure that all the goals are met..... **we will do our utmost to institutionalize the goals in every parliament**, with sufficient time for discussion and monitoring. Parliamentary committees and processes must pursue all goals coherently..... We pledge to make laws and budgetary provisions in line with the national sustainable development plan..... we will support the implementation of all international commitments..... we will seek to engage with United Nations field operations in our countries to share information and explore all avenues for cooperation to advance our national plans."*

[The fact that vital aspects of the 2030 agenda will be enforced by local laws](#), as noted above, is a major issue:

"Parliamentarians were among the many voices that helped shaped the global SDGs agenda. Now that the SDGs have officially been adopted, parliamentarians are expected to translate the SDGs into actionable legislation and policies at the national level."

In spite of these facts however, the Australian government consistently misleads and misinforms the people by pretending the 2030 agenda and the SDGs are "**voluntary**" or "**non-binding**" ([1,2,3](#)). This is a well established strategy of successive governments however, followed religiously for more than 2 decades following the Keating government's introduction of Agenda 21 ([4, 5](#)). Like the 2030 Agenda, the people were told Agenda 21 was voluntary or non-binding even though it was always the government's intention to force the people to comply with the dictates of this UN agreement by passing domestic legislation ([4, 5](#)). And like the 2030 Agenda, the people were denied any democratic choice for more than 2 decades ([4, 5](#)).

When I sought clarification from various government Ministers, including Foreign minister Bishop, as to whether the government intended to utilise this same legislative strategy with the 2030 Agenda, while publicly claiming the Agenda is 'non-binding', ALL refused to comment. [The Foreign Minister described the UNs 2030 agenda](#) as "*an ambitious, bold – and necessary – objective.....a global objective, the product of unprecedented consultation and negotiation*", so why is the government so determined to exclude democratic consideration by the people?.

Obviously the first step towards 'accountability' is to educate and include the people, and permit them to have an informed democratic vote. Any government which prevents this is clearly NOT an open democratic government and can therefore make no meaningful claim they are dedicated to 'sustainability'.

In order to assist governments in this process the IPU and the UN combined to produce a [“Self-Assessment Toolkit” for governments](#) to “equip parliamentarians to effectively institutionalize the new agenda and mainstream the various goals into the legislative process.” It is instructive to examine the following extracts from this toolkit.

“Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions – an overview

Building on lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs include a specific goal to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Two targets within this goal refer to the role of parliaments:

Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Parliaments’ participation in global progress monitoring

National governments are in the driving seat for implementing the SDGs. But the process is also supported internationally through information-sharing and monitoring mechanisms.....The core parliamentary roles of law-making, budgeting, oversight and representation of constituency interests are all critical to the full implementation of the SDGs.

Representation, *To ensure meaningful national ownership of the SDGs, all citizens and stakeholders should be involved in setting policies and priorities. As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians have an obligation to reach out to their constituents throughout their term of office, not just at election time.”*

“Democracy” is not being served by refusing to grant the people an informed democratic vote, and “representation of constituency interests” is not being served by falsely telling the people the whole 2030 Agenda process is “non-binding” and the people will not be forced to comply with the dictates of the UN.

The role of the government is clear, but how does it measure up according to the following self-assessment questions posed by the toolkit?

Questions 1: Building understanding of the SDGs in parliament

In the past 12 months:

Have parliamentarians received any training sessions on the SDGs? If so how many sessions have been run and for how many parliamentarians (men and women)?

Questions 2: Bringing the SDGs from the global to the local level

Part A: identifying your baseline

Is there a national plan for the implementation of the SDGs? If so, have links been drawn between that plan and existing sectoral plans (climate, education, health, etc.)?

Has parliament formally endorsed the national plan?

Has parliament organized any debates (either in plenary or in relevant sectoral committees) on SDG implementation within the country in order to discuss national priorities?

In the past 12 months, has the government:

submitted reports to parliament about the implementation of the SDGs?

made ministerial statements to parliament about SDG implementation?

provided data on progress towards the targets and indicators for the SDGs? Are the data disaggregated by sex, age, geographical distribution and other relevant characteristics?

Questions 3: Mainstreaming the SDGs within parliamentary mechanisms

Part A: identifying your baseline

Has parliament formally endorsed the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs (perhaps through a motion or resolution)?¹⁰

Does parliament have an institutional plan that adequately identifies its priorities in relation to supporting SDG implementation and monitoring?

Has parliament clearly assigned responsibility for the SDGs within its own structures?

Has parliament given responsibility to an already existing parliamentary body or structure for coordinating work on the SDGs? If so, which one?

Have the SDGs been included in the formal mandate of one or more committees? If so, which ones?
Has parliament created a committee dedicated to the SDGs?
Are there informal cross-party mechanisms that focus on the SDGs (e.g.: caucuses, interest groups)?
To what extent have the SDGs been successfully mainstreamed in parliament? What adjustments, if any, are necessary to parliament's structures and working methods to enable it to work more effectively on the SDGs?

Questions 4: Making laws in support of the SDGs

Parliament will play a key role in supporting the implementation of the SDGs by building a legal framework that enables the goals to be achieved.

Part A: identifying your baseline

Has any review been undertaken to identify the legislative reforms required to support the SDGs? Is draft legislation accompanied by an assessment of the impact that it would have on implementing the SDGs?
Are laws tabled with an explanatory memorandum that sets out the impact of the proposed law on relevant SDGs?
Does the ministerial speech introducing a law usually explain whether and how the proposed law will progress the SDGs?

In the past 12 months:

How many laws have contained a specific reference to the SDGs?
How many proposed amendments have contained a specific reference to the SDGs? How many of these amendments have been adopted?

Questions 7: Engaging with the public

Making the SDGs people-centred means that people from all walks of life should have a say in the legal and policy processes that affect them. It also means that they should be able to demand corrective action from decision-makers in both government and parliament. The exponential growth of information technologies is leading to new ways for people to participate in development planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring processes. At the same time, there is still considerable scope for strengthening conventional methods of including citizens' contributions in parliamentary processes. It is important for parliament to proactively engage with the public both to find out the public's SDG priorities and to assess SDG implementation on the ground.

Part A: identifying your baseline

Is there a nationwide public campaign on the SDGs? Is parliament part of it?
Does parliament hold regular public consultations on the SDGs? Does it have an open-access online platform to engage with the public on the SDGs?

In the past 12 months:

How many public events on SDGs have been organized in parliament or by parliament?
How many outreach or constituency visits have focused on the SDGs?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

How effectively does parliament communicate to the public about its work in support of SDG implementation? Does parliament have a communications strategy that includes efforts to reach out to the public on SDG issues?
Is parliament's website designed to easily identify the legislature's SDG-related activities?
Does parliament use social media to communicate about its SDG-related work?

SOLUTION: To *begin* to become 'accountable', and to introduce effective 'governance' measures, the government needs to answer all these questions and do so publicly and conspicuously, and cease excluding the people from the entire 2030 Agenda process. False information about proposed legislative enforcement must also cease and the people should be correctly informed that the government intends to enforce the dictates of this UN agreement. Effective governance involves including the people, but to date the government has shown no interest in this.

3. The Cost of Implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda (b)

It is generally accepted that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will cost trillions of dollars annually ([6](#), [7](#)) with no one even daring to estimate final costs. Once again, given the staggering degree of these costs, it is alarming that this matter has not been at the forefront of the electoral agenda of all major political parties.

As above, the government urgently needs to publicly and conspicuously answer the questions from the “[Self-Assessment Toolkit](#)” for governments

Questions 5: Financing the SDGs

Part A: identifying your baseline

Did the most recent budget proposal describe how it takes the SDGs into account? Does parliament require the government to do so?

Does the budget allocate specific funds for the implementation of the SDGs? If so, what percentage of the budget is allocated, and for what purpose?

Does the country receive or provide international development funding to support the SDGs?

Do the terms of reference of budget and finance committees require them to consider SDG implementation as part of their oversight activities?

Is there a budget office or unit in the parliamentary secretariat with the capacity to support parliamentary committees to assess proposed and actual budget expenditure against the SDGs?

In the past 12 months:

How many reports on the SDGs has the country's supreme audit institution or similar body submitted to parliament?

How many reports from the relevant committee have contained specific reference to allocating funds or expenditure related to the SDGs?

SOLUTION: The people must be urgently advised of the enormous cost of this agenda, including the itemised costs and final costs to taxpayers at all levels. Once again, this information should not have been excluded from the electoral agenda during elections. This must be rectified urgently.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the government has already devoted significant time and resources to institutionalising the UN driven 2030 Agenda even though there has been no democratic foundation whatsoever. In fact, my requests to the Foreign Minister, and other Ministers, to include this matter in the electoral agenda, met with no response, and no mention of the issue during the last election. Yet, experts agree the entire sustainability agenda can only succeed if it has a solid democratic foundation. At the crux of the matter is whether the government should act as an agent of the United Nations by legislating to enforce the dictates of the UN upon the Australian people, and to do so whilst denying the people any democratic choice. Should imported international agreements prevail against democratic Australian laws? All these issues need to be taken to the people.

Not to do so is to treat democracy, and the Australian people, with utter contempt.