



Sustainability is a journey, not a destination.

(Mr Chris Davis, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Water Association)¹

A Vision for Sustainable Cities

Introduction

- 1.1 Australian cities are facing a number of crucial issues. Water shortages, congested transport, and demands placed on energy and urban development must be addressed.
- 1.2 Current indicators, such as greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and energy use, suggest that future cities may develop in ways we do not desire.
- 1.3 Creating sustainable cities for the future requires planned action. Australia must proactively shape the growth and liveability of cities into the future.
- 1.4 Our cities must be inclusive, healthy environments that are rich in economic as well as social capital, and that are open, accessible and safe.
- 1.5 Australia has the opportunity to address the challenges that face its cities. In the course of this inquiry, the committee has observed many individuals, organisations and governments taking up these challenges and that much is already being done to bring about more sustainable cities.

¹ Mr Chris Davis, Australian Water Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2005, p. 35.

- 1.6 This committee recognises that the issue of sustainable cities is an issue that affects all Australians and must be addressed by the Australian Government.

The inquiry

- 1.7 In August 2003, the then Minister for Environment and Heritage, the Hon Dr David Kemp, referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage the inquiry into *Sustainable Cities 2025*. Following the dissolution of the 40th Parliament, the inquiry lapsed.
- 1.8 In the 41st Parliament, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage sought a reference from the Minister for Environment and Heritage, Senator the Hon Ian Campbell, and resumed the inquiry in February 2005 with the same terms of reference.
- 1.9 The terms of reference for this inquiry are broad and outline an examination of the impacts and costs of sprawling urban development, the major determinants and benefits of different settlement patterns, mechanisms for urban reform, and a blueprint for sustainable Australian cities.
- 1.10 The inquiry into *Sustainable Cities 2025* comes more than a decade after the 1992 report *Patterns of Urban Settlement: Consolidating the Future?*, conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies. Although many similar issues have been identified in the two reports, in 2005 the path to sustainable cities calls for a new set of initiatives from the Australian Government. It also puts out an urgent call for sustainable urban development to be placed at the forefront of government agendas.
- 1.11 The large number of submissions and the high level of media interest in the inquiry indicated that urban development is now a national priority and there is a local desire for change.
- 1.12 In the 40th Parliament, a total of 192 submissions were received to the *Sustainable Cities 2025* inquiry. So comprehensive and informative was the range of submissions that the committee of the 40th Parliament elected to conduct a number of roundtable forums in addition to public hearings and inspections around the country.

- 1.13 Roundtable forums brought together organisations with a similar focus or needs, such as local councils in one instance, to discuss the types of challenges faced in the implementation of sustainability policies. Another roundtable brought together a range of health professionals and researchers to detail the connection between urban environments and population health.
- 1.14 In conducting its public hearings, the committee of the 40th Parliament sought to hear from a broad range of witnesses. These witnesses represented organisations, industry, researchers and individuals. Public hearings were conducted in Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane.
- 1.15 A number of inspections were also held in the 40th Parliament. These inspections provided a first hand look at innovative energy technologies, greenfield housing developments, in-fill and retrofit developments, broad scale coastal development, community regeneration projects, water treatment systems, and conservation and recreation areas.
- 1.16 The committee of the 41st Parliament reaffirms the importance of sustainable Australian cities by resuming the inquiry and completing this report. The committee held additional public hearings and roundtable discussions in Perth and Sydney. The committee also conducted a number of inspections which provided insights into energy and waste management technologies.
- 1.17 The committee acknowledges the contribution of the previous committee, in particular, the previous Chairman, the Hon Bruce Billson MP, for his ongoing interest in this inquiry.
- 1.18 In conducting this inquiry, the committee was well aware that many issues relating to urban development are the responsibility of State and Territory or local governments. However, while not all issues are within the jurisdiction of the Australian Government, the performance and health of our cities impacts on Australia as a nation.
- 1.19 The committee determined that there is a critical role for the Australian Government to provide a holistic national vision and to establish a framework approach to integrate the components of a sustainable city. This framework of city sustainability should govern Australian Government policies and actions. It should also provide a connected framework to plan and fund sustainable Australian cities – the details and implementation of these plans are devolved to and determined by State, Territory and local governments as appropriate.

- 1.20 It is the vision of this committee that sustainable cities of the future will be vibrant urban regions which are economically productive, environmentally responsible, and socially inclusive. The conclusions in this report establish the objectives, mechanisms and commitment for the cooperative development of vibrant and sustainable Australian cities.

Structure of the report

- 1.21 The evidence gathered during the course of this inquiry is extensive. The summary of key issues and recommendations in this report is broad but it does not aim to be comprehensive. The report represents many of the thematic issues that emerged during the inquiry and it sets a direction for governments of all levels.
- 1.22 The issue of sustainable cities is vast and the approach of this inquiry was to initiate the establishment of a national framework of principles, targets and mechanisms towards sustainability.
- 1.23 The committee saw this task as encompassing five processes:
- Acceptance of the need for sustainability in our cities. This entails understanding our 'urban scorecard' and our comparative performance on sustainability indicators.
 - Establishment by the Australian Government of future targets related to urban sustainability and the governance frameworks that are required to connect these targets with policy and funding decision-makers.
 - Implementation of the sectoral programs and changes needed at a practical and grass-roots level to modify current unsustainable practices and to promote best practice in all aspects of urban development.
 - Monitoring of progress towards sustainability, and transparently reporting back to all Australians (and internationally) on our successes and failures. We must be prepared to research and implement new technologies, and to review and adapt new and existing programs to better meet sustainability targets.
 - Provision of accessible information so that the Australian public can make informed judgements about the issues addressed in this report.

- 1.24 The structure of this report broadly follows these key processes. The following chapter considers the current health of our cities in terms of economic performance, social well-being, population health and a number of other comparative international indicators. It provides a snapshot of our urban environments and an overview of the liveability of Australian cities.
- 1.25 Chapter 3 reviews the policy frameworks governing urban development and the role of the Australian Government in setting a national urban policy. It proposes a new model to enable governments to promote and include sustainability in future decision-making and funding.
- 1.26 Chapter 4 considers issues of settlement patterns, examines current trends in household and dwelling sizes and looks at different models of city development. It looks at the focus needed on building communities rather than just housing people, and finally considers consultation processes and the Development Assessment Forum.
- 1.27 Chapter 5 examines the transport needs of our cities. It looks at problems with transport sustainability and Australian Government funding for transport infrastructure. It considers ways in which car use can be reduced and the benefits of public and active transport. It also discusses options for increasing the efficiency or environmental performance of transport modes.
- 1.28 Chapter 6 examines water issues in relation to sustainable cities. It looks at water efficiency with an emphasis on water recycling and desalination, Water Sensitive Urban Design and finally, decentralised water delivery as a major challenge for urban environments.
- 1.29 Chapter 7 examines the efficiency and health impacts of commercial and residential building standards, and how appropriate current building practices are to provide sustainable buildings for our future. It looks at the myriad of standards, regulations and benchmarks and other concepts such as Life Cycle Analysis of Design that all impact on the sustainability of the built environment.
- 1.30 Chapter 8 focuses on energy delivery and energy efficiency. It examines the energy needs of cities and measures to reduce consumption, and increase efficiency and the take-up of renewable energy.
- 1.31 Chapter 9 examines the need to research and report on how we are performing in order to map and plan our path towards sustainability.