

The Secretary,
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
House of Representatives

I am writing to ask the committee to include in its report a recommendation that sustainable cities will only be achieved if individual citizens have access to information that allows them to put theory into practice.

In support of this suggestion may I refer to my own circumstances. I live in Minto, NSW. Recently my local council replanted the open space reserve next to my home with vegetation typical of the Cumberland Forrest that covered the district prior to colonisation. I think this is a good idea and would like to mirror their planting program in my own backyard. The difficulty I am experiencing is finding information that will inform me of the trees, bushes and grasses that make up the Cumberland Forest type which ones would grow best in a suburban back yard and where to obtain them for planting.

I believe that if I had this information I would be taking steps to realise a few of the ideas of a sustainable city referred to in your discussion paper. I would be extending an urban green zone that the council has created into my backyard. In planting plant species native to the environment I live in I would be contributing to the efficient use of water in my neighbourhood by not having to undertake additional watering of my garden other than that provided by rainfall.

At present, however, such an undertaking is not easy because access to the information to carry out such a plan is not readily available. Nor is it generally supported by the public authorities by way of publicity and appropriate support in its implementation. Our city authorities for the greater part limit themselves to a regulatory role in respect of citizens and their homes. More recently they have been ready to influence homeowners in undertaking actions that contribute to sustainability, for example, by facilitating recycling through a regime of sorted household and gardening waste. What I would like to see is council and other government authorities going further, trying to form partnerships with individual households to take more steps to make sustainability an integral part of the lifestyle of urban and suburban dwellers. They should be asking to be invited into people's backyards - not because they want to ensure that they meet relevant civic codes, but to find out what they can do to help them become part of a sustainable neighbourhood and city.

In conclusion, I believe the challenge is to transform the private domain that we have now into the sustainable city of the future. If this is not done, all we will have is a city of case studies for sustainability rather than the sustainable city itself. To ensure this transformation occurs we have to provide individuals with the information and the support to carry it out.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and consider it as part of your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Maris Bruzgulis

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