

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE**

SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025

SUBMISSION BY

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INTRODUCTION – IT IS TIME

The House of Representatives decision to establish the inquiry into sustainable cities 2025 is timely. Not only because 2004 is the year of the built environment. But also because, for example:

- The planning frame works particularly of the major cities are increasingly being questioned (Sydney) or are absent (Hobart);
- There is greater knowledge about the environment which has affected some of the metropolitan planning strategies;
- Some of the cities are experiencing population growth greater than previous predictions;
- The community's values and expectations have changed. This is particularly evident in issues related to environmental management and conservation. In some cases the community is prepared to forego economic development opportunities in order to protect the environment; and
- The role of cities as places to live, work and play is changing in response to technology and global economics.

Particularly relevant to this Committee's deliberations is the growing acceptance by the broader community and informed professionals that there are environmental capacity limits to the growth of settlements generally and cities in particular. This acceptance is founded on:

- The realisation that our water resources are finite in quantity and threatened in quality;
- Increasing despair about the long term management of air quality within major cities;
- The diminishing supply of suitable unencumbered land for urban development which has implications for housing choice and affordability;
- The population debate particularly in Sydney which has raised questions about sustainable population levels and the need for a wider population policy for Australia; and
- An emerging debate about the appropriate forms of urban structure that balance between social, economic and environmental conservations factors.

This submission is intended to identify and explore the issues. It is not the work of authority on sustainability or sustainable cities. It draws on the author's experiences of working at State and Local Government levels in two Australian States and overseas. It is in no a submission by Glenorchy Council.

My key argument is that sustainable cities in 2025 and beyond should not only accept that there are environmental capacity limits to growth, but also:

- Achieve a balance between vertical and horizontal growth;
- be planned, developed and managed in partnership by all levels of government as well as in collaboration with the broad communities of interest;
- sustainably funded
- supported by the appropriate administrative structures;

- strategically guided by planning frameworks which implement targeted solutions that reflect agreed global policies; and
- create communities that are diverse in socio economic backgrounds (inclusive communities)

SUSTAINABLE CITIES MUST GROW VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY

A key feature of the major cities of Australia today is that most of the growth continues to be on the urban fringe, although there is now an emerging trend towards greater inner city living. The challenge for the planners and Governments is that there is no theoretical equation for a sustainable balance between inner city and fringe development. Even if such an equation existed, a sustainable balance would have to take into account the environmental capacity limits of each city. Notwithstanding, and if population densities are an indication of sustainable cities, an argument could be mounted that Australian cities are, on this single indicator, less sustainable than their overseas counterparts. This is highlighted in comparing Sydney to a number of overseas cities as shown in the table below.

City	Area (sq.km)	Population (m)	Density
Sydney (a)	1617	3.275 (1)	2027
Hong Kong	1092	6.3 (2)	5769
Shanghai	6213	13 (3)	2090
New York	785	8(4)	10201
Greater London	1610	6.38(5)	3961
Los Angeles	1215	3.7 (6)	3041
Berlin	883	3.5 (1)	3936

((1)=1996, (2)=1997, (3)=1994, (4)= 2000, (5)=1991, (6)= 2000, (7)=1994;
(a)=Central Urban Area which excludes Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Picton, Richmond and Windsor whose inclusion would result in an area of 2210 sq.km, a population of 3.85m and a density of 1744)

The above table is not intended to show that Sydney is less sustainable than the other cities. However it suggests that Sydney may have greater carrying capacity in its existing footprint and therefore less demand on greenfield land for urban development. The challenge is how to harvest the spare capacity.

The NSW Government's urban consolidation policy is demonstrating that greater community and local government acceptance can be achieved through the targeting of particular areas where both in terms of environmental outcomes and community acceptance the greatest impacts would be achieved. Even greater acceptance could be achieved where these targeted solutions embrace the broader social economic and environment considerations. Australian cities could in this instance learn from the British approach where urban redevelopment and renewal programs must result in improvements to the environment, the social services as well as the economic/employment opportunities and transport services of the targeted communities.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES MUST BE PARTNERSHIPS

Planning for our cities should be a shared responsibility between all levels of Government. Historically however, planning has remained primarily the responsibility of State and Local Government

The Federal Government has over the last two decades been largely a spectator in the planning, development and management of Australian cities. This is despite its decisions having major implications for the cities. The Government's immigration policies in particular have major implications for population growth and therefore the planning and housing directions of the major cities. This has recently led to the debate on sustainable levels of population not only for the nation but particularly the major capital cities such as Sydney. Despite the acknowledged impact of its policies and programs on Australian cities, and apart from the decentralisation policies of the 1970's, the Federal Government has been sporadic and intermittent through programs such as *Better Cities* of the mid 1990's. This approach contrasts markedly with the overseas experiences, such as Germany, Denmark and indeed most of the European Union, where the national governments have taken an active role in the planning, development and management of their major cities. For example, the five sector metropolitan plan for Copenhagen is supported by an Act of Parliament.

In light of the Federal Government's hands off approach, the responsibility for providing strategic planning leadership for the cities lies with the State Governments. But even at this level, there are problems. While States, such as NSW, have developed comprehensive strategies and programs for their major metropolitan areas, other States, such as Tasmania, do not have such frameworks in place. The planning, development and management of some of the metropolitan areas remain fragmented and would in extreme fall in the category of those centres whose planning could be described, in the words of the late Professor Denis Winston, as exercises in muddling through. For the States to effectively manage Sustainable Cities in 2025, they need to put in place clear strategic frameworks supported by disciplined monitoring and review programs.

The other problem at State level is the inter agency relationships. In the same way that Sustainable Cities 2025 must be a partnership between all levels of Government, so must it also be a partnership between the planning authorities and those authorities who provide the social and physical infrastructure. The relationship between the planning agencies and the infrastructure providers is politically and financially weighted towards the latter. To achieve more effective outcomes for the communities of Sustainable Cities 2025, there needs to be a balance of power between the planning authorities and the service providers. The NSW Government has attempted to address this imbalance by creating a super ministry of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. This initiative could however be strengthened by , for example adopting the Danish model which clearly distinguishes planning authorities as providing the strategic leadership and the infrastructure agencies as service providers.

The third element in the partnership is local government. This is the level which has the day to day management of our cities. If there is conflict in the management of the

cities it is between State and Local Government. Local Government has an important role in the lives of communities. However its contribution to Sustainable Cities 2025 is a matter of debate. The fragmentation of major cities into a multiplicity of local government areas has made strategic planning difficult in cities such as Sydney. The fragmentation of the cities in geographic and political senses has resulted in lack of shared visions and inconsistent strategic and regulatory frameworks between State and local government as well as between local government. This is compounded by and/or reflected in a number of 19th century local government controls, eg three storey limits on residential flat buildings, definition of floor space ratios, which no longer reflect modern planning and housing needs.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES MUST BE PROPERLY FUNDED AND EFFICIENTLY GOVERNED

The infrastructure requirements of a modern city are complex, challenging, enormous and beyond the capacity of a single level of government. In the same way that there is a need for a partnership approach to the planning of Sustainable Cities in 2025, so is the need for a collaborative and coordinated approach by the three levels of government to the funding of infrastructure. Funding of infrastructure is one of the most powerful tools for managing urban sprawl. In this instance the City of Merrylands in the USA provides a good lesson. The decision by that city to shift its budget from spending about 80% on infrastructure on the urban fringe to 80% in the established areas saw a dramatic drop in the urban sprawl. As well, the British success in its urban redevelopment programs has been to a greater part due to the Governments on going commitment of billions of pounds annually. This contrasts with, for example, the NSW experience where the government is promoting greater in city living on one hand but closing down some of the social infrastructure and services.

Metropolitan governance is both politically and intellectually a topical issue. In The world is blessed with a multiplicity of models ranging from City states such as the Vatican, through the USA model where local authorities perform the same role as Australian states to Brisbane as a metropolitan council. Different States around Australia have approached metropolitan governance differently- forced amalgamations of Councils in Victoria, boundary changes and voluntary amalgamations in NSW and *sacred cow status* of Councils in Tasmania. There is no single model that would appear to meet the political and community needs of the Sustainable Cities of 2025. Nevertheless this Inquiry is a timely opportunity to discuss this issue and one of its key outcomes should be the way forward in developing a model of metropolitan governance for the Sustainable Cities of 2025.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES MUST BE INCLUSIVE

Sustainable Cities 2025 must reflect the community's values and expectations. One of these values must be an inclusive society. Inclusiveness is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Inclusiveness in this submission it is confined to the socio economic mix of our communities.

Cities have always been segregated places. However, modern planning has advertently or inadvertently, reinforced this segregation and in part contributed to monocultural communities and urban sprawl. This is particularly well illustrated by the planning and development of Sydney.

After years of planning driven by health outcomes, the County of Cumberland Planning Scheme was gazetted in the mid 1950's. This forward looking document saw Sydney developing as a city comprising mixes of socio-economic communities. This is because the areas designated for living allowed for a mix of housing choice. The creation of different classes of residential zones, in some local government areas up to six such zones not only introduced economic but also social segregation. The State Government's attempt to reverse this trend through its urban consolidation policy has been vigorously opposed by local government and the community who consider the introduction of new housing opportunities for the socio-economically disadvantaged sections of the community as a affront the status of particular communities.

If one were to accept that land for Sustainable Cities 2025 is a finite resource, then one also has to question whether or not the exclusive zones are appropriate in managing urban sprawl and creating inclusive communities. This is not to say that forms of social and economic segregation will be eliminated; but it can be minimised.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025 MUST BE BASED ON GLOBAL POLICIES AND TARGETTED SOLUTIONS

The environmental capacity limits to the growth of the Sustainable Cities 2025 means that we have to identify what is sacrosanct and draw lines in the sand as to the limits of growth. Sustainable Cities 2025 achieving a n appropriate ratio of vertical and horizontal growth. How we plan, develop and manage the environment of the development footprints of the cities must be guided by global policies. These policies will include, inter alia, population levels, environmental management, infrastructure funding, inter and intra governmental relations economic development and housing. To achieve the most effective and sustainable outcomes, however, the implementation of these policies must be by way of targeted solutions.

The need for global policies is similar to the approach the European Union has taken in demanding that member states prepare national and regional planning and policy frameworks as a prerequisite to funding development projects and programs. The need for targeted solutions is exemplified by the approach which the City of Copenhagen has taken in dividing the city into five sectors as a well of managing and guiding its growth and development.