



ACT Government

**ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE DISCUSSION PAPER
INVESTIGATING OPTIONS FOR A NATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY
CHARTER**

Overview

On 12 September 2006 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage tabled the *Sustainable Cities* report. The committee called for the development of a Sustainability Charter based on measurable outcomes, over a certain time period, with intermediate milestones.

The charter should be inspirational. It must provide targets for the Australian community to meet and, once those targets have been met they must be re-assessed so new targets can be put in place.

The Committee is now inquiring into and will 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.

A discussion paper scoping some of the key areas central to the preparation of a sustainability charter, canvassing input from a wide range of local and state governments, researchers, business, industry and community associations and individuals has been presented. The aim of this paper is to assist and challenge those who make a submission or otherwise assist the committee in the inquiry.

The committee has invited comments from individual

Is and organisations with an interest or expertise in these matters.

The Sustainable cities report

The *Sustainable cities* report contained 32 recommendations. Whilst not all of these related directly to the establishment of a Sustainability Charter – many of them did or would provide leadership in areas to be touched on by the charter. Recommendations directly related to this question include:

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- establish an Australian Sustainability Charter that sets key national targets across a number of areas, including water, transport, energy building design and planning.

- encourage a Council of Australian Governments agreement to the charter and its key targets.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that all new relevant Government policy proposals be evaluated as to whether they would impact on urban sustainability and if so, be assessed against the Australian Sustainability Charter and the COAG agreed sustainability targets.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that:

- the Australian Government establish an independent Australian Sustainability Commission headed by a National Sustainability Commissioner;
- task the Commission with monitoring the extent to which Commonwealth funds and State and Territory use of Commonwealth funds promotes the COAG agreed sustainability targets; and
- task the Commission with exploring the concept of incentive payments to the States and Territories for sustainability outcomes along the lines of the National Competition Council model.

ACT Government Response

The ACT Government's response to the *Sustainable Cities* report dated February 2006 included comments relating to the above recommendations, these were:

Recommendation 1 – Supported in Principle

The ACT supports the establishment of an Australian Sustainability Charter that sets key national targets across a number of areas, including water, transport, energy, building design and planning, and that this be developed through a high-level inter-jurisdictional forum such as the COAG or its Local Government and Planning Ministers Council. The ACT recognises that the future of Australian cities and regional centres lies in concerted national action.

There is a role for this forum in providing a holistic national vision, overarching principles for sustainable urban and regional development, and to establish a framework approach to integrate the components of a sustainable city. Investigations will enhance the likelihood of the proposed Charter identifying appropriate mechanisms for improving the responsiveness of urban development to the principles of sustainability.

The ACT recognises that targets can be problematic in terms of being meaningful, measurable and achievable. Given the differing environmental, social and economic conditions and priorities within and between jurisdictions, establishing national targets

will be a significant challenge. The cost of developing and implementing policies and plans to achieve identified targets is likely to be significant.

The ACT will be in a better position to identify the implications of the proposed Charter, following investigations through the above-mentioned forum. The ACT cannot provide full endorsement of a Charter until this forum has scoped the contents.

Government Response to Recommendation 2 – Supported in Part

The ACT supports the concept of evaluating the impacts on urban sustainability of all new relevant Australian Government policy. This will ensure that major challenges facing our cities and towns are addressed upfront, and that strategies are developed to respond to these challenges. The ACT agrees that the introduction of sustainability, as a criterion for new policies, is essential if we are to recognise sustainability as more than an optional add-on.

With respect to the proposal to evaluate relevant proposals against the Australian Sustainability Charter and the COAG agreed sustainability targets, the ACT will be in a better position to respond to this recommendation following further investigation by a high level inter-jurisdictional forum into the establishment of an Australian Sustainability Charter (and any associated national targets or standards).

Recommendation 3

Government Response to Recommendation 3 – Supported in Principle

The ACT supports an investigation, in consultation with the States and Territories, into an independent Australian Sustainability Commission. However, before the ACT could endorse the establishment of an Australian Sustainability Commission, we would require clarity on:

- the specific roles, powers, and responsibilities of the Commission;
- funding arrangements for the Commission;
- any associated governance structure that would need to be established; and
- the relationship between the Commission and the proposed Charter.

If a Commission were established, a review of sustainability issues addressed in other national for a such as energy, transport, planning, adaptation etc, would need to be undertaken to avoid any duplication of work. Such duplication would place unnecessary strain on resourcing, especially in the smaller jurisdictions. In addition, if a Commission were established, it should work collaboratively with the States and Territories.

The Committee has indicated that a possible task of the Commission would be to monitor the extent to which Commonwealth funds and State and Territory use of Commonwealth funds promotes the COAG agreed sustainability targets. The ACT would only support monitoring the extent to which State and Territory use of Commonwealth funds promote the COAG agreed sustainability targets for Commonwealth-tied grants.

If a Commission were established, the ACT would support it exploring the concept of incentive payments to the States and Territories for sustainability outcomes along the lines of the National Competition Council model. Proposed models would need to be tested against public interest outcomes, where public interest is measured by a holistic assessment of sustainability outcomes. Funds could be allocated to address structural adjustment costs associated with the move towards improved sustainability outcomes.