Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

INTERFACE COUNCILS

Submission from Interface Councils

Overview

The Interface Councils Group comprise the municipalities of Cardinia, Hume, Melton, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges (see Appendix 1). All Interface Councils have a minimum of 70% rural land, which will remain as such into the future.

A lack of recognition of the urban/rural conservation mixes has significant impact on the Interface Councils in relation to planning issues, infrastructure issues and critical programming and funding issues.

Planning Issues

Key planning issues include sustaining growth zones, reserving public space, protecting rural and conservation zones and providing basic services such as water supply and effective transport systems.

It is expected that over 40% of all new dwellings will be built in the Interface.

Infrastructure and Funding Issues

Key infrastructure issues include funding for interface growth zones, road infrastructure and infrastructure costs, alignment of boundaries, funding of services such as sewerage, drainage, gas, telecommunications and the impact of privatisation and corporatisation on these utilities.

The Interface Councils Group welcomes the initiative from the Commonwealth Government to investigate and consider initiatives related to Sustainable Urban Development.

1. Preserve bushland, significant heritage and urban green zones

The principle that urban development provides for green zones in order to enhance local amenity and also to protect significant bushland and other natural heritage items is supported. These areas are often rich in their biodiversity and increase the liveability of a region. They also act as important sinks for greenhouse gases that are generated by urban development.

The retention of green zones within the urban boundary may limit the availability of land for residential development, creating further pressure for urban expansion. However, this pressure will most likely arise in any case and it is best managed by considering more efficient land development opportunities. In this regard, higher density urban development need not be at the expense of green zones, or vice versa, where careful strategic planning is undertaken. In addition, where urban expansion is necessary, this may occur in areas that have lesser environmental value than areas appropriately included within a green zone. As a result, this may ensure an environmental gain by retaining these green areas within the urban fabric.

Local government's experience has been that remnant vegetation can be retained on private land, and it is not necessary that the protection of remnant vegetation is solely achieved through it being in public land ownership within green zones.

Where large areas of private land are to be set aside to protect vegetation for the benefit of the wider community, it is considered that some financial offset should be provided. This could be through direct grants, transfer of development rights to elsewhere on the property, tax concessions and the like. Submissions have been made to the Victorian Grants Commission to include an "environmental" factor within its funding formula for designated "Green Wedge" areas.

There are a number of ways to provide incentives to encourage partnership arrangements with land holders and developers to preserve remnant vegetation on private lands. A number of Councils have a 'Land Sustainability Rate' or Sustainable Agricultural Rebate which offers a rate reduction incentive for improvements to rural land. Other programs include biodiversity grants and assistance for pest plants and animal control activities.

2. Ensure equitable access to and efficient use of energy, including renewable energy sources

The principle that there does need to be concerted effort made to move away from non renewable energy sources to renewable energy is supported. The price differential between the two needs to be addressed in order for this to become a reality. Currently, the cost of renewable energy is substantially dearer than that produced by traditional large scale energy generation and therefore there is a cost disincentive for individuals and businesses to move in this direction.

One option is to facilitate pooling of funding to install systems which all participants will gain some benefit from. The various technologies would be more visible to the wider community, and real reductions in greenhouse emissions will begin to happen.

Whilst the Discussion Paper concentrates its consideration on the implementation of energy efficient practices within new developments and Greenfield sites, there is a need to also address the retrofitting of existing buildings; whether they are for residential, commercial, industrial or public uses.

Given the significant additional costs of retrofitting existing buildings, there is a need for ongoing financial incentives and support for research and development projects, rather than short-term pilot projects, which can initiate and support the continued implementation of energy efficient designs and infrastructure.

A National Standard or Approach to measuring environmental sustainability in the built environment would reduce a significant amount of work being duplicated at the State and Local Level.

3. Establish an integrated sustainable water and stormwater management system addressing capture, consumption, treatment for their reuse opportunities

A catchment management approach is needed to address water management systems. The Green Paper on *Securing Our Water Future*, recently released by the Victorian State government places a strong emphasis upon catchment management. In this regard, the Standing Committee's attention is drawn to the proposals within the Green Paper to seek to achieve smarter water use in urban settlements by:

- Reducing potable water consumption in the household and industry via a range of mechanisms;
- Substituting recycled water and stormwater for potable water to extend the urban water supply;
- Increasing the use of recycled water for industry, agriculture and environmental uses; and
- Promoting the adoption of innovative technologies to extend the supplies of potable water.

A major deficiency of this Green Paper is the lack of recognition that it affords to the initiatives undertaken by local government. Acknowledgment needs to be provided in the areas of stormwater and domestic waste water management. In particular, there is the opportunity for the Commonwealth to financially support the implementation of these initiatives.

Steps towards the reuse of what traditionally has been waste water should be vigorously pursued and again a pricing mechanism must be established to encourage this. The reuse of treated effluent from treatment plants servicing the needs of our cities should be encouraged wherever possible, but careful consideration of possible health and environmental impacts would need to be undertaken, including impacts on groundwater.

Simple initiatives such as requiring all new developments to install water takes to collect rain water for use on gardens and flushing of toilets and the installation of water saving devices and dual flush toilets all contribute to the sustainability of Australian cities.

It may be of interest to the Committee that the Association of Bayside Municipalities is currently working on a 'Clean Stormwater' project which has developed planning tools to enable new developments and infill developments handle their stormwater appropriately. Some of the engineering solutions provided do require ongoing maintenance, however increasing development is incrementally adding to the amount of stormwater being generated and greater regulation is required to minimise the impacts. More information on Clean Stormwater' can be found on the Associations website www.abmonline.asn.au.

In relation to stormwater and waste water management, it is considered that a primary principle for new developments ought to be the concept of no net gain in relation to runoff and waste water.

4. Manage and minimise domestic and industrial waste

Whilst considerable work has been undertaken in the area of waste management, especially at the local and regional level, there is a need for particular attention to be given to waste minimisation in industry which is a key generator at the present time.

In the broader context, product stewardship, not only involving the consumer but also the producer, is an important element in the management of both domestic and industrial waste, which is an area where the Commonwealth Government has a key role to play in promoting such responsibility.

Some initiatives may involve long term payback timelines. However, this should not be a financial deficit in the end and would eventually mean economic benefits for cleaner living and decreased consumption. There should be a focus on sustainable investment portfolios to increase the communities' expectation that industry will be both environmentally and socially responsible.

A number of local governments have introduced innovative programs to reduce domestic waste. For example, see Nillumbik's GRO system (Appendix 2).

5. Develop sustainable transport neworks, nodal complementarity and logistics

Given the intrinsic relationship between transport and land use planning, Commonwealth Government involvement in transport planning and provision is considered to be essential if it is to take an active interest and participatory role in broader urban settlement issues. In this regard, the Commonwealth Government's interest and involvement in the provision of public transport in urban areas would be welcomed, and it is an area where the Commonwealth could take a more significant role.

It is noted that in the United States, 75% of the costs of new urban rail and light rail lines is directly funded from Federal fuel taxes (Public lecture by visiting American expert GB Harrington, sponsored by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment 28 October 2003, Melbourne).

Urban sprawl has been allowed to occur over many decades across all Australian cities. Often this pattern of urban growth results in people living remote from their place of work and also from other key services. The spread out nature and low densities of development that result do not enable sufficient critical mass to be reached to justify the established criteria for major expenditure of public funds to be spent on expanding the public transport system.

Successive governments have tended to allow this urban sprawl to continue and have proceeded to expend large sums of money on the construction of freeways and the like to support it. The provision of such major infrastructure has in turn tended to further encourage this sprawl rather than contain it.

6. Incorporate eco-efficiency principles into new buildings and housing

It is considered that better design and orientation of buildings, use of appropriate building materials, incorporation of renewable energy infrastructure and systems such as solar hot water, solar panels for electricity generation, water minimising devices, water reuse systems and the like will all assist in improving the sustainability of Australian cities.

It is also considered that standards for new buildings requiring them to attain certain energy and water consumption standards should be mandatory. Likewise, all fittings, fixtures and appliances should be required to meet specified performance standards in terms of their consumption of energy and water. The current star rating system is a good start but needs to be supplemented with other initiatives such as an extensive publicity campaign promoting the benefits that this will achieve, both economically and environmentally.

7. Develop urban plans that accommodate lifestyle and business opportunities

What is considered essential for any model of a sustainable city is that it provide for such things as:-

- Social and cultural diversity
- Equity of access to services (eg. Education, medical services, recreation etc)
- Easy access to efficient, reliable and safe public transport
- Housing choice
- Employment opportunities
- Business Investment opportunities

To achieve this, we need an integrated approach to planning that has the cooperation and commitment of all levels of government, the private sector and the general community. This planning needs to foster innovation and creativity and be willing to adapt and modify strategies and expectations at all levels in order to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE COMMITTEE

ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 146

ATTACHMENTS, APPENDICES AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED WITH SUBMISSIONS ARE HELD IN THE COMMITTEE OFFICE