

Submission to Sustainable Cities 2025

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment & Heritage



City of
Onkaparinga

Overview

Sustainability is arguably the most significant challenge facing Australia over coming decades. To meet this challenge strong leadership and effective coordination from all spheres of government is vital. Due to their social, economic and environmental importance, it is not possible to isolate discussion of sustainable cities from the broader discussion of a sustainable Australia.

Commonwealth engagement and leadership is vital on this issue. The Better Cities program saw the Commonwealth actively engaged in achieving environmental, social and economic outcomes for urban areas through a focus on urban form and structure. The establishment of similar program, but with a broader sustainability focus is recommended.

Vision

A clear vision of sustainability needs to be defined and articulated for Australia. The development of the 1992 National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development was significant milestone. However, a decade on the issue appears to have fallen off the Federal agenda. It is now time to revisit the 1992 strategy, review progress and reaffirm commitments. The Commonwealth has a strong leadership role to play in reinvigorating this debate. It needs to facilitate the development of a clear vision, principles, strategies and targets for sustainability for Australia for the next 10 years.

Governance

The establishment of a Sustainability Commission, similar to the existing Productivity Commission (as proposed by Dovers 2001) is strongly supported. Such a body could act to oversee progress towards sustainability. Just as the Productivity Commission has reviewed Federal, state and local government legislation with regard to anti competitive measures, a Sustainability Commission could identify similar obstacles to sustainability. The New Zealand model, whereby a Sustainability Commissioner reports directly to Parliament, rather than the Government, is worthy of consideration.

The challenges of sustainability will require changes to the design of public institutions. Cross-disciplinary institutions, which promote integration and collaboration, are needed over those with a specialist or narrow focus.

Coordination

The pursuit of sustainability requires a coordinated approach from all levels of government. Currently multiple programs with similar objectives are being run at State, Federal and local level. This is creating confusion for the intended audiences and resulting in wasted resources. Improved coordination needs to occur at all levels from strategic planning to service delivery.

Partnerships between all levels of government, communities and business are essential.

Financing

Financial systems will have a key role in bringing about sustainable outcomes. Commonwealth funding has an important part to play in this. It should aim to promote sustainability not just via type of projects funded, but also in the way in which funding is allocated. Funding models should aim to deliver multiple outcomes and provide funding security over the medium to long term to enable “big picture” issues to be addressed.

In relation to local government, Commonwealth grant funding to local government could be tied to the adoption of suitable sustainability frameworks.

The City of Onkaparinga

The City of Onkaparinga is South Australia's most populous local government with a population of 148,000. The City has a strong commitment to sustainability.

Council's policies are built around the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Creating our Future, Council's strategic directions document, reflects this with a focus on 3 key themes: our people, our community and our environment. Within the document these 3 themes are integrated via the key strategic directions namely:

- turn waste to wealth;
- fostering enterprising communities;
- places for people;
- commit to our environment; and
- promote healthy lifestyles.

The document also contains a Charter for Future Generations, in which Elected Members pledge to consider the needs of the current and future generations in their decision-making.

Rather than follow the submission format suggested, a discussion of some of the key issues facing the City of Onkaparinga as it seeks to improve sustainability outcomes follows.

Land use planning

There are specific spatial characteristics pertinent to the City of Onkaparinga, which affect the attainment of a more sustainable environment:

- The City of Onkaparinga straddles the southern rural – urban fringe and coastal area of Adelaide. Within its 520 sqkm area, the majority of the population is clustered in the urban areas, which occupy just 20% of the total area.
- The urban form (street layouts and homogenous and segregated land uses) has been designed on car dependency reinforced by the separation of places of work and living, which requires commuting.
- This is exacerbated by a public transport system, which is limited to certain areas and is demand rather than supply led.
- The lack of a reliable, frequent and penetrating public transport system and of choices in transport modes reinforces car dependency.
- The fringe area of the City is also characterised by rural residential and lifestyle hobby farms blending through to agricultural and viticultural pursuits such as those associated with the McLaren Vale Wine region.

The responsibility for addressing these shortcomings rests with all spheres of government. A coordinated approach is required to ensure that sustainable urban practices are achievable at the time of settlement. Long-standing policies in Council's Development Plan which prescribe future patterns of settlement need to be given adequate regard by state infrastructure authorities in terms of forward planning. Communities isolated from education institutions, public transport links, regional health facilities and the like, cannot contribute to the attainment of sustainable cities.

As in other coastal councils there has been a recent rapid gravitation of population to the coastal extremities of the City of Onkaparinga. This has, for the most part, preceded the development of necessary infrastructure. This has compromised the degree to which social and environmental sustainability can be achieved. The City of Onkaparinga is a participant in the Seachange Councils Group. This represents a national response by local government to this issue.

The City of Onkaparinga in particular is faced with multiple challenges, a derivative of a wide and varied social and urban landscape. Recent measures by the SA State Government aimed at limiting urban growth represent a first step. However, the following fundamental strategies should be implemented in partnership between all spheres of government:

- Develop economic, social and land use policies which move the urban form away from segregated homogenous environments. This can be achieved through the development of centres and/or corridors with intensified mixed uses to encourage greater reliance on localised facilities and raise the accessibility to services and work and social opportunities.
- Initiate a metropolitan-wide spatial framework which will guide city-wide and local area planning and development by identifying key centre and urban corridor development, open space, transport linkages, rural living areas etc
- Linked to the above, a strategic infrastructure planning and a green fields and brown fields land release program is recommended. Whilst Council's Development Plan does have sequential strategies for the development of residential land at, say, Aldinga Beach, these have little relevance if supporting state physical and human services infrastructure is not available commensurate with forecast land releases.
- Linked to this is the need for a more accessible public transport system that is supply rather than demand driven – fast, frequent, reliable, convenient and safe. This needs to happen at a state level and must provide a viable alternative to private vehicle corridors. Specifically this would see the extension of the train line from Noarlunga to Maslins Beach with bus linkages to Sellicks Beach.

Waste

The challenge to use resources in a more efficient and less environmentally damaging manner is at the heart of the pursuit of sustainability. The City of Onkaparinga has accepted this challenge via its “turn waste into wealth” strategic direction. This seeks to realise substantial, environmental social and economic benefits for the local community from the more efficient use of water energy and waste within the community. A “waste to wealth” strategy is currently being developed to identify priority actions to achieve this goal.

Key initiatives already underway include:

- Aware Sustainable Industries Project - which promotes sustainability in local businesses;
- Aware Food and Wine – an extension to the above project, focussing on the Food and Wine industry; and
- Council's involvement in the ICLEI green purchasing pilot program.

The City of Onkaparinga is also currently reviewing its kerbside waste and recycling services. Across Australia, local government manages waste generated from the household sector. Despite moves toward producer responsibility for waste the significant disposal costs

of waste generated from product packaging from the domestic sector are largely borne by government. The National Packaging Covenant is yet to deliver significant benefits to the local government sector .

In implementing new waste and recycling services and infrastructure local government faces significant challenges. These include:

- rapidly developing waste and recycling technologies;
- strong community expectations for recycling services;
- legislative uncertainty at both State and Federal level;
- significant capital investment required; and
- still-maturing markets for recycled products.

The Commonwealth could assist councils by supporting research and development into emerging technologies and the development of frameworks against which technologies can be assessed. Legislative requirements re the producer's responsibility for waste need to be strengthened. Greater emphasis and support for resource use reduction (the avoidance and minimisation "end" of the waste hierarchy) is required to redress the current over emphasis on recycling education and infrastructure.

Water

The City of Onkaparinga is currently involved in the development of a project entitled Water Proofing the South. This will investigate opportunities to achieve a significant reduction in mains water use within the City of Onkaparinga through the conservation, reduction and reuse of water resources. It represents a partnership between State and local government and will complement the State's broader waterproofing Adelaide initiative.

Key problems the project seeks to address include:

- **Current levels of water use are unsustainable** in the long-term. Increased broad acre residential development within the southern region will result in further pressure, as well as the potential for greater stormwater run-off;
- **A high nutrient load in Gulf St Vincent** due to the discharge of treated water and stormwater, particularly in winter months;
- **Pressure on groundwater supplies.** If current groundwater allocations were decreased in the McLaren Vale Proscribed Wells Area, there would be a negative economic and social impact in the region;
- **Low environmental flows in the River Murray** due to reliance on this water source for irrigation and potable water supplies, particularly in dry years;
- **Low environmental flows in other watercourses including the Onkaparinga River** due to diversion to dams and reservoirs, and use for irrigation. There may be pressure in the future to release water from reservoirs to increase flows;
- **Point source pollution** due to poorly performing septic tanks.

The Commonwealth could assist via strategically targeted funding for sustainable water management initiatives.

Biodiversity

Within the City of Onkaparinga only 9% coverage of the total area remains as remnant vegetation and is specifically concentrated within riverine and drainage lines and on steep and rocky hillsides. These areas are fragmented throughout the city with numerous small isolated pockets. **Minimal areas of remnant vegetation exist within the critical areas of coastal woodland, *Banksia marginata* associations and Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) woodland, which has been removed by agricultural clearing.**

There is an urgency to conserve the remaining remnant vegetation within the City of Onkaparinga and ensure these areas are the basis for conservation, restoration and revegetation schemes. The intention is to protect and restore existing priority remnants and then establish buffer planting around these areas. These buffers will effectively reduce the impacts of edge degradation and create zones of high quality vegetation associations. Fragmented areas of remnant vegetation can then gradually be linked through a concentrated program of ensuring regeneration of species and revegetation programs. The City of Onkaparinga has concentrated conservation and enhancement of vegetation on land-owned or under the care and control of council. There is though encouragement of preserving vegetation on private land through education, land agreements and legislation.

Planting Guidelines have been prepared by Council which identify the importance of drainage channels and riverine environments in preserving biodiversity due to their extent of remnant vegetation and the ability to traverse numerous land-systems.

The importance of biodiversity preservation has also been identified within the City of Onkaparinga draft Open Space Plan. The development of a Riverine Corridors Study will further encourage the use of the east-west river corridors to enhance biodiversity and recreation linkages.

Biodiversity conservation programs generally need to be sustained over the long term to be effective. The Commonwealth is a significant and welcome funder of biodiversity conservation through its Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality programs. However, neither of these programs offers long term security funding for projects. A key challenge for the Commonwealth is to develop more strategic and forward looking funding delivery mechanisms.

Community / Social

Planning for sustainable cities needs to encompass the people (social /cultural) component as being equally relevant as the environmental and economic components. Consideration of the collective aspirations and lifestyles of current and future 'citizens' will greatly impact on any city's sustainability.

The community's aspirations, strategic directions and priorities for the next few years have been succinctly encapsulated in the enclosed the "fostering enterprising communities" strategic direction of Council. This seeks to create a community that is informed and future orientated. It seeks to turn local strengths into competitive advantages and employment opportunities.

Currently City of Onkaparinga is one member of the Southern Social Planning Alliance, collaborating with other local management representatives from a range of key State

government human services agencies. Clearly governments cannot achieve this in isolation and longer-term community capacity building, more resourcing from the private sector and NGOs and service partnerships with the community itself must be strongly supported at all levels for any solutions to be sustainable.

Some of the challenges currently facing the City of Onkaparinga community include creating innovative, pragmatic solutions to resource unmet demands for, and access to, services in relation to:

- anticipated population growth in outlying suburban areas;
- the need for affordable housing options;
- an ageing population;
- large numbers of families and young people;
- increasing numbers of single person households and single parent families;
- difficulties in accessing GP services;
- improvements in Aboriginal health, education and employment outcomes; and
- high youth unemployment and geographic pockets of entrenched inter-generational unemployment.

Increased and more flexible financial input from the Commonwealth for resourcing sustainable solutions in partnership with other key players is encouraged, eg in the provision of public housing stock, supported accommodation and services, child care and aged care services. Leadership could be provided by the Commonwealth in terms of researching more effective, flexible, culturally appropriate and innovative models of service provision to address pressing local community needs, eg, new medical models that reduce the current reliance on high cost GPs (as part of mechanisms for addressing the GP shortage in the southern area) and hospital services for minor health issues and re-focus on early intervention.

Cultural diversity and heritage

An understanding and recognition of our heritage provides a sense of context that is fundamental to healthy communities. This sense of connectedness encourages care for the environment, each other and inspires balanced initiative and enterprise.

Euro-based heritage is relatively well understood, highly regulated and perpetually celebrated and forms a positive framework for much of the community. The City of Onkaparinga is currently working to support this through proposed changes to the Development Plan and existing heritage incentives and assistance programs. Occupation of the Adelaide region by the Kaurna community (with visitation from adjoining groups) stretches back many tens of thousands of years. Whilst diversity per se will contribute new thought and opportunity, one of the missing sustainability legs is the recognition of this significant indigenous heritage and its benefits for all the community.

The City of Onkaparinga, in a partnership with neighbouring Councils and the Kaurna community is seeking to improve self-determination aims of Aboriginal people and improve awareness and understanding of this (in a fundamental sense) shared heritage, with the broader community. A structured and wide-ranging Reconciliation Agreement is being developed between the parties that addresses such themes as influence into the development

system, protection of important places, development of skills-based business units and promotion of Kaurna values generally. It is envisaged that funding from skills-based enterprise (eg. monitoring, tourism, intellectual property, return from enterprises on Crown Land, land management, etc) will over-take and replace local government funding over a period of time.

In addition to the Reconciliation Agreement, Council is actively working with the community to incorporate Kaurna cultural interpretation into the design of a number of major open space developments.

This has been a local initiative over the last 18 months, however there has been a history of joint initiatives with Kaurna people over the past five years, and is supported (non-financially) by the State government department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation. There has been little input by ATSIC at this stage.

Our experience with reconciliation is that is a very uncertain and rocky road. To assist local entities with Reconciliation, the Federal government could cooperatively develop contemporary models for reconciliation process in urban, fringe and regional areas that can be moulded to local circumstances. These models might have a range of elements as mentioned above and (alternative ATSIC) funding could be provided to communities engaged together in such a structured initiative at the local or regional level.

Long- term Infrastructure Planning

For the City of Onkaparinga long term infrastructure planning is a significant issue for both existing and planned development areas with significant gaps in understanding, together with decreased resources for implementation. Poor role clarity in relation to infrastructure planning between local, State and Federal governments, non-government organisations and the private sector also serves as an impediment to effective infrastructure coordination and provision. As highlighted in the Commonwealth House of representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration “Rates and Taxes - A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government” local government is facing significant and increasing financial pressure in relation to infrastructure.

Infrastructure planning issues within the City of Onkaparinga relate primarily to addressing:

- the existing needs of fringe communities, including coastal settlements and rural townships;
- public transport, employment, education and health services;
- the needs of future populations, particularly in new broadacre development areas and the staging of that infrastructure; and
- the cost of infrastructure provision, including developer contributions;

The City of Onkaparinga is currently undertaking a range of infrastructure planning processes to address the current and future needs of the area including a Southern Social Planning Study in alliance with government and non-government service providers in the area, Road Network Plan, Drainage Plans and management of the STEDS scheme. Translation of needs into staging plans and structure plans is also being undertaken via amendments to the Development Plan, particularly in relation to the southern areas.

There are significant opportunities to improve the sustainability of the City of Onkaparinga area in relation to infrastructure planning:

- clarity of roles in the planning and implementation of infrastructure
- coordination of infrastructure between various infrastructure providers
- developer contributions and partnership arrangements with the private sector

The Commonwealth could assist by facilitating the development of a national framework to infrastructure planning and provision, which seeks to clarify roles, improve coordination encourage innovation and develop partnership arrangements with the private sector.

References

Dovers, S. 2001. *Institutions for Sustainability*. Tela P`aper 7. Melbourne: Australian Conservation Foundation