

2 May, 2006

Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Canberra 2600

## SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for requesting submissions for the above Inquiry. I wish to make the following three points.

### SUSTAINABILITY IS A DESTINATION

Your discussion paper claims that “sustainability is a journey, not a destination”. This statement is untrue. Either our use of a particular resource is within renewable limits or it is not. Thus our use of that resource is either sustainable or it is not. A claim that it is possible to be a bit sustainable simply muddies the waters and if it is incorporated into the Charter it will render that Charter meaningless.

### INFINITE GROWTH IS NOT SUSTAINABLE

On a finite planet infinite economic growth or infinite population increase are impossible. To argue otherwise is absurd. The same applies to a finite continent, nation, city or community. Infinite growth simply cannot happen.

Growth can only occur while resources are available to support it. If resources are used unsustainably they will eventually be exhausted and growth will be replaced by collapse.

If the Charter is to have any meaning it must recognise that the Australian continent can support economic growth and population increase only up to a certain point. The continent can sustain only a certain level of resource exploitation. Anything more is not sustainable.

The precise size of the population or economy that can be sustained may be open to debate but the principle that infinite growth is unsustainable must be one of the foundations of the Charter.

### CURRENT RESOURCE USE IS NOT SUSTAINABLE

The prosperity of this nation over the last century has been underpinned by increasing use of fossil fuel, particularly petroleum. This fuel will not always be available and indeed it is increasingly recognised that demand for petroleum is already outstripping supply, and that this situation will not be reversed. Without our high per capita energy use our society and economy will be very, very different. Our agriculture, transport, manufacture and lifestyle cannot be sustained in their present form as fossil fuel supplies fade. A sustainability charter must recognise that exhaustion of certain resources (such as petroleum) will have a flow-on effect on our ability to exploit other resources.

Yours faithfully,

Jill Curnow