

**SUBMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER**

I would like to congratulate the Committee both on the Sustainable Cities report and on this important Inquiry. Commonwealth Government commitment to sustainability and to institutions to enable the development of more sustainable government policies – at all levels – is very much needed in Australia. Since the Ecologically Sustainable Development process in the early 1990s, little has been done to embed sustainability in the workings of the Commonwealth Government. It is encouraging to see the development of this inquiry and I hope that it will be the beginning of the implementation of many policies and initiatives for sustainability.

My doctoral research focused on the context for, development and use of *Australia: State of the environment 1996* with a comparative case study of the equivalent report for England and Wales prepared in 1996. This research is highly relevant to this inquiry as it looked at how information could inform policy making with regard to sustainability.

Attached to this submission, please find:

- an extract from my PhD thesis ‘Asking awkward questions about environmental information: State of the environment reporting in Australia and England and Wales’.
- a draft paper for the Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning. Please note that this paper has not yet been submitted and is not to be quoted without permission.

I would also recommend that consideration be given the references (see list attached), in particular:

- the reports prepared for the then Lower Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (LHCCREMS) ‘Capacity building in state of the environment reporting project’ – see: <http://www.hccrems.com.au/>
- the report prepared by myself for the NSW Audit Office on State of the environment reporting (Kuiper, 2004).

These references provide a large number of suggestions and recommendations relevant to this inquiry.

On reading the discussion paper, I’d make the following additional comments

- The establishment of a Sustainability Commission and Charter is supported.
- Targets are only useful if linked to regulation or funded policies and programs.
- Undue attention should not be given to the development of indicators at the expense of more comprehensive ways of evaluating policy impacts (see, in particular, the literature on ‘realistic evaluation’ (Eg. Pawson and Tilley’s (1997) book ‘Realistic Evaluation’).
- The process to develop a Sustainability Charter and Commissioner should learn from the experience of the last decade of state of the environment reporting in Australia (and internationally).
- The charter should ‘join up’ and fund levels of government (as discussed on page 12 of the discussion paper).

On the basis of my research and professional experience, *it is recommended that:*

- The Sustainability Commission be given statutory independence and sufficient ongoing funding to conduct its work.
- The Committee look to models of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) and the New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment as successful models of statutorily independent institutions which have been able to successfully influence government policy making with regard to sustainability.
- The Commission's mandate must include social, economic and environmental sustainability and public participation.
- The Committee consider establishing a Commission with several Commissioners rather than a single individual in order for the Commission to draw on the experience and wisdom of several experts – in the form of an expert panel rather than a panel of experts – as is the case with the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution – see Owens, S., & Rayner, T. (1999). When knowledge matters: The role and influence of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 1(1), 7–24.
- The development of indicators should not be a major focus on the Commissions work (if it is included at all). Considerable resources have already been expended to develop indicators as part of national state of the environment reporting and it is my contention that the focus on indicators has distracted attention away from the vital task of implementing and evaluating (in a more holistic manner) policies for sustainability.
- The Commission should instead undertake inquiries into specific topics – eg. into sustainable transport in Australia; the regulation of sustainable housing; social and community housing.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further input for the Committee to assist its work on Sustainability.

Kind regards,  
Dr Gabrielle Kuiper  
BSc (Hons) Grad Dip (Sci Comm)  
PhD (Sustainable Futures) MURP

## **Kuiper, Gabrielle – State of the environment reporting references**

- 2004 Kuiper, G. *Discussion paper on state of the environment reporting: constraints and opportunities for NSW*, Report to the NSW Audit Office
- 2003 Mason, C., Kuiper, G. & Woodward, A. *Lower Hunter and Central Coast State of the Environment Reporting Capacity Building Program, Project Report*, Lower Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, Callaghan, NSW.
- 2003 Mason, C., Kuiper, G. & Woodward, A. *Legal and Conceptual Frameworks for State of the Environment Reporting*, Lower Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, Callaghan, NSW.
- 2003 Mason, C. & Kuiper, G. *State of the Environment Reporting: Template for the Lower Hunter and Central Coast Councils*, Lower Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, Callaghan, NSW.
- 2003 Mason, C. & Kuiper, G. *Cycling Case Study: Improving the Reporting Process for Management Planning by Councils*. Lower Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, Callaghan, NSW.
- 2003 Mason, C. & Kuiper, G. *New Information and References: Relevant to State of the Environment Reporting in the Lower Hunter and Central Coast*, Lower Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, Callaghan, NSW.
- 2002 Kuiper, G. *Asking awkward questions about environmental information: state of the environment reporting in Australia and in England and Wales*, unpublished PhD (Sustainable Futures), University of Technology, Sydney
- 2001 Penman, R. & University of Technology, Sydney *Review of the preparation of the NSW State of the Environment Report 2000*, Report to Environment Protection Authority, NSW
- 2001 Penman, R. & Kuiper, G. *NSW State of the Environment Report 2000: User Evaluation*, Report to Environment Protection Authority, NSW
- 2001 Kuiper, G. & Penman, R. *Aspiring to dialogue in state of the environment reporting*, Proceedings of '2001, A Science Odyssey, National Conference of the Australian Science Communicators' Sydney, 24-26 September
- 2001 Kuiper, G. & Penman, R. *Environmental information, decision-making and communicating*, Proceedings of 'Conference on Communication and the Environment' Cincinnati, 27-31 July