

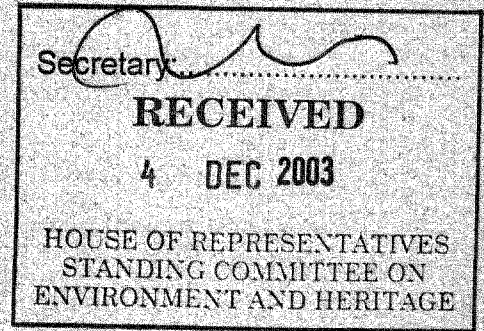
# CONSERVATION COUNCIL

OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.

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30 November 2003

Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
 House of Representatives  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Madam/Sir

Faxed 2 / 11 / 03

## Sustainable Cities Inquiry

The Conservation Council of WA welcomes the Committee's inquiry into sustainable cities and makes the following comments.

Most Australians live in cities and these are a major source of environmental impacts. Improving the sustainability of Australia's cities should be a priority - a national approach is needed to achieve it.

The Commonwealth Government should play a greater role. Unfortunately positive initiatives to do this did not continue after the change of government in 1996. The findings of the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review (particularly the Green Cities report) and the National Housing Strategy should be considered in the inquiry.

The objectives proposed by the committee for sustainable cities raise critical issues that need attention including the conservation of biodiversity, the use of energy and resources including water, the reduction and management of waste, the design and management of the built environment and transport. Sustainability needs to be the overarching goal in planning and managing settlements, with the environment a key consideration.

Much could be said about each of the objectives proposed and the questions raised in the inquiry discussion paper. The Conservation Council would like to highlight some priorities for Commonwealth Government action to advance each objective:

#### Preserve bushland

- Support consideration of urban biodiversity in regional natural resource management plans and fund their implementation through the Natural Heritage Trust.
- Lead national dialogue on urban bushland, especially strategies to address the continued urban land clearing and coastal sprawl that threatens biodiversity. This should involve state and local government and community stakeholders.
- Ensure biodiversity values are fully considered in planning the development or sale of Commonwealth land in urban areas and subject such proposals to environmental impact assessment.
- Support urban bushland conservation by providing additional funds for inclusion of land in conservation reserve networks and providing tax incentives for bushland retention on private land.

#### Energy use

- Continue community-based initiatives to reduce energy use by households, such as the Australian Greenhouse Office funded Cool Communities program.
- Fund and facilitate a national effort on energy demand management and efficiency including research and development in areas of significant and growing energy consumption. Consider rejuvenating the Energy Research & Development Corporation.
- Increase regulatory backing and financial incentives for the development of ecologically sound renewable energy, including a higher Mandatory Renewable Energy Target of at least 10% as soon as possible.

#### Water and wastewater

- Support research into the environmental impacts of water and wastewater in urban Australia and development of sustainable urban water management strategies, for example through the CRC for Freshwater Ecology.
- Convene a national summit on urban water use to identify ways of managing water demand and enhancing efficiency. This should address the problems of rainfall decline, increasing demand and water pollution experienced in major cities.
- Review the impact of COAG water industry reforms on urban water sustainability, especially demand management initiatives.

#### Waste

- Show leadership through a whole-of-government green procurement policy favouring recycled materials and requiring Commonwealth agencies to institute waste reduction and recycling programs.
- Continue and extend national cleaner production and wastewise initiatives to improve industry performance in reducing and better managing waste. The 'design for the environment' concept should be promoted to design out waste rather than just managing waste.
- Encourage life cycle analysis of products so that the full impacts of products, including environmental and social, are factored into the cost.
- Develop a national action plan for zero waste. This should involve state and territory government and other stakeholders in considering current performance and future strategies for quantum improvement in waste minimisation.

### Transport

- Broaden the scope of AusLink and the proposed national land transport plan to include urban passenger transport. Require integrated regional transport and land use planning and use sustainability assessment for projects proposed for funding.
- Reform fringe benefits tax to remove the current perverse incentive for car commuting and enable employers to salary package travel alternatives like public transport fares. The Commonwealth public service should set the lead.
- Develop a national response to oil decline, emphasising demand management initiatives like TravelSmart and alternative fuels for passenger and freight transport. This response should reduce oil vulnerability and promote transport energy alternatives (including reduced need for travel).

### Built environment and housing

- Enhance energy and water efficiency for residential and non-residential buildings through the Australian Building Code requirements and national energy rating schemes.
- Work with other governments, industry and community groups to promote ecologically appropriate design, e.g. the Your Home promotion by the Australian Greenhouse Office et al, and apply this approach to Commonwealth Government buildings (including sustainability provisions in accommodation leasing guidelines).

### Urban planning

- Establish a national approach to sustainable urban development, including a vision and targets, a continuing research effort and a national policy forum. Tackling urban sprawl should be a priority for research and dialogue between community, industry and government stakeholders.
- Promote appropriate development in country towns and regional centres. Investment in public services and employment creation projects is critical to stem population drift from regional to urban Australia.

Population and consumption fundamentally influence the sustainability of settlements. The size and distribution of population and the level and equitability of consumption should be considered in looking at urban sustainability. The Commonwealth Government has a key role in shaping population through migration policy, yet there is no clear population policy for the nation. To this end we recommend that the Commonwealth:

- Develop a sustainable population policy for Australia addressing the size, make up and distribution of the population in the medium to long-term.
- Prepare a consumption policy that aims to reduce total resource use.
- Undertake an examination of taxation policies – how they impact on environmental quality in urban areas and areas where fiscal policy could assist in moving towards sustainability.

The WA Government's State Sustainability Strategy includes many positive actions that could be replicated in other states and supported by the Commonwealth. The Conservation Council supports the initiative that should lead to a more integrated approach to planning and decision-making, though many actions needs to be strengthened and resources committed if environmental, social and economic gains are to be made.

The Conservation Council is keen to provide further input to the inquiry through participation in hearings or roundtable meetings. Please contact the Council if you would like more information on any points in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Graham-Taylor". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Sue Graham-Taylor  
President