

Comments

Discussion paper

Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter – May 2006

A sustainability Charter should definitely be aspirational. Rather than setting specific targets though it should establish the features of our society that should be measured (in the same way as GDP) and enable these features to be amended over time. Eg greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps an Appendix that is updated every 2 years could set targets and include tools of measurement. This would be a regularly amended Appendix initially but, as our patterns of living changed, it would become less relevant.

Aspirational statements should emphasize quality over quantity. One way of doing this with products is to make the manufacturer responsible for the product at the end of its life. With buildings, consideration should be given to life span of buildings. If demolition within 50 years entails a penalty, then more care may be given to 'loose fit' design and quality construction.

Aspirational statements should include a vision of making suburban precincts autonomous in regard to energy consumption, water consumption and waste management.

Local authorities should be supported (financially, with expert advice and with legislation) by the other 2 tiers of government to address sustainability. Perhaps the Charter should require that local authorities report annually on a series of features appropriate to the particular community. These would then be compiled into the national State of the Environment report.

As with the NCP, generous incentive payments should be made to local authorities who exceed minimum sustainability requirements.

It is debatable whether ecological footprint is a useful measure in Australia. This comment is based on the impact of travel on ecological footprint. We depend on tourists traveling long distances and we live in very low density accommodation. It will take a very long time to change our suburban life style and reduce dependence on the car. Thus efforts to create more autonomous living with community energy generation for use in buildings, water and waste management will not make a marked impact on ecological footprint.

A charter should avoid one of the conspicuous features of the seven foundation principles of the sustainability framework in Western Australia – short-term economics that makes the framework palatable to government. Instead a charter should focus on aspirations over the long term. There could well be short term costs for long term gain. However Australian governments are in an excellent position at present to support such costs. This will not always be the case.

Measures of cultural and social values could be measured through an understanding of involvement in community activities, local businesses, local education programs and the like.

Built Environment

The Swedish provisions are well expressed and appropriate for Australia.

The measurement is more difficult. The Swedish provisions would require that Australians reconsider our suburban housing developments as they are generally not located or designed in accordance with sound environmental principles. Not politically palatable!

NABERS provides a starting point for rating the existing housing stock. Some benchmark of our built environment is necessary in order to establish changes in the future.

Energy

Again, the Swedish provisions are well expressed and appropriate for Australia with the additional statement that current reliance on fossil fuels must be reduced and replaced with renewable forms of energy.

Renewable energy should form an ever increasing percentage of the energy supplied in Australia. The target should be visionary rather than politically expedient. Government financial incentives should be provided for R& D and manufactures in the renewable energy business. In addition the costs of energy should reflect the real costs of manufacture (including environmental degradation) and should be averaged irrespective of energy source.

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