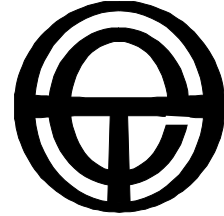


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9 December 2003

Environment and Heritage Committee  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA 2600

**Re: Sustainable Cities 2025**

Dear Sir/Madam

Total Environment Centre (TEC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage inquiry into *Sustainable Cities 2025*. TEC supports the objectives listed in the discussion paper. Comments in relation to each of these are provided below. Attached also for the Committees consideration are copies of TEC publications "The Great Waste Debate" and "Sydney – the urban sustainability challenge".

Preserve bushland, significant heritage and urban green zones

It is clear that the pattern of urban sprawl that has characterised development in Australian cities is environmentally and socially unsustainable. Urban planning must concentrate on preventing further loss of bushland by stopping fringe development and protecting parcels of remnant bushland.

Preservation of remnant urban bushland or urban green zones not result in more development at the urban fringe, providing that there is an acceptance of redevelopment and increased density in already developed areas. Remnant bushland in urban areas should be viewed as a precious refuge of biodiversity and a vital community resource, not as vacant areas available for clearing and development.

Ensure equitable access to and efficient use of energy, including renewable energy sources & incorporate eco-efficiency principles into new buildings and housing

These two objectives are discussed together below as they are closely linked and require co-ordinated approaches.

Throughout the country population growth and increasing demand are placing major pressure on current energy supplies. The augmentation of the Sydney CBD supply and pressure to gain approval for new coal fired power stations in several states clearly demonstrate the need for major reform if Australian cities are to become more sustainable.

While important progress has been made in improving energy efficiency of buildings and appliances this is insufficient on its own to stem the present unsustainable growth in energy demand.

This is equally true for water efficiency and the use of green building materials and principles. Progress towards sustainability, while welcome, has been insufficient.

Achieving genuine sustainability will require changes to building codes (such as the Building code of Australia) and approval mechanisms. TEC welcomes the introduction of the BASIX system in NSW to assess building sustainability and recommends that similar approaches be adopted on a national level.

Improved energy and water efficiency, use of renewable energy sources and environmental friendly design and constructions principles should be mandated for all new buildings and redevelopment projects.

The discussion paper raises the question of whether renewable energy generation should be promoted at the single dwelling or across city regions. These should not be seen as mutually exclusive options. Increasing the uptake of renewable energy will require a mix of decentralised options and larger scale renewable energy generation.

#### Establish an integrated sustainable water and stormwater management system addressing capture, treatment and re-use opportunities

It is clear that cities around Australia are approaching or exceeding the limits of current water resources and that current methods of treating and disposing of wastewater are having an unacceptable impact on receiving waters. Continuation of traditional approaches to the provision of water, wastewater and stormwater services will simply result in expensive and environmentally unsustainable supply augmentation such as construction of new dams, continued pollution of receiving waters and destruction of urban stream environments.

The creation of sustainable cities requires an immediate and sustained focus on demand management, effluent re-use and stormwater harvesting. This must involve pricing reform to provide a stronger resource conservation signal, as well as non-price demand management (such as permanent outdoor water restrictions) and substitution of potable water with other supplies for non-drinking applications.

Current urban water systems are inherently inefficient in that they provide potable quality water for all uses despite the fact that a majority of household and industrial applications do not require water of this standard i.e. gardens, toilet flushing, car washing etc. Substituting potable water with other sources will ease pressure on current supplies and free up water currently retained in storages for environmental flow releases.

Achieving this objective will require a combination of decentralised approaches such as the widespread adoption of rainwater tanks and conversion of wastewater infrastructure for effluent re-use projects.

Current stormwater management approaches have also resulted in destruction of urban stream environments through channelisation and concreting of natural creeks. Traditional approaches have also failed to recognise the value of stormwater as a resource, treating it only as a waste product to be disposed of.

Creating sustainable cities will require a more enlightened approach that harvests stormwater for a variety of applications and restores degraded urban streams and canals to a more natural condition.

### Manage and minimise domestic and industrial waste

The sustainable city needs to be supported by sustainable materials policies and regulations. Tools need to encourage producers to operate in a resource efficient manner; generate beneficial by-products; plan for post-consumer management pathways; and incorporate responsiveness to social, consumer and environmental needs.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a key tool which responds to these issues and is essential for the sustainable city. EPR encourages resource conservation and waste avoidance. It's key is in the transfer of responsibility for post-consumer products from ratepayers and councils to producers and consumers. In doing so, responsibility for sustainable product design is transferred back to those who are most instrumental in the determination of the environmental impacts of products – those who design and produce them in the first place.

Producers initiate and market products, decide what materials go into them, determine how long they last, how toxic they are and how easy or difficult they are to recycle. These are decisions over which consumers have little say. By placing the onus back onto producers, EPR provides the incentive to design products for longevity, reuse, remanufacturing and recycling. Critical is the phase-out of hazardous substances from products, increased take-back and recycling on post-consumer goods and pricing that is reflective of environmental impacts. The key to the success of EPR schemes is the implementation of clear and substantial targets linked to specific timelines, as well as regulatory underpinning to ensure a level playing field for industry. In this context the widespread failure of voluntary industry schemes necessitates regulatory underpinning to any policy that hopes to succeed.

Sustainable cities must factor in the environmental costs of resource depletion and waste creation. The playing field for material resources, which is currently skewed in favour of raw material depletion, must be corrected to make recycled and remanufacturing competitive. To this end, landfill fees must be significantly higher than they are at present. In particular, the cost of hazardous waste management must be so restrictive as to force producers to find more sustainable substitutions. At the same time, taxes should be reduced or eliminated on recycled and remanufactured products to balance massive and unsustainable subsidies to raw materials.

Industries which support resource conservation and waste avoidance – recyclers, re-manufacturers, sustainable designers, green products, for example - must also be supported in the initial stages of market development. Such research, development, investigative and infrastructure building investments also constitute investment in the sustainable cities and in future generations.

### Develop sustainable transport networks, nodal complementarity and logistics

As acknowledged in the discussion paper, the private automobile has dominated urban planning in Australian cities. This has created an ever-worsening cycle of

traffic congestion, air pollution and public health impacts. Australian and World Health Organisation air quality guidelines are regularly exceeded.

While promotion of new technology such as cleaner vehicles and fuels has an important role to play, achieving meaningful improvements in air quality, public health and traffic congestion will require a massive expansion of public transport infrastructure.

Development of sustainable public passenger and freight transport must not be seen as solely the responsibility of State Governments. Major investment from the Commonwealth Government is required. At present Commonwealth funding is focused heavily on road construction. This serves merely to exacerbate car dependency and the decline of public transport as a viable option. It should be clear that redirection of Commonwealth funding toward sustainable transport options is urgently needed.

Current taxation arrangements that provide incentives for private vehicle use over public transport must also be replaced with measures that provide tax incentives for packaging of public transport.

#### Develop urban plans that accommodate lifestyle and business opportunities

TEC does not support any planning models that would allow a continuation of the urban fringe development that has characterised Australian cities. It should be obvious that this pattern of development is environmentally, socially and economically unsustainable.

Urban planning must concentrate of accommodating growth through redevelopment and consolidation of developed areas, particularly around transport nodes. While such planning is predominantly the role of local and state governments, the Commonwealth should assist by encouraging the development of national standards and coordination of planning strategies between jurisdictions.

Yours sincerely

Leigh Martin  
Urban Campaigner

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE COMMITTEE**

**ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 42**

**ATTACHMENTS, APPENDICES AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED WITH  
SUBMISSIONS ARE HELD IN THE COMMITTEE OFFICE**