

SUBMISSION NO. 1



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

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RE: Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter

I am writing in response to your call for submissions to the above inquiry.

I have a particular interest in the field of sustainability charters, and am actively involved in their development. I co-chair the Ethics Specialist Group of the IUCN (World Conservation Union), where we are involved in the development of a Code of Ethics for Biodiversity Conservation (Resolution 3.020, Bangkok World Conservation Congress). Also, I am on the Council of the International Earth Charter Initiative, and was involved in the drafting of the Earth Charter. As part of the associated global consultation process that produced this document, I convened a national summit where representatives of government, business and civil society discussed the draft Charter and values and principles for sustainability. I have attached a copy of the summit proceedings. Please note that Senator Gary Humphries was a keynote speaker at this meeting. Subsequently, with the sponsorship of Woodside Petroleum and the assistance of Judy Moylan M.P., we held a workshop at Parliament House, Canberra, which examined the role of the Earth Charter in ethical investment, again with representatives of all sectors, including the investment industry.

Following are some brief comments regarding the questions raised in the discussion paper.

1. The term *sustainability* is most commonly used in reference to an integration of environmental, social and economic goals. The discussion paper focuses on environmental issues. In which case, the Committee needs to decide if the Charter's scope is restricted to *environmental sustainability*. If so, this should be clarified at an early stage in the consultation process.
2. The Committee should consider using the Earth Charter as a useful reference document and source of para-legal principles for developing an Australian Sustainability Charter. The Earth Charter has been endorsed by the IUCN, UNESCO, and ICLEI, amongst other international bodies.
3. A Sustainability Charter – even if focused on environmental sustainability – needs to open with a preamble that states the vision and case for a sustainable Australia, including recognition of the shared values that are at stake if the challenge of sustainability is not met. Following the preamble would be the principles that need to be followed in order to advance the vision. With such an ethical framework it is then possible to identify “middle axioms” or guidelines with respect to particular themes. Sector-specific objectives can then be developed, along with programmes, and targets and timetables for their implementation.
4. The hardest step is actually the first – reaching agreement on shared values and the aspirational vision for a sustainable Australia. This requires an unavoidably lengthy, expensive and participatory consultation process. However, such an approach will result in an authentic and useful Australian Sustainability Charter.

I would be very happy to provide the committee with further details and materials.

Yours sincerely,

cc. Senator Gary Humphries
Judy Moylan, M.P.
Alan AtKisson, (Director, Earth Charter International, Sweden)
Antonio Benjamin (Deputy Chair, IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, Brazil)