

# MORDIALLOC BEAUMARIS

1 MONTGOMERY ST,

Mr Robert Little,  
Inquiry Secretary,  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
Environmental & Heritage  
Parliament House,  
Canberra Act 2600.



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# CONSERVATION LEAGUE INC

Secretary: *Robert Little*

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7 APR 2006  
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ENVIRONMENTAL AND HERITAGE  
STANDING COMMITTEE  
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Secretary: .....

Dear Sir,

In attempting to formulate a Sustainability Charter the Standing Committee could, with confidence adopt, or adapt, both Sweden's Environmental Objectives and Western Australia's Sustainability Strategy to form a Charter with the aim of "handing over to the next generation a dynamic but sustainable society in which major environmental problems have been solved."

Of relevance to the formulation of this Charter both the Swedish and Western Australian examples stress the importance of water conservation. For instance on page 17 of the Discussion Paper:-

Flourishing lakes and streams, good quality groundwater, a balanced marine environment and thriving wetlands are examples of Swedish objectives.

Western Australia, where there are very real water shortage problems, includes in its Strategy the need for sustainable water resources management.

Of the five key elements listed on page 13 of the Discussion Paper, Australia's declining water supply due to climate change, is the most challenging element for the survival of both urban and rural communities. The driest decade on record has drained the Wimmera Mallee of water. Farmers are being forced to cart water while the Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Authority is relying on 26,000 megalitres of Goulburn Valley water from the Waranga Channel to keep towns and the regional city of Bendigo supplied with drinking water. Bendigo is on level 4a water restrictions and needs at least 20,000 megalitres to meet its long term water needs. I

The lack of winter rainfall pattern now extends from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and southern New South Wales, and while climate change can result in bouts of heavier summer rainfall, this can cause severe flooding due to greater run-off volumes.

"A drain which causes local flooding every two years would probably prove unacceptable to local people leading to calls for a better service. Present designs are based on the assumption of climate stability. Future designs will have to be modified for climate change." 2

Replacing old drainage systems in established middle ring suburbs of Melbourne has been estimated to cost billions of dollars by Melbourne Water, the responsible authority.

The issue here is the waste of a precious resource - stormwater run-off, and ill-considered State and local government planning policies. The State Government's M2030 Strategy is based on the assumption that there will be a need for housing to accommodate a million more people by 2030. Policies have been introduced for increased density in-fill housing in established suburbs where stand alone houses and gardens are moon-scaped to make way for multiple town houses surrounded by impervious surfaces leading to increased storm water discharge and flooding. Clearly there is a need in this case to encourage improvement in planning policy but also to adopt the ACF's fifth test for policy performance as stated on page 13 of the Discussion Paper:-

"Support Sustainable Living. Introduce a 5 star Green Cities Program with mandatory energy and water efficiency standards for commercial and domestic buildings, and help families wanting to install solar power and rainwater tanks."

- a. Make it mandatory for developers of all suburban sub-divisions and green field sites to limit the number of dwellings on the site to allow for sufficient permeable surfaces surrounding the development to absorb run-off to replenish groundwater.
- b. Use of disused sand quarries as storm water holding basins. There is a number of large quarries in the green wedge sand belt region of Oakleigh, Springvale and Heatherton suburbs of south east Melbourne which could be used for this purpose.
- c. An absolute prohibition of timber harvesting in major cities rain water catchments.

The New Scientist reports on a resumption of an ancient practice of rain harvesting in India where old ponds, lakes and waste land in cities are once again being revived to capture monsoon rains. The villages don't use the water directly from the ponds but allow it to percolate into the soil to re-fill underground reserves and replenish their wells. There is no more water than before, but local harvesting does seem to be a key to using it more efficiently and sustainably.<sup>3</sup>

However lack of water will remain a major threat to ecological sustainable development in Australia while vast quantities of water is used for mining, the wine industry, rice, cotton and sugar cane crops. A substantial increase in immigration encouraged by Federal and State Governments also places an increasing demand on water supply especially when migrants settle predominately in major cities already struggling to provide adequate water for commercial and domestic use.

Richard Heinberg quotes Liebig's Law in his book "Powerdown". stating that :-

"The lesson is that even if we get things nearly perfect - adequate water, oxygen, proteins and so on - but fail to manage just one factor, then the result will be catastrophic." <sup>4</sup>

The Powerdown path requires we reduce population and per capita resource usage if we are to avoid economic turmoil with plummeting food production, water shortages, rising sea-levels and severe storms.

Finally then a further and most important element to include in the Sustainability Charter:-

- d. An assessment, independent of business interests, into reducing Australia's migrant intake in view of the serious and continuing depletion of water due to climate change and extravagant use of existing water resources.

To quote from the City of Darebin's excellent submission to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2005:-

- " Australia must prepare a 'National Population and Settlement Strategy'. Sustainable Australian cities cannot be achieved in the absence of this as a fundamental starting point. Such a strategy must inter alia:
- o Be largely based on the ecological carrying capacity of Australia.
  - o Assess ideal population densities for optimising sustainability via the support of sustainable transport options, resource use and waste treatment.
  - o Include regional and rural Australia in the sustainable cities discourse - clearly Australian cities will not achieve sustainability unless regional and rural Australia is also sustainable.

Mary Rimington OAM

*Mary Rimington*  
Secretary  
MBCL

## FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Weekly Times, March 22, 2006 pp.11 & 23.
2. Lowe, Ian. Living in the Greenhouse, Scribe Publications, Newham, Victoria, 1989. p.59.
3. Pearce, Fred. "The Parched Planet" in the New Scientist, 25 February 2006. p.32-36.
4. Heinberg, Richard. Powerdown: Options and Actions for a Post - Carbon World. New Society Publishers. 2004. P.208
5. City of Darebin. Submission No.19 to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025.