

INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

FILE NO:

MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR

To Council:

On 12 September 2005, the Federal Parliament's House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage tabled the *Sustainable Cities* Report. The report was a welcome, if a long overdue indication that the Commonwealth Government has an interest in our cities. Approximately 60% of Australia's population lives within the five major capital cities, with 1.3 million people living in the state capital CBDs alone.

The significance of the *Sustainable Cities* report is that it brings together a comprehensive and compelling case for modest and achievable change. It offers an important first step in addressing sustainability issues in a planned and co-ordinated way. Most importantly, it recommends that Government take the lead and it spells out what Government can do.

Key recommendations of the Standing Committee are:

- That the Australian Government establish an Australian Sustainability Charter that sets key national targets across a number of areas, including water, transport, energy, building design and planning.
- Encourage the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to agree to the charter and its key targets.
- That all new government proposals be evaluated as to whether they impact on urban sustainability and be assessed against the charter and COAG targets.
- That the Australian Government establishes an independent Australian Sustainability Commission which is tasked with monitoring the extent to which Commonwealth funds and State and Territory use of Commonwealth funds promotes the COAG agreed targets and explore the concept of incentive payments to the States and Territories for sustainability outcomes along the lines of the National Competition Council (NCC) model.

The City of Sydney commended the *Sustainable Cities* Report and welcomes the Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter currently being undertaken by the Committee into key elements of establishing a sustainability charter.

It is crucial the Federal Government takes a leadership role in the future of our cities, as the nature of sustainability issues requires a co-ordinated, national

and whole of government approach. A national sustainability charter is a positive and important step in developing an effective integrated response.

The City of Sydney has a strong commitment to environmental leadership and is making progress through immediate practical action and a long-term strategy to provide local responses to world-wide sustainability issues.

The City is one of eleven Australian councils to join the *ICLEI Triple Bottom Line Capacity Building Program*. This program involves undertaking a sustainability gap analysis, reviewing council's current sustainability principles, objectives and targets and will provide a vital introduction to networks and alliances.

Most importantly, it will enable Council to implement triple bottom line reporting on environmental issues.

The City recently adopted a Water Savings Plan and is currently developing an Energy Savings Plan to improve the water and energy efficiencies of Council owned properties. To encourage the major emitter of green house emissions, the commercial sector, the City hosts the 3CBD's program with North Sydney and Parramatta Councils. Companies joining the program commit to significantly reduced office energy consumption.

I am pleased to announce the City's vehicle fleet is now emission neutral and for some time our depot staff have been recycling 100% of building and road materials.

Council is strongly committed to sustainable, integrated transport. Our Cycling in the City program to encourage CBD workers to ride to work has recently won two prestigious environmental awards and active transport strategies are being developed for cycling and walking.

We will also tonight consider our new Surry Hills community facilities building, which showcases environmentally sustainable development principles to reduce environmental impacts and provide a facility that is cheaper and easier to maintain. The project includes innovative mechanisms for sustainability, including energy and water conservation, solar access, indoor air quality, natural lighting and material sustainability.

Through the Capital Cities Lord Mayors Forum (CCCLM), we're working together to put urban issues on the Federal agenda, particularly the need for investment in our major cities through large infrastructure projects, such as transport, which are not being undertaken by state governments.

The CCCLM has funded a secretariat based in Canberra. It is co-located with and works with Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), although our specific focus is on city and urban issues. The CCCLM Strategic Plan includes priorities closely linked with the City's own Strategic Plan, including:

- Transport and infrastructure;
- National security and city safety;

- Tourism and off-shore investment attraction;
- Human capital, including issues of mental health, alcohol and drug, homelessness and affordable housing, accessibility; and
- Sustainability and liveability of our cities.

Over two days in August, a delegation of Capital Cities Lord Mayors travelled to Canberra to attend a series of meetings with Ministers, MPs and Parliamentary Committees to build a stronger working relationship. The delegation included: John So Lord Mayor of Melbourne; Campbell Newman, Lord Mayor of Brisbane; Michael Harbison, Lord Mayor of Adelaide; and myself. Our central theme of making our cities more sustainable and helping to achieve greenhouse offsets was well received.

The CCCLM has also established national high level policy committees to work with Federal Government departments to address these issues. Each capital city has taken responsibility for one part of the CCCLM Strategic Plan and I am pleased Sydney has responsibility for sustainability issues.

As part of this work I will be encouraging all levels of government to take global warming and other environmental issues seriously and to work together to find effective solutions.

The City of Sydney commends the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage for undertaking this Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter. Establishing a national Charter is an important step in ensuring sustainability is approached and managed at a national level and with whole of Government commitment.

By setting national targets, the Commonwealth Government will provide vital leadership on this critical issue. Public reporting will raise the community's awareness of the environment and will provide some way the community can measure progress in reaching targets. Engaging the community is vital to success.

I welcome the opportunity for the City to have input into the development of a Sustainability Charter and look forward to the Committees recommendations.

Recommendation:

It is resolved that:

- (A) That Council endorse the attached submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into a Sustainable Charter; and
- (B) The Lord Mayor be delegated to make any necessary amendments to the submission in response to issues raised by Councillors.

**The City of Sydney Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter**

The City of Sydney commends the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage for the undertaking this Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter. This is a positive step arising from the Sustainable Cities report that the Standing Committee completed last year.

Establishing a national Charter is an important step in ensuring that sustainability is approached and managed at a national level and with whole of government commitment.

Public reporting will raise the community's awareness of issues relating to sustainability and also provide the community with some way of seeing how they are progressing in reaching the targets. Engaging the community in sustainability is essential to success in achieving targets.

By setting national targets a lead can be shown from the Commonwealth Government. It will also provide for a set of targets that the City is able to work with as a framework for setting its own agenda on sustainability. Presently targets are set from different levels of government and can be restrictive in allowing higher targets to be set by state or local government. The NSW government has imposed targets on residential buildings through BASIX but has deemed that these targets cannot be increased at a local approvals level.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

The Charter will provide an opportunity for the government to provide targets that are measurable, ambitious and national. The City agrees with committee's recommendation that the Charter should be aspirational, that it should set targets for the Australian community to meet and that these should be reassessed once they have been met. These targets should also be over a certain period and have intermediate outcomes as was recommended in the Sustainable Cities report.

The Charter should work towards the integration of social, economic and environmental efficiency and sustainability. In order for the Charter to be comprehensive the key elements of water, energy and transport should be expanded to include air and water.

The Charter should focus on sustainability of urban or built environments to recognise that the majority of Australians live in cities. The long term sustainability of Australia will be dependant on how cities develop, how the resources they use are managed and how the quality of life is maintained.

The CSIRO's recommendation regarding improved benchmarking and reporting processes is supported. Presently State of the Environment reporting is different across the States. Bringing the reporting in to line at a national level will assist in measuring results and also provide an effective means of communication with the public.