

---

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# Sustainability for survival: creating a climate for change

**Inquiry into a sustainability charter**

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

September 2007  
Canberra

---

© Commonwealth of Australia 2007

ISBN 978-0-642-78996-9 (printed version)

ISBN 978-0-642-78997-6 (HTML version)

Cover design by Lisa McDonald

House of Representatives Publishing Unit



# Contents

- Foreword .....vii
- Membership of the Committee .....ix
- List of abbreviations .....xi
- List of recommendations ..... xiii
  
- 1 Sustainability charter inquiry..... 1**
  - Sustainability in Australia ..... 1
  - Background to and conduct of the inquiry ..... 2
  
- 2 Defining sustainability..... 7**
  - Australia’s position..... 10
  - Triple Bottom Line ..... 11
  - The Committee’s position ..... 12
  
- 3 The proposed Sustainability Charter ..... 13**
  - The sustainability agenda ..... 14
  - Built environment and construction ..... 14
  - Water ..... 15
  - Energy..... 16
  - Transport..... 17
  - Ecological footprint..... 18
  - Economics ..... 19
  - Waste..... 20
  - Social equity and health ..... 21
  - Community engagement and education..... 22

---

The Committee's position.....	23
<b>Aspirations versus targets</b> .....	<b>23</b>
The Committee's position.....	24
<b>4 Existing sustainability strategies</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>International sustainability strategies</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Earth Charter.....	26
United Nations Global Compact .....	27
The Committee's position.....	28
<b>National sustainability strategies</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Sweden's environmental quality objectives .....	29
The United Kingdom's sustainable development strategy.....	34
National Agenda for a Sustainable Australia .....	36
The Committee's position.....	36
<b>Sectoral sustainability strategies</b> .....	<b>37</b>
Sea Change Sustainability Charter .....	38
National Action Plan for Urban Communities .....	38
The Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for places of Cultural Significance 1999 ..	39
Enduring Value: the Australian Minerals Industry Framework for Sustainable Development ....	40
EnviroDevelopment Standards.....	41
International Hydropower Association's Sustainability Guidelines .....	43
The International Association of Public Transport .....	44
Hope for the Future: the Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy .....	45
The Committee's position.....	47
<b>5 A national framework for sustainability</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>The Sustainability Commission and Commissioner</b> .....	<b>50</b>
Commission .....	50
Commissioner .....	54
<b>Regulation versus voluntary schemes</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Leadership</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>Incentives</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Measurement</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>Reporting</b> .....	<b>60</b>

Informational .....	61
Performance .....	62
<b>Appendix A—List of submissions .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Appendix B—List of exhibits .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Appendix C—List of roundtable discussions and public hearings .....</b>	<b>81</b>

## **FIGURES**

Figure 2.1	Concentric model of sustainability.....	11
Figure 4.1	The Global Compact's ten principles .....	27
Figure 4.2	Sweden's 16 environmental quality objectives.....	30
Figure 4.3	Sweden's <i>Reduced Climate Impact</i> environmental quality objective.....	31
Figure 4.4	The United Kingdom's principles of sustainable development .....	34
Figure 4.5	EnviroDevelopment certification process .....	42
Figure 4.6	EnviroDevelopment branding certification icons .....	43
Figure 5.1	All Sector Taskforce model of optimal stakeholder focus and five phases of engagement .....	52
Figure 5.2	Types of information required for public agency sustainability reporting.....	64





## Foreword

Throughout industry and among community groups in Australia there is increasing awareness of the importance of advancing sustainability and as such, a desire to adopt more sustainable practices. In fact, there is a wealth of existing research, strategies and technologies in the area of sustainability and these are part of a host of measures contributing to its advancement in Australia. A national Sustainability Commission, Commissioner and Charter would help coordinate the use of existing sustainability measures and facilitate further development in this area.

Australian Government establishment of a national Sustainability Commission headed by a Commissioner would deliver a strong signal of the Commonwealth's commitment to take a leadership role on sustainability. This signal of commitment would be further strengthened by Australian Government support for a national Sustainability Charter. The Charter would help create a climate for change for a sustainable future and provide long term direction to Australians.

Change for sustainability comes with financial cost, but the cost of inaction is far greater. It will be an investment by us in the health of our environment, society and economy.

I am moved by the enthusiasm of everyday people, academics, industry representatives and others who participated in this inquiry. Your contributions are appreciated. I also thank my fellow committee members for their diligence and bipartisan commitment to help pave the way to protecting Australia's future.

Dr Mal Washer MP  
Chair







## Membership of the Committee

Chair            Dr Mal Washer MP

Deputy Chair   Ms Jennie George MP

Members        Mr Russell Broadbent MP

Hon Duncan Kerr MP

Hon Warren Entsch MP (from 9/2/06)

Mr Stewart McArthur MP

Ms Kelly Hoare MP

Mr Ken Ticehurst MP (from 9/5/06)

Mr Harry Jenkins MP

Mr Malcolm Turnbull MP (to 9/2/06)

Hon Jackie Kelly MP (to 9/5/06)

Mr Jason Wood MP

## Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Ms Janet Holmes <i>(from December 2006)</i>
	Mr Ian Dundas <i>(to December 2006)</i>
Inquiry Secretary	Ms Sarah Fielder <i>(from July 2006)</i>
	Mr Robert Little <i>(to June 2006)</i>
Senior Researcher	Ms Sam Mannette <i>(to January 2007)</i>
Researcher	Ms Pam Burman <i>(to May 2007)</i>
Office Manager	Ms Jazmine De Roza <i>(from December 2006)</i>
	Mrs Marlene Dundas <i>(to July 2006)</i>
Administrative Officer	Mrs Fiona McCann <i>(from June 2007)</i>
	Ms Gemma Baron <i>(August to November 2006)</i>
	Mrs Doris Cooley <i>(to August 2006)</i>



## List of abbreviations

ACF	Australian Conservation Foundation
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
Cities Programme	United Nations Global Cities Programme
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
IHA	International Hydropower Association
NCP	National Competition Policy
NSESD	National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development
SoE	State of the Environment
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
UDIA	Urban Development Institute of Australia
UITP	International Association of Public Transport
UR-3R	Urban Resource - Reduction, Recovery, Recycling





## List of recommendations

In its report, *Sustainable Cities*, tabled 12 September 2005, the Committee recommended that the Australian Government establish an Australian Sustainability Charter. While there is considerable support for the concept of a Sustainability Charter, there is also much debate about nearly all aspects of developing and implementing one. The Committee thought it would be useful to identify and flesh out some of the more contentious issues surrounding a Sustainability Charter and to make concrete recommendations. On 16 February 2006 it therefore resolved, under provisions of the House of Representatives standing order 215(c), to undertake an inquiry into a Sustainability Charter. Its recommendations follow.

### Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that within the first six months of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources introduce a Bill for an Act to establish a statutory national Sustainability Commission, headed by a Sustainability Commissioner.

In drafting this legislation, the Australian Government should seek input from the state and territory governments.

In the Committee's view, and drawing from some of the suggestions made in submissions, the legislation should outline the ongoing roles of the Commission and Commissioner.

The ongoing role of the Commission should involve:

- defining what sustainability means to Australia
- creating an aspirational Sustainability Charter with objectives and milestones
- creating a supplementary technical implementation agreement containing targets

- evaluating progress towards meeting national sustainability goals, objectives and targets and reporting on this to both Houses of Federal Parliament
- conducting inquiries into sustainability matters, recommending remedial measures for unsustainable practices and gaps in policies and acknowledging those that are sustainable
- reviewing (when necessary) national sustainability goals, objectives and targets
- building and strengthening partnerships with government, industry and the community (nationally and internationally)
- influencing and guiding government, industry and the community in advancing sustainability outcomes
- collecting, maintaining and disseminating information on sustainability, including national performance statistics.

The Commissioner should:

- head the office of the national Sustainability Commission and chair the advisory committee
- be an independent statutory officer
- be appointed with support of the government and the parliament for a 10 year, non-renewable period
- be removed from office only by agreement of both Houses of Parliament on the grounds of misconduct, neglect of duty, or physical or mental incapacity
- report annually to parliament
- seek input from bodies such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation in defining scientifically sound targets
- have wide powers of access to people, places and papers in undertaking his/her duties
- represent Australia at international sustainability forums
- be bound by the functions and powers of the enabling legislation as well as meeting the obligations under the *Public Service Act 1999 (Commonwealth)*

- undertake and oversee (as appropriate) the duties of the Commission
- draw upon existing sustainability measures.

Further, the legislation should provide for:

- the establishment of an advisory committee, chaired by the Commissioner and comprised of government, industry and community sustainability champions
- informational and performance reporting against the Charter.

## Recommendation 2

The Committee reiterates its recommendation in the *Sustainable Cities* report to establish a national Sustainability Charter.

The Charter should:

- be aspirational
- define sustainability in an Australian context
- contain clear and concise overarching objectives and timeframes.

The supplementary technical implementation agreement should:

- contain targets that are closely aligned with the the objectives of the Charter
- be used primarily by government and industry.

The scope of the Charter should, at a minimum, cover the following sustainability sectors:

- the built environment
- water
- energy
- transport
- ecological footprint
- economics
- waste
- social equity and health
- community engagement and education

and integrate their related components.

The process used for devising the Charter and supplementary technical implementation agreement should be transparent, participatory and inclusive.

### Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends the Australian Government take a leadership role in advancing sustainability outcomes, not only through the measures outlined in Recommendation 1, but also through:

- the use of monetary and non-monetary incentives for governments, industry and the community in advancing sustainability outcomes
- assessing existing and future policy against the proposed Sustainability Charter.



/  
///  
/  
/  
/  
/  
/  
/  
/  
/