



25 November 2003

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to Inquiry into Sustainable Cities

Please find below a brief response to the House of Representatives Environment and Heritage Committee *Inquiry into Sustainable Cities* from the WA Collaboration.

The WA Collaboration is a partnership of primarily civil society organisations from a range of perspectives (such as environmental, social equity, indigenous, sustainable industry) in Western Australia who came together to help shape and promote the sustainability agenda in WA. Since the official launch in August 2002, the WA Collaboration has focused its efforts on developing a community sector response to the *Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*. This response, the *Community Sustainability Agenda* (Attachment I) was created through a participatory process of ten regional workshops and a Sustainability Summit, involving a total of around 450 people over a six month period.

Throughout this process, a major theme which emerged was the sustainability of Western Australia's towns and cities - from a social, environmental and economic perspective.

Some of the specific issues that arose out of the WA Collaboration process include:

- The importance of a holistic conceptualisation of sustainability, which moves beyond the triple bottom line approach to a version of sustainability which is much more inclusive of social equity and cultural sustainability;
- The importance of social equity in the sustainability debate around cities and other settlements, particularly in relation to affordable housing. In most cities in Australia there is an ever increasing demand and a falling supply of affordable housing. Increasingly, affordable housing is only available on the urban fringe, where transport costs are high, accessing services is difficult, and there are few

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FOUNDING ORGANISATIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Council of Churches of WA, Ethnic Communities Council of WA, Environmental Alliance-Sustainability Focus Group, Unions WA, WA Council of Social Service, WA Sustainable Industry Group

economic opportunities. Decreasing housing affordability can therefore have a significant affect on the sustainability of cities, through forcing a greater reliance on private transport, contributing to social exclusion, impacting upon the environmental costs of a sprawling pattern of urban development, increasing infrastructure costs.

- Increasing the diversity of transport options to remove the emphasis from private transport and provide a more environmentally sound and equitable transport system;
- Sustainable design and construction of housing and other buildings and the particular opportunities available in different areas of WA. The design of housing and buildings can obviously have major impacts on resource use, and therefore environmental impacts as well as costs for households. Particularly in places with extreme climatic conditions, such as the Kimberley and the Pilbara, the WA Collaboration workshops noted the extent to which houses and other buildings are not currently designed in a climate sensitive or ecologically sustainable way.;
- The importance of examining policies and processes that encourage or discourage greater regionalisation. This is particularly important in such a highly urbanised, yet geographically vast state as Western Australia;
- The importance of sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles in the sustainability of settlements;
- The environmental impacts of increasing urban growth, such as loss of bushland, air pollution, impacts on water quality, and increasing demands on water resources;
- The importance of developing and implementing more innovative processes for building and supporting socially sustainable communities; and
- The importance of genuinely participatory processes for urban and regional planning.

Most Australians live in cities, and subsequently the Commonwealth Government should be playing a significant leadership role in promoting the long-term sustainability of our cities.

In broad terms, the Commonwealth has the potential to encourage greater sustainability in Australian cities by encouraging appropriate behaviours through a range of means such as:

- using legislative/regulatory measures to set constraints and internalise costs;
- providing incentives for preferred behaviours;
- using demonstration projects;
- improving communication; and
- enhancing institutional arrangements.

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In addition, the Commonwealth Government can support research, collaboration and demonstration projects to develop better practices and national approaches to key urban issues such as affordable housing, car dependence, and urban sprawl.

The WA Collaboration looks forward to taking part in any further discussions around the issue of sustainable cities in the future.

Yours sincerely

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