

# ***Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter***



**BDP**  
built**environment**australia  
THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF BUILDING DESIGN PROFESSIONS LTD

**A submission to the  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE  
Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter  
from the  
Australian Council of Building Design Professions.**

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## **Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter**

A submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter from the Australian Council of Building Design Professions.

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### **Background**

#### **The Australian Council of Building Design Professions**

The Australian Council of Building Design Professions (BDP) is the peak body of professional associations united to achieve better practices, policies, legislation and regulation for the design of the built environment.

The constituent professions comprise -

- **Architects** represented by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) and the Association of Consulting Architects Australia (ACA);
- **Engineers** represented by the Institution of Engineers Australia (Engineers Australia) and the Association of Consulting Engineers Australia (ACEA);
- **Quantity surveyors** represented by the Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (AIQS)
- **Landscape Architects** represented by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA),
- **Planners** represented by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA).
- **Lighting Designers** represented by the Illuminating Engineering Society of Australia & New Zealand

Member organisations retain their individual identities, policies and positions but are able to promote a unified position through BDP. This combination exerts a powerful influence for the design professions because it presents a united approach and substantial membership within the design professions<sup>1</sup>.

The quality of the environment, and the built environment in particular, is of increasing concern to the Australian community.

BDP has identified 15 key issues and has published these as the organisation's 'Public Policy Statements'. The Policy Statements document the position of the BDP on major industry issues that are vital to the integrity of the built environment and the cultural heritage contained within the built environment.

The BDP Policy Statements are aimed at ensuring the maintenance of standards and to provide world's best practice within the design sector of the building and construction industry.

The BDP Policy Statements addresses Environmentally Sustainable Development to provide a better understanding of the environment and the sustainable management of our natural resources. *This submission is based on the BDP Policy Statements.*

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<sup>1</sup> Member associations, which comprise BDP, have a total membership in excess of 96,000 members.



### **The Built Environment**

The term "Environment" comes from the French word *environner* that means to surround, to encircle, to contain. This definition refers equally to both the natural and built environments.

The **natural environment** comprises all living and non-living things that occur naturally on Earth. In its purest sense, it is thus an environment that is not the result of human activity or intervention. In reality the natural environment interacts with, and is impacted by, the **built environment**.

This leads us to question the exclusivity of the term "natural environment" in that humans at some point have directly or indirectly influenced nearly all environments in time. Many natural environments are the product of the interaction between nature and humans.

For this reason, the term ecosystem has been used to describe an environment that contains nature, and includes people. It follows then that environmental problems are human or social problems. It is virtually impossible to regard the environment as separate from people.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of that part of the environment, which is not natural, but built. Not only does the built environment strongly interact with nature, but it also affects how we know, feel, and behave in the world around us - it affects the quality of our lives. Statistics indicate that most people spend over 80% of their time in the built environment.

The built environment refers to the man made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging from the large-scale civic surroundings to the personal places.

Users of the built environment encounter issues that cross the traditional professional boundaries between a range of disciplines within the design professions. In landscape architecture, the built environment is identified as opposed to the natural environment, with the recognition that places like urban parklands may have the look, feel, and nourishing quality of natural surroundings while being completely artificial and "built", thus blurring the line between the two.

Urban planning, acknowledges that a large percentage of the human environment is manmade, and these artificial surroundings are so extensive and cohesive that they function as organisms in the consumption of resources, disposal of wastes, and facilitation of productive enterprise within its bounds.

### **The BDP Position**

BDP members have been strong in their support for Australia to adopt a Sustainability Charter to ensure that the nation is at the leading edge of environmental responsibility for the benefit of future generations.

The ecological integrity and productive value of Australia's land resource is running down. There is a clear need for a better understanding of the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources.



Agricultural and mineral exports, energy use and the form and structure of Australian communities have placed a combined reliance on the consumption of natural resources. This situation, along with global warming, forest management, water and air quality, demands that government continues to commit itself to leading edge initiatives in environment and resource management.

### **Australia's Opportunity**

Australia is in a key position to be a leader in sustainable energy and environmental protection. In Australia we have a great opportunity by way of professional knowledge and skills to develop major new industries in renewable energy technologies both for grid connected and remote area power supplies and in environmental protection and remediation technologies. We should be recognised as a lead country in applying solar power technologies, energy efficiency and water conservation.

A Sustainability Charter provides the government with the opportunity to set domestic regulation and policy aimed at achieving a high level of integrity within the built and natural environments for the benefit of all Australians.

BDP is of the opinion that a sustainability Charter and its mechanisms have the potential of providing a superior set of drivers for encouraging uptake of sustainable technologies in relation to in relation to:

1. The built environment;
2. Water;
3. Energy;
4. Transport; and,
5. Ecological footprint.

The starting point is to recognise that a well-designed built environment benefits people. If we as a nation succeed in building imaginatively not only to give shelter but to lift our spirit, then we will have fashioned an enduring future, and enhanced the present.

As stated earlier A

ustralia is facing increasing urbanisation and intensification of our towns and cities. In this context, relevant policies are essential to achieve a built environment that is liveable, that responds to the myriad of needs and expectations of Australians, which expresses our culture and which is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

There is strong precedent for establishing government policies on the built environment. Relevant policy is in place in the United States of America, the United Kingdom - where a particularly succinct policy has been developed by the Scottish Executive - the Republic of Ireland, Finland and other parts of Europe. The preface to the Netherlands Government Policy on Architecture (1992) emphasises why such a Charter is vital.

Internationally, there are numerous examples of policies to manage and regulate activities that impact on the built environment. Precedents for policies on the built environment (or similar) come from such varied countries as South Africa, Hong Kong, The United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Finland and Canada.



*Key commonalities of the policies and reports are:*

1. All policies and reports recognised the importance of the built environment as a defining feature of people's experience of spaces and places, and the subsequent impact on their quality of life.
2. All policies and reports realised the multi-disciplinary nature of the built environment and complexity of managing the diverse range of skills, professions and controls without a coordinating objective.
3. And most policies reflect on the need to manage the past, current and future aspects of the built environment for the best possible outcomes socially, environmentally and economically.

*Some marked differences were apparent in the implementation of the policies and reports:*

1. The most markedly different policy was from South Africa and was a parliamentary bill to minimise the inequalities of the built environment (and the professions that serve it) in the new post-apartheid regime. It aims to distribute the resources, skills and education to those built environment projects most worthy.
2. Hong Kong's policy is aiming to better manage the handling and control of built heritage, with the aim of enriching the community's culture, promote environmentally responsible development and meet public expectations of development outcomes.
3. The Netherlands policy aims to promote the integration of Dutch design in major projects to further highlight the design skills of the Netherlands.
4. The reports and publications from CABE in the UK focused on a variety of subjects and the impact of the built form and urban design on social, economic and environmental issues, and the sustainability of the current systems.
5. The Northern Ireland example was prepared by their Arts Council, and makes an articulate case for government commitment to high quality design in the interest of the strong economic benefits this brings to the community.

From the research undertaken, it is not clear how effective these policies have been in changing the quality of design and the built environment in their respective countries. At best, they have changed the culture, or attitude towards the importance of this issue. Where the policies attempt to reform the way government effort is directed, such as in South Africa, the policies clearly have the opportunity to change the built outcomes for the better.

There is a strong view that Australia is well placed to build on the overseas experience and by doing so take a leadership position on the issue of sustainability.



### **A legacy from the Year of the Built Environment**

In 2003, all States and Territory Governments and the Federal Government accepted the proposal supported by the Australian Council of Building Design Professions that 2004 be celebrated as the Year of the Built Environment (YBE2004). In launching this initiative, the then Minister for the Environment and Heritage, The Hon Dr David Kemp, MP said that the YBE 2004 would be celebrated with a program of events and activities to encourage the community to appreciate and achieve built environments that are sustainable, are practical and provide us with an improved lifestyle.

The Minister added that the idea of celebrating our built environment provided the opportunity for all state and territory governments, peak building and construction industry organisations, professional bodies and a wide range of interest groups within our community to focus on the legacy we wish to leave for future generations.

He said that the Year of the Built Environment aimed to embrace all members of the community, from those in the planning, design and building professions, to community leaders and anyone who lives, works and plays in the built environment.

It is important to note Minister Kemp's statement that YBE 2004 "needed to be focused on outcomes for the community, and specifically to address the challenges of achieving sustainable development, energy efficiency and public amenity."

He described YBE 2004 as a "watershed year" that will provide impetus for positive built environment outcomes to flow on to the community for years to come. The BDP believes that Australia's adoption of a Sustainability Charter would provide a substantial legacy from the YBE 2004 and added achievements in the year since, to the Australian and global communities.

Achieving a sustainable built environment will require an effective partnership between governments, architects, engineers, landscape architects, planners, builders and developers and their clients in the general community.

The legacy of the Sustainability Charter will address in very real terms the impact our cities have on the environment – particularly in the areas of the built environment; Water; Energy; Transport; and the Ecological footprint.. Working within the Charter, Australia could achieve significant goals in the reduction of greenhouse emissions in the residential and commercial building sectors.

### **Recommendations from the Sustainable Cities Report**

The Sustainable Cities report had 32 recommendations. Whilst not all of these recommendations related directly to the setting up of the Sustainability Charter – many of them did or would provide leadership in areas to be touched on by the charter. Recommendations directly related to his question include:

#### **Recommendation 1**

*The Committee recommends 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 a Council of Australian Governments agreement to the charter and its key targets.*

#### **BDP Supports this Recommendation**



## **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that all new relevant Government policy proposals be evaluated as to whether they would impact on urban sustainability and if so, be assessed against the Australian Sustainability Charter and the COAG agreed sustainability targets.

### ***BDP Supports this Recommendation***

## **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that:

- the Australian Government establish an independent Australian Sustainability Commission headed by a National Sustainability Commissioner;
- task the Commission with monitoring the extent to which Commonwealth funds and State and Territory use of Commonwealth funds promotes the COAG agreed sustainability targets; and
- task the Commission with exploring the concept of incentive payments to the States and Territories for sustainability outcomes along the lines of the National Competition Council model.

### ***BDP Supports this Recommendation***

## **Conclusion**

The cities and buildings we inhabit require the same commitment to quality and innovative management that is essential for the long term sustainability of the natural environment. A built environment policy would focus explicitly on the ecological niche of human habitation, expression of culture, with a perspective different from but complementing other policy documents.

The ideal outcome from the Inquiry will be Government's agreement to:

- A national Sustainability Charter for the built and natural environments.
- The adoption of a national Policy for the Built Environment
- Built and natural environment strategic outcomes reflected in all legislation affecting the environment.

## **Attachments:**

BDP Policy Statement for the Built Environment  
BDP EDG Gen 1: RAIA Environment Policy  
BDP EDG Gen 26: AILA Environment Policy  
BDP EDG Gen 27: IEAust Environment Policy)  
BDP EDG Gen 28: PIA Environment policy