

SUBMISSION NO. 60

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Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER – PROPOSED NATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

On behalf of Maroochy Shire Council I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed National Sustainability Charter (NSC) and the terms of reference of the Standing Committee for Environment and Heritage.

The following comments have been prepared in light of this organisation's recent moves to embrace sustainability and manage substantial seachange population growth. They also reflect my participation in the National Sea Change Taskforce.

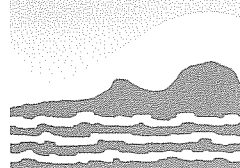
1. Opportunity versus Lost-Opportunity

- 1.1 The development of a NSC presents a great opportunity for leadership at the national level around sustainability. It also presents an opportunity to uphold a set of national values and supporting environment, social and economic standards within a broad framework of sustainability. To not embrace the broadest definition of sustainability in the establishment of a national sustainability charter would be a significant lost opportunity
- 1.2 The proposed NSC presents a great opportunity to drive a broad triple-bottom-line (TBL) framework at national level. It is an important opportunity to adapt and enhance existing national reporting processes to achieve broader sustainability outcomes.
- 1.3 The NSC presents an opportunity to establish a national sustainability indicator set and associated reporting framework, while still allowing for locally relevant and enterprise-based indicators to be developed and reported.

2. Scope of Proposed Charter

- 2.1 The NSC needs a vision. A vision has the capacity to 'pull' communities toward an outcome. A vision would help all levels of government and community to work towards a common vision. If the charter is to be aspirational it must have a vision
- 2.2 The scope of the proposed NSC and the discussion paper appear to be narrowly directed at 'priority areas' of sustainability within the confines of five categories: built environment, water, energy, transport and ecological footprint. This premise in itself would be sound as a set of priorities. For the purposes of a NSC, however, these priorities should be couched within a broad sustainability framework from which ongoing and changing priorities can be identified.

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- 2.3 The proposed NSC does not capture the social dimension of sustainability adequately, although it does appear to address elements of a cultural agenda by referring to heritage buildings
- 2.4 The proposed NSC does not capture the economic dimension of sustainability adequately, although the discussion paper refers to incentive schemes centred on performance.

3. National Sustainability Framework

- 3.1 The NSC presents a great chance to fill a void at the national level for a national structured framework for whole of community reporting on environment, social and economic performance indicators.
- 3.2 The adoption, enhancement and integration of existing environment, social and economic performance monitoring and reporting systems would be encouraged in the establishment of a national charter for sustainability. For example, the existing processes for State of Environment Reporting and the existing national community data collection mechanisms such as ABS/Census could be adopted and integrated into a national sustainability reporting framework.
- 3.3 Recognition for local priorities and local desired outcomes should be a key principle for any national charter. Any future framework would benefit from reporting on a range of indicators in addition to the 'core' national indicator set. A framework that not only establishes national standards and mechanisms for monitoring, collating and reporting data but also encourages similar systems to be developed at the state, regional and local levels would be desirable. Indicator development by local government, community and business organisations should be encouraged. National reporting would need to address, as a minimum, the 'core' national indicators in the manner prescribed by the charter.
- 3.4 The proposed NSC should be supported by a monitoring and reporting framework that encourages ongoing benchmarking, measurement and reporting on at least an annual basis. Third Party validation should also be considered where economic incentives are being considered. Voluntary reporting models for business and community organisations would work well if supported by incentive schemes. Some sustainability models would suggest that mandatory public sector reporting on a 'core' set of indicators is a desirable outcome.

4. National Sustainability Indicators and Targets

- 4.1 The proposed NSC presents a wonderful opportunity to improve alignment between all levels of government, industry and the community around a common set of 'core' social, economic and environmental 'quality of life' indicators that reflect the essential values and desired living standards for Australians.
- 4.2 The proposed NSC presents an opportunity to establish open and transparent monitoring and reporting on key sustainability characteristics across both private and public sectors as an ongoing measure of our ability to continue to provide for future generations.

- 4.3 A structured framework at the national level would present an opportunity to track and improve our performance as a nation and ensure future generations have a high level of social fabric and community well-being, environmental amenity, resources and biodiversity, and economic prosperity, community well-being and standard of living.
- 4.4 Significant work has been done in research sectors on the myriad of indicators that suit the social, environment and economic dimensions of sustainability, including key agencies such as CSIRO and the National Sea Change Taskforce.
- 4.5 The discussion paper refers to ecological footprint as a measurement tool for sustainability. This indicator would be supported for use, but falls short of addressing many other key attributes of sustainability.
- 4.6 It is noted that the U.K. government introduced and still run national set "quality of life" indicators and targets based around the triple bottom line (TBL) concept of environment, social and economic considerations. All public sector organizations are required to publicly report on how well they are performing against these measures. Other features include:
- National quality of life performance indicators have to be published in annual reports;
 - Benchmarking of performance from one council to another is conducted;
 - Performance is independently monitored and validated; and
 - Collaboration with other agencies and organizations is mandatory.

5. Economic Dimension and Incentives

- 5.1 The notion of economic incentives flowing to highly performing public and private sector organisations is supported. Economic incentive schemes should be developed that encourage sustainable commerce and industry, and reward high performers. However, the notion of the charter being a mechanism for directing financial incentives in itself would not be supported. Independent consideration of the outcomes of reporting under the NSC should be conducted by appropriate agencies. The National Competition Council is one such option.

6. Sea-Change Phenomenon – Population Growth and Environmental Sensitivity

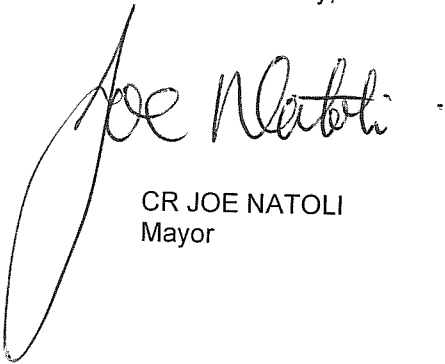
- 6.1 There exists a substantial trend in population growth in coastal areas around the country, and in some areas these are amongst the highest growth rates in the developed world. Maroochy Shire is one of many local authorities subject to significant growth management pressures from the sea-change phenomenon, and has one of the fastest population growth rates in Australia. The affects of climate change in low-lying seaside communities may exacerbate these pressures.
- 6.2 There may be a need for the proposed charter to give separate and particular attention to regions of the country being affected by high growth sea-change trends. The unique growth management priorities and environmental sensitivities of these areas pose significant challenges for local governments and communities alike, and accordingly these areas may warrant separate and distinct consideration.

- 6.3 The unique pressures in high growth areas may need to be considered in such a way as to attract targeted assistance to manage the magnitude of growth while maintaining high standards of environmental and social integrity.
- 6.4 The National Sea Change Taskforce (NSCT) has adopted a *Sea Change Sustainability Charter* which seeks the commitment of all spheres of government to:
- develop innovative and best practice strategic planning at regional and local levels
 - preserve local character and sense of place
 - provide for the timely provision of resources to meet the needs of high growth communities for infrastructure and services
 - integrate coastal management and conservation objectives with economic development
 - support community wellbeing
 - ensure community ownership and participation in key planning decisions affecting the coast

Further detail on the NSCT views on the proposed National Sustainability Charter can be cited in a separate submission to the Standing Committee dated 12 May 2006.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Natoli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping loop on the left side.

CR JOE NATOLI
Mayor