



15 May 2006

The Committee Secretary  
House Standing Committee – Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Email:** environment.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: Enquiry into a Sustainability Charter**

The Australian Green Development Forum (AGDF) welcomes the opportunity of lodging this summary submission in relation to the House Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage's "enquiry into a sustainability charter".

The AGDF had a significant role in the urban sustainability stream of the Enviro 06 Conference in Melbourne last week and unfortunately this stretched our resources to a point where we were unable to prepare this submission prior to the closing date of Friday, 12 May 2006. We understand from information provided on your website however, that the committee will accept late submissions and we would appreciate your consideration in this instance.

We have publicly confirmed our overall support for the recommendations contained in the committee's report on "Sustainable Cities" of 12 September 2005. We support all of the recommendations contained in the "Sustainable Cities" report and whilst we see the government has taken a positive step in moving to an enquiry into a sustainability charter, we would recommend that urgent consideration be made to adopting recommendation 3 which suggests that the Australian Government should establish:-

1. An independent Australian Sustainability Commission headed by a National Sustainability Commissioner
2. Task the Commission with monitoring the extent to which Commonwealth funds and State and its Territory's use of Commonwealth funds, promotes the COAG agreed sustainability targets and task the Commission with exploring the concept of incentive to States and Territories for sustainability outcomes along the lines of the National Competition Council model.

As Australians, we need to learn from the successes of the past, and we would like to highlight the success of the "*Better Cities*" program introduced by the Federal Government in 1991 which led to a significant improvement in many of our cities over the last 15 years. A highlight of the "*Better Cities*" program was the very successful "*Green Street*" project which led to the preparation of the Australian Model Code for Residential Development (AMCORD). This was a leadership project coordinated by the Federal Government which adopted an integrated approach to changing codes within State and Local Government Regulations and had immediate tangible results in the improvement of the quality, standards and the safety of residential development throughout the country.

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This was achieved in a relatively short period at what we would suggest was a very reasonable cost due to the coordinated approach which was adopted and the partnerships with industry which underpinned the project.

### **Australian Model Code for Sustainable Development**

We recommend that the Government move straight to establishment of a National Sustainability Commission to ensure a coordinated approach is adopted in both establishment of a Sustainability Charter and initiation of a project for preparation of an "Australian Model Code for Sustainable Development" (AMCSD).

We would recommend the National Sustainability Commission review the strategy adopted for the successful "*Green Street*" promotion and AMCORD project and form partnerships at all levels of government with strong input and leadership from the industry, who will be responsible for actual implementation of the new sustainability standards. The AGDF would be happy to contribute to such a partnership and we are confident that this would be supported by industry organisations such as the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA).

To achieve maximum benefit from a National Sustainability Charter guided by a National Sustainability Commission, a coordinated communication and implementation strategy needs to be adopted from the outset. Relationships need to be established and resources assigned at all 3 levels of government and partnerships should be created with industry bodies as well as leaders in the Development Industry and Community.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The AGDF believes that it is critical that a visionary leadership approach be adopted in advancing the recommendations of the Sustainable Cities report. Whilst we support the inquiry into a Sustainability Charter which focuses on identifying achievable targets in relation to the 5 key elements which contribute to the creation of Sustainable Cities, we believe that the Australian Government and Industry would be better served if we moved directly to the establishment of an Australian Sustainability Commission led by a visionary "National Sustainability Commissioner". The Commission needs to have strong industry leadership as well as representation from all levels of government and needs to be provided with sufficient resources to play a leadership role in coordinating all the positive programs that are pursued around Australia in advancing sustainable development.

Australia is well positioned to take a leadership role on the world stage in demonstration on how to build Sustainable Cities. Our cities are some of the most liveable places on the planet, and we believe that there is potential to establish an export industry providing advice to Asian cities wishing to introduce smart growth management and sustainable development which in turn would have a significant positive impact on world environmental standards.

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We appreciate the opportunity of providing this submission and would welcome the opportunity of meeting with representatives of the standing committee at your convenience to advance our discussions.

Yours sincerely

Jim McKnoulty  
PRESIDENT

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