

**House of Representatives Environment and Heritage Committee**

**Submission to the Inquiry for  
a  
National Sustainability Charter  
from  
Graeme Jessup**

**May 2006**

# SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER SUBMISSION

## Background

After some 9 years of experience in the field of sustainable development, I have concluded that:

- Over 50% of the population will agree when surveyed that some positive action is required to achieve a sustainable lifestyle. However only about 1% of the population will actually do something about it – its something that sustainability is something that others should do.
- The way to make progress is to empower those few enthusiastic leaders that we have so they have the means to bring about change
- There will be no real support from the public until we have the following measures in place:
  - A set of clear and **simply** stated sustainability goals that the public can identify with
  - Solid and demonstrated Government support for the sustainability action plan. This must include a high level of commitment from all Government activities right across the board
  - An easy mechanism for the public to contribute to these goals
  - A **simple** way of providing feedback to the public on the state of progress

The real challenge is not to devise a well worded comprehensive Charter document, but to devise a program that deals effectively with these issues. To date Government programs have failed to do so because:

- They are too slow to react to the needs of enthusiastic proponents
- The application process for any funding is far too complex
- There is no significant and visible commitment by the whole of Government to the sustainable measures they advocate

There is a very real danger that this Charter will be a carefully worded voluminous document that is unreadable by the average person and if so will be relegated to the bookshelf.

The following suggestions seek to overcome these problems.

## Suggested Charter Outline

To be effective in making a significant impact on sustainability issues the Charter should consist of a short (not more than 10 pages) working document in plain English plus an Addendum that outlines:

- a. The reason of needing positive action to develop a sustainable lifestyle
- b. The areas chosen Nationally for immediate action
- c. The plan of Action
- d. How each of us can make a difference
- e. The ways in which all Government Departments and Agencies will commit

## Suggested Priority Goals

I think the ACF summary of the priority areas are best suited to the keep it simple approach:

- 1. Show National Leadership:** Reverse Australia's environment damage and promote a clean and efficient economy by a Prime Minister and Premier's commitment to a National Sustainability Policy, implemented through an independent National Sustainability Council.
  - Government departments should be seen to adopt the Charter goals and be seen to implement them

**2. Cut Greenhouse Pollution:** Ratify the Kyoto Protocol, establish national mandatory targets of 10% renewable energy by 2010 and 50% reduction in energy use by 2025, backed by a revenue neutral carbon tax or domestic greenhouse emissions trading.

- Document the existing emission levels for industrial, commercial, and domestic sectors – eg tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>/year, tones of CO<sub>2</sub>/unit of production). Sub sectors to include vehicle emissions, household emissions, commercial transport emissions, etc so that each sector can see the target degree of improvement relative to the National targets
- Regular and widespread feedback on progress in the press and media every month. This ongoing feedback is a crucial part of making us aware of the issues.

**3. Repair our Land and Rivers:** Save the Murray River by increasing annual environmental flows by 1,500 gigalitres over the next decade, halt all large-scale land clearing and tackle salinity through financial incentives for the revegetation of cleared land.

- Establish benchmarks for a variety of sectors and processes eg:
  - River flows
  - Salinity levels
  - River bank re-vegetation
  - Salinity reduction
  - Wildlife corridors
  - Reforestation
  - Wildlife numbers

Regular and widespread feedback on progress in the press and media every month. This ongoing feedback is a crucial part of making us aware of the issues.

**4. Protect Our Great Natural Areas:** Ensure that at least 50% of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and 25% of Australia's marine environment is fully protected; protect all old growth and high conservation value forests, and protect the outstanding natural and cultural heritage of Northern Australia.

**5. Support Sustainable Living:** Introduce a 5 Star Green Cities Program with mandatory energy and water efficiency standards for commercial and domestic buildings, and help for families wanting to install solar power and rainwater tanks. Support sustainable living in our Asia Pacific region.

## Implementation

An effective means of implementing these measures would be to publish the benchmarks and targets for each sector and sub-sector so that each person in business can identify with an appropriate goal. Similarly each citizen should be able to identify with domestic benchmarks and targets.

The Government would then need to legislate for successive mandatory measures (such as MRET) to facilitate progress.

## Methodology

A National Program could provide incentives for any project based on the degree to which it enhances the sustainability goal.

## Sustainability Goals

The areas of sustainable development could be defined such as:

1. Sustainable land use – sustainable cropping developments
2. Dry land salinity mitigation
3. Soil quality improvement – organic content, erosion stabilisation

4. River water quality, fish habitat improvement
5. River bank improvement
6. Wildlife habitat
7. Sequestration of CO2
8. Renewable Energy generation

### ***Indicators***

For each of the above goals an indicator will be developed to enable the assessment of the potential degree of improvement of any proposed area of action. These indicators could be based on work already carried out and where necessary by developing additional appropriate indicators.

### ***Incentives or Credits***

The program could develop a table of financial incentives or Credits for each of the above benefits. The value of these credits could be tailored to meet the local sustainability objectives and encourage the most appropriate developments to meet the sustainability goals.

### ***Funding***

The program would then offer potential projects funding to encourage a greater focus on sustainable development by rewarding those initiatives that embody the above benefits and deliver the best impact. Funding would come from the Federal Government – sustainability is a National imperative.

## **Questions for Consideration**

### **Should the Charter consist of Aspirational Statements or Targets or both**

It should consist of both. However the Statements should be couched in plain English and the Targets in a form that is clear, unambiguous, and can be easily measured and understood by the public.

### **Research Needed**

When the DRAFT document is being prepared, and before it is published and when it is still in a fluid state, there should be a series of focus group evaluations to feedback public comment.

No research is required to determine the appropriate measures as there are stakeholders available right now who can develop a suite of appropriate mechanisms.

### **Use of Existing Standards**

The Charter should as far as possible embrace those mechanisms currently operating in the marketplace.

### **Integration into Government Decision Making**

This can only be effectively implemented by a genuine commitment from the top, and by setting mandatory requirements with incentives or penalties for non performance. The ineffective commitment to the NSW GEMP program shows how ineffective voluntary processes can be in Government circles.

To bring sustainable development into Government decision making will require that all decisions by Govt meet a set of simple goals such as:

- Govt policy should show how any decisions or regulations have met the Charter requirements
- The rationale for the level of commitment to the Charter should be stated
- The process should be transparent and open

**Will there be a cost/gain to the Economy**

A comprehensive assessment of this question is complex and the basis will be debatable. The real answer to this is that it doesn't matter anyway – moving towards a sustainable lifestyle is absolutely essential. If we don't come to grips with this issue we are simply abrogating our responsibility and passing the problems on to the next generation.

**Can the Charter be incorporated into State of the Environment Reporting**

No comment

**Is the National Competition Policy a good Template**

No comment – but rewarding States for progress is a sound principle and better in concept than using the stick.

**Award of Payments**

See earlier comments – the process should be quick and simple. The way to do this is to delegate the authority to approve payments to program managers, not to middle management or senior management. An independent auditing process will be required to check on performance.

The public service in many areas is bogged down with inadequate delegation of financial approval to the extent that all enterprise and enthusiasm to provide an efficient service is lost.

**Measure of Cultural and Social Values**

I think this aspect is not necessary and would lead to additional complication in the Charter, and act contrary to my main suggestion to keep the process *simple*.

*Graeme Jessup*

*12 May 2006*