



**Submission by the South East
Queensland Regional Organisation of
Councils**

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY BY THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE INTO

***Sustainable Cities
2025***

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***SEQROC submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Environment and Heritage***

Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

1. Introduction

The South East Queensland Regional Association of Councils (SEQROC) comprises 18 member Councils with a total population of 2.45 million. In 2026, it is forecast that the SEQROC Councils will grow to a total population of 3.72 million. In this context, SEQROC is delighted that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage has embarked on this Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025, and SEQROC is pleased to present this submission.

As Australia's fastest growing urban region, and as one of the development 'hotspots' of the Asia-Pacific, South East Queensland has been the focus of significant regional planning work. SEQROC has made great progress in organising for and addressing the challenges of rapid urban development in a location of outstanding natural values. However, it is now clear that the local governments of the region need strong and sustained support from both State and Commonwealth Governments if the lifestyle attributes of this world class region are to be protected and maintained.

2. A National Vision for Sustainable Cities

In Australia city governments are steadily increasing their roles and responsibilities, driven by globalisation, urbanisation, marketing of cities for economic competitiveness, and seeking better outcomes in terms of sustainability. The 18 member Councils of SEQROC are currently grappling with these issues in the face of massive population growth and attendant urban expansion. Much good work is underway on improving urban sustainability, however SEQROC has clearly identified a need for both state and national government leadership and involvement in addressing these urban challenges.

Despite all the efforts at the local and regional level, it is national policies that will largely determine if and when there is a transition to sustainability away from the current unsustainable economic system which is rapidly depleting resources such as water, soil, minerals, energy fuels, forests and biodiversity and wreaking an enormous social toll.

It is essential that Australia formulates a national vision and a set of objectives for future city settlements, and for the management of the nation's major growth areas. In this way, a coordinated effort can be facilitated, at the national, state, regional and local levels for implementation of sustainable city initiatives. Without a high degree of coordination, the full benefits of the many worthy initiatives currently underway at these various levels of interest, will never be realised and sustained.

In Australia, cities are run by local governments which do not even have constitutional recognition, much less any real ability to influence the key drivers of unsustainable actions by industry, government and the community. For example, local government is seen as responsible for waste but waste (resource inefficiency) is largely driven by massive Commonwealth subsidies to extractive industry, probably

exceeding \$20 billion pa. Meanwhile local government has to find \$100 million pa to support domestic waste recycling from a very limited tax base.

Likewise, city governments struggle to implement sustainable transport and building efficiency, and deal with consequent traffic congestion and air pollution while Commonwealth policy works against them with road freight subsidies, fringe benefits and income taxes, import laws and standards, and building and fuel regulations driving unsustainable outcomes.

Until the Commonwealth government accepts an overriding commitment to a market economy where competition is unsubsidised, price signals reflect the full cost and information supports sustainable consumption, the key drivers of unsustainable development will remain largely in place and the degradation of soil, air, water, natural resource and social systems will continue to decline.

The question needs to be addressed as to what is our national policy in managing population growth, especially when some metropolitan areas have reached their limits for sustainable growth such as Sydney and potentially South East Queensland. Have we abandoned the notion of a national policy of supporting growth to key regional centres that could accommodate more population, bringing significant benefits to the regional centre and benefiting our large metropolitan areas?

3. Local Government's powers: the Legislative Context.

Queensland Local Government's broad responsibilities and actions which address the sustainability of cities are based both in the general competence powers of Queensland Local Government (Local Government Act 1993) and in the requirements of a raft of State and Commonwealth legislation.

Key pieces of legislation in which specific regulatory powers and planning responsibilities are given to Local Government include:

- Integrated Planning Act 1997,
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999,
- Building Act 1975,
- Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995,
- Vegetation Management Act 1999, and
- Water Act 2000.

Despite a steadily increasing range of functions managed by cities, there is not the legislative support or flexibility to allow local governments and /or regional associations of Councils to adequately control those drivers of unsustainable development subsumed into state and national regulations and taxes.

The Commonwealth Government can support activities that result in sustainable outcomes through providing a taxation system that provides incentives and subsidises sustainable activities and penalises non-sustainable activities such as the consumption of petrol which is currently subsidised through a purchase price of fuel that does not incorporate the environmental and social costs. Levels of Commonwealth fuel excise are helping to degrade urban air quality by not sufficiently encouraging cleaner fuel use.

4 Regional Challenges

SEQROC is a leading example of local governments joining together cooperatively to meet the challenge of rapid urban growth. SEQROC has been notable for pursuing a long-term regional planning initiative, first established in December 1990, in partnership with the Queensland State Government. It must be acknowledged that the Commonwealth Government has maintained an interest and has had some representation in the SEQ regional planning project.

The SEQ 2001 project was created to plan for and accommodate the rapid urban growth pressures being experienced in the South East Queensland region. This project resulted in the **Regional Framework for Growth Management (RFGM)** that is intended to guide the development of the region in an integrated manner. The **RFGM** was first released in 1994 and formally adopted by the participating Governments in December 1995. It has since been reviewed and updated in 1996, 1998 and 2000. The **RFGM** sets out a wide range of initiatives and nominates individual authorities and agencies for the implementation of particular strategies. It is anticipated that local government planning schemes will continue to be the implementation vehicles for many of these **RFGM** initiatives.

The current review of the Regional Plan, the SEQ2021 project, is a three year project to comprehensively overhaul the regional planning framework for South East Queensland. It aims to develop a long term vision and strategy for a sustainable SEQ in response to forecast continuing high population growth. The project is just over half way through and it is anticipated to be completed towards the end of 2004.

The forecast increase in SEQ's population will necessitate an additional 300,000 dwellings in the region over the next 18 years. With 60% of development currently occurring in green field areas, this poses huge challenges to local authorities to maintain and improve open space areas, supply infrastructure efficiently and maintain social cohesion.

5. Local Government's Planning Responsibilities

Queensland Local Government has a primary role in progressing the sustainability of cities through the preparation and implementation of Planning Schemes. Local Government has primary responsibility for the development of planning schemes under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. The IPA 97 states:

Section 1.2.1 The purpose of the Act is to seek to achieve ecological sustainability by

- (a) coordinating and integrating planning at the local, regional and State levels; and*
- (b) managing the process by which development occurs; and*
- (c) managing the effects of development on the environment..*

Within this purpose planning schemes consider and identify sustainable urban forms, protect environmental, cultural and amenity values, provide for population change and facilitate economic growth. In addition, planning schemes establish and implement standards of development and construction that ameliorate the negative impacts of development.

South east Queensland Local Governments have recently adopted new planning schemes or are currently preparing land use planning schemes, engaging and supporting regional planning processes, commencing integrated land use

infrastructure planning and urban design/centre improvement projects, all of which are fundamental elements in achieving sustainable cities.

SEQ Councils have spent more than 20 million dollars in the preparation of *Integrated Planning Act 1997* planning schemes. The purpose of IPA Schemes is to seek to achieve Ecological Sustainability for their local government area.

In addition to the land use component of planning schemes, Local Governments are preparing infrastructure plans and charging schedules. These plans directly tie infrastructure planning and provision to land use and also require the transparent costing and financing of the infrastructure. The infrastructure systems required under legislation to be planned and costed are;

In addition to the land use and infrastructure planning, many SEQ Local Governments are addressing the sustainability of localities through planning for centres and urban design projects. It is recognised that the sustainability of urban localities in terms of liveability, economic growth and environmental performance is critical to overall sustainability of larger urban areas (cities).

The commitment of Queensland Local Government is demonstrated directly through the support and resources applied to community development and community planning initiatives. The reasons for the increasing role and focus by Local Government; include changing community expectations for Councils to respond to issues of social disadvantage and shifts to partnership arrangements with State and Commonwealth Governments. Fundamentally it is increasingly recognised that addressing social issues is a primary principle of the sustainability of cities. In this context SEQ Local Governments are recognising that it has a important role.

6 A Role for the Commonwealth for Urban Sustainability

South East Queensland is the fastest growing region in Australia and is projected to overtake Melbourne over the next 15 years to become Australia's 2nd largest metropolitan area with approximately 15% or 1 in 7 Australians living in the region. Yet the Commonwealth Government is not involved in urban policy and is not supporting the development of South East Queensland and other urban areas as sustainable communities that are well serviced and provide a good quality of life for its citizens.

The Commonwealth should concentrate on the critical issues facing urban areas that it can contribute to such as how to achieve sustainable growth patterns and to provide the services and infrastructure necessary to sustain these areas and to provide social cohesion. The Commonwealth Government has an important impact on urban form through its taxation system which influences spatial outcomes.

The Commonwealth could play a very important role in introducing smart taxes to change the culture and behaviour. Such taxes could provide a range of incentives for more efficient urban development such as increased densities around transport nodes and disincentives for sprawl. Housing affordability could be assisted through providing incentives for more affordable housing that supports a more efficient urban form. Such incentive based, taxation schemes have been successfully implemented by Commonwealth and State Governments in Portland, Oregon, USA. They have a significant impact went introduced to complement effective urban growth management polices at the local and state levels. Sadly, instead of smart taxes fostering sustainability, Australia has dumb taxes that encourage unsustainable patterns of consumption.

While Local Government or the non-government sectors are logical service deliverers in many cases of social development, our journey to a sustainable urban community suffers due to the lack or even withdrawal of strong financial support from the Commonwealth Government.

The extreme demand for land has driven the costs of home ownership beyond the reach of many. No provision for capturing part of this financial windfall has been established so funding for necessary programs like affordable housing, social enterprise, and community facilities remains inadequate. The social consequences of unsustainable development are as real and as pressing as the environmental and economic.

To date, regional population growth across Australia has been addressed in an uncoordinated manner with a development led, reactive pattern of inefficient urban development rather than through a planned and infrastructure led approach with a strong and effective regional plan. The challenge now facing SEQ is not only to halt current development and consumption patterns, but to reverse these trends. There is an obvious role for both State and Commonwealth Governments to re-focus their spending from the unsustainable to the sustainable projects.

7. The Key Challenges for SEQ: A Regional Planning Case Study

There is probably no single blueprint for a sustainable city. Australia's cities represent a fertile laboratory of new methods for city management and for sustainable development. Much work of international standing has already been undertaken by SEQROC and its member Councils, often without much involvement or support from the State or Commonwealth Governments. Imagine how much more could be achieved with the full and active commitment of these two better resourced levels of Government!

The experience of SEQROC in addressing its urban growth challenges will be instructive to other urban regions in Australia with similar issues. As part of the current strategic regional planning exercise, SEQROC has identified a number of critical issues for creating a sustainable future for SEQ. SEQROC welcomes both State and Commonwealth Government assistance in delivering sustainable outcomes for SEQ region.

SEQROC's view is that to be effective, the SEQ2021 project must confront the major challenges and resolve the conflicts arising from rapid urban growth. As a major partner in SEQ 2021, the 18 SEQROC Councils are resolved that this program will ensure that the hard decisions will be made for the region to achieve its desired future.

The SEQ 2021 vision statement defines the preferred future for the SEQ region in 2021:

“The people of SEQ value, sustain and celebrate the health and diversity of our natural environment and landscapes, communities and economies.” The vision establishes a philosophical basis for the preferred future - a future that is sustainable and inclusive; that respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; that values the environment; that is characterised by cohesive and vibrant communities, a diverse and prosperous economy; and will be achieved through collaborative action.”

To be successful, this vision, and the SEQ2021 project, must include the commitment of all three levels of government. To deliver this vision by 2021, all levels of government, industry, the community sector, residents and visitors will have taken steps to achieve a fair society, a culturally rich community, a healthy ecosystem, and an internationally competitive economy that is capable of sustaining a population which will have increased some 37% by that time.

The eleven discussion papers released to date under the banner of SEQ 2021 provide a valuable resource for the development of a package of strategies and actions to deliver the desired future for the region. However there is a risk that a topical approach can dilute the integration of strategies and their action plans and therefore reduce their overall effectiveness.

SEQROC has identified the following critical issues as a particular focus for all the work to be undertaken under the SEQ 2021 program:

- a) Greenspace.
- b) Strengthening communities.
- c) Prioritisation of infrastructure.
- d) Growth areas.
- e) Implementation measures for items a) to d).

To be an effective review process, the SEQ 2021 final recommendations will have to confront the difficult challenges of effective resource allocation and of conflict resolution, with particular reference to the critical issues listed here.

SEQROC has proposed the following interventions to achieve a much more sustainable SEQ:

Urban form and extent

Determination of and agreement on a general urban frame or footprint for South East Queensland.

- a) A map outlining the extent and form of urban and non-urban land in South East Queensland.
- b) Development of a package of mechanisms to sequence and manage development within the urban allocation in accordance with the 'map' (eg provision of infrastructure and services, employment distribution, alignment with planning schemes, etc) and to protect the non-urban allocation from encroachment by development which erodes the non-urban values.

c)

Greenspace

Recognise the importance of greenspace (parks, recreational facilities, agricultural lands, environmental areas, inter-urban breaks, marine environment and Moreton Bay) within the regional framework. The plan must include mechanisms to protect the greenspace at all levels from neighbourhoods to the region.

- a) Recognise the environmental and economic importance of greenspace.
- b) Consistent methodology to identify the various values of greenspace within the region.
- c) Identify greenspace as a system of viable networks throughout the region.
- d) Protect identified greenspace through equitable processes.
- e) Provide for the recreational needs of the region.

Agricultural Lands

Acknowledge the contribution of agricultural lands to both the economic prosperity and scenic amenity of the region.

- a) Agreement reached on the criteria for identification of farming land and on the characteristics to be protected.
- b) Protect identified farming land through equitable processes.
- c) Integration of the Rural Futures Strategy and its initiatives into the regional plan.
- d) The regional plan to reflect the importance of farming land.
- e) The regional plan to include mechanisms for maintenance and support of rural communities.

Regional Transport Plans

The regional plan provides a framework to integrate regional transport plans with the land use planning process

- a) A demonstrated understanding of the transport task in terms of improving access by people to places, goods, services, employment, and social, cultural, educational and other opportunities.
- b) A process for planning for aligned and integrated transport infrastructure and service delivery.
- c) Agreement of priorities for investment in transport infrastructure and service delivery.
- d) Links between delivery of priorities of both existing and future land use.

Building Complete Communities

Acknowledgement of the benefits of development which is orderly, economically efficient and close to existing services, amenities, infrastructure and centres.

- Promotion of an agreed centres and employment distribution network. Such a network would assist in the development of complete communities across a region made up of many communities. Centres facilitate efficiencies for transport and service delivery.
- a) Agreement on the desired characteristics and functions of centres at all levels in the network (from neighbourhood to CBD) in terms of transport, jobs, housing variety, etc. and the relationship between those characteristics and the characteristics of land uses outside centres.
 - b) Identification of a consistent network of major regional, subregional or special purpose (eg an educational centre; a tourist centre) compact/vibrant/lively/competitive yet complementary centres.
 - c) Identification of the role of these centres, and the dynamics and interactions between them, reflecting their associated characteristics (eg transport, jobs, housing variety, etc).
 - d) Identification and designation of sufficient areas of land, distributed throughout the region, to attract 'population supporting' business development.
- Provision of appropriate levels of community services, cultural and recreational facilities at locations and centres which service the needs of the region's diverse communities.
 - Balancing of population growth with employment / economic opportunities within both the rural and urban fabric of the region.

- a) Commercial revitalisation and stimulation / economic development.
- b) Promotion of industrial activity / economic opportunities.
- c) Provision of institutional facilities / community services.
- Encouragement of a variety of housing choices, including affordable and adaptable housing and intensification at locations within the region.
- a) Transit-oriented development.
- b) Centres / mixed-use development.
- c) Corridors (arterial, commercial, transit).
- d) Services with proximity to employment opportunities.

A System of Vibrant Centres and a Vital Economy

The regional plan enhances the investment environment, supports the development of existing business, attracts new investment in key industry sectors that will generate growth for the region, and has a focus on building the export capabilities of local firms.

- (a) Promotion of regional economic development built on positive and pro-active measures to improve:
 - Inter-regional "export" generation
 - Import substitution
 - Self containment in services
 - Investment attraction
 - Workforce capability
 - Strategic infrastructure
 - The creation of new firms from within the existing economic structure
 - Capital availability
 - A comprehensive economic environment (institutions)
 - Innovation
 - Partnerships between all stakeholders
- (b) The regional plan makes effective use of the existing system of centres as a focus for activity and investment, with initiatives for:
 - Clear recognition of existing regional centres and the investment in private and public infrastructure that has been made in those centres.
 - Ensuring residents have a clear 'sense of place' in their communities.
 - Commercial revitalisation and stimulation / economic development.
 - Promotion of industrial activity / economic opportunities.
 - Provision of institutional facilities / community services.
- (c) Agreement to the compilation, assessment and on-going measurement of key economic indicators.

An Agreed Regional Plan for essential regional infrastructure and services

Acknowledgement by State and Commonwealth agencies of an agreed cross-portfolio regional plan that facilitates and coordinates the delivery of essential regional infrastructure and services by State agencies.

- a) Coordination and delivery of mechanisms for essential regional infrastructure and services.
- b) Acid test of a new model developed within 2 years and measured at 4 years.
- c) Agreement of priorities for investment in infrastructure and service delivery.

Social Development- Cohesive and Vibrant Communities

- a) A mechanism for building on the community skills base, recognising the capacity which already exists within SEQ communities. This mechanism will reflect a commitment to self-help to enable each community to achieve its own economic, social, and cultural potential.
- b) Improvements in ability to recognise and respond to sectors of the community which are ‘money-poor’ (even if they are ‘asset-rich’ - eg rural landholders, elderly householders).
- c) Degree to which strategies are in place to ensure housing remains affordable to avoid segregating or displacing sectors of the community.
- d) Degree of commitment to planning to reduce the risk of social isolation and facilitate equitable local access to places, goods, services, facilities and opportunities.
- e) Degree of commitment to fairness and equity, including development of mechanisms where distribution of wealth sustains entire communities and where resources of ‘recipient’ areas appropriately extend to areas where impacts are felt (eg food and other resource production, environmental services, recreation opportunities, amenity services.)
- f) Collaborative mechanisms in place to more effectively deliver human services.
- g) Mechanisms in place to ensure the celebration and encouragement of the multicultural nature of SEQ society
- h) Recognition and inclusion of the Indigenous population and traditional owners of SEQ.
- i) Support structures and access to opportunities for socially disadvantaged people.

Economic Development

- a) Development of a dynamic, diverse and resilient economy that is not overly reliant on residential growth and local consumption, but increasingly knowledge-based and export-oriented.
- b) Strategic investment in labour, resources and ‘enabling’ infrastructure (eg training, technology, transfer, communications, etc) underpinned by an understanding of the potential of the region’s economy.
- c) Attraction of investment based on competitive advantage.
- d) Economic development underpinned by partnerships between all key players.
- e) Ongoing competition.
- f) Development of geographically decentralised elements of a diversified regional economy.

Environment Protection and Conservation

- a) Clean air.
- b) Clean water.
- c) Biodiversity.
- d) Access to nature.
- e) Sustainable management of natural resources (including waste and recycling, energy, renewable vs. non-renewable inputs to production/consumption).
- f) Minimal impacts to the natural environment as a result of project, policy or infrastructure planning decisions.

Leadership / Governance

The new robust vision for SEQ2021 can only be delivered by strong leadership with active cooperation shown by all levels of government. Any proposed new governance arrangements for SEQ must provide measurable improvements across the following attributes:

- a) Transparency and accountability.
- b) Consistency.
- c) Program budgeting: Specific allocation of resources to defined activities and initiatives.
- d) Compliance.
- e) Performance monitoring and reporting.
- f) Consultation.
- g) Advocacy.
- h) Partnering and collaboration.
- i) Clear lead agency responsibility.
- j) Linkages (as in other areas) between the planning and infrastructure provision functions of government.
- k) Commitment.
- l) Communication.

Determinants of a Successful Regional Strategy

- The actions and projects identified under the SEQ 2021 process must be outcome-driven.
- The development and agreement of institutional arrangements and strong leadership roles within the process is essential to any success.
- The importance of whole-of-governments and sector leadership, commitment, alignment and integration.
- Alignment and integration of program planning/budget with funding approval.
- The need for integration and alignment across the 11 discussion paper and 8 implementation areas.
- The regional plan must incorporate a mechanism to deal with issues that emerge unpredictably and/or outside of the SEQ 2021 process.
- Delivery of the State Government's budgetary processes must occur in close alignment with the endorsed regional plan. The Regional Plan must be clearly integrated into the major structural arrangements for delivery of State Government services, so that it must be taken into account when important resourcing decisions are made.
- The entirety of the regional planning should be the basis for state agencies and local authority strategic planning, budget preparation and project and infrastructure planning and provision. The Commonwealth Government should also reflect this regional planning in its prioritisation of expenditure.

This strategic overview of the SEQROC progress with the SEQ2021 project gives some indication of the breadth of issues contained in urban sustainability considerations and underlines the importance of robust cooperation across all levels of government. There is clearly an important role for the Commonwealth to help guide, complement and assist in the funding of the work required.

8. Planning and Infrastructure Support for Growing Cities from State and Commonwealth Governments.

The major infrastructure required to service the needs of fast growing urban areas such as South East Queensland cannot be provided from the resources of the local governments alone. There is a clear role for the State and Commonwealth Governments in the planning and funding of major infrastructure. One of the most notable areas of need is transport infrastructure.

Public Transport

The inescapable economic, environmental and social logic is that the State and Commonwealth Governments must invest heavily in fostering public transport with the massive funds collected through Commonwealth fuel taxes. Safe convenient public transport can make the most fundamental contribution to urban sustainability.

Moving commuters and residents into public transport and out of the way of commercial freight

- frees up this expensive investment in roads and contributes to our competitive position,
- improves our climate change contribution,
- cleans our air,
- minimises the road footprint,
- reduces the horrific social and economic costs of the road toll and helps foster the sense of community.

To date, the Commonwealth contribution has been inadequate, and significant increases in the funding for safe convenient public transport can be the simplest and most significant contribution the Commonwealth Government can make to the sustainability of Australia's cities, especially the rapidly growing cities of South East Queensland.

Despite its critical role in achieving a more sustainable pattern of growth in Australian cities, sustainable urban transport has not been a funding priority for the Commonwealth Government. The responsibility for efficient, safe and environmentally responsible transport infrastructure and services in urban areas has been directly deferred to state, territory and local governments and the private sector.

The current Commonwealth policy on non-investment in urban transport and its focus on investment outside of the city regions should be questioned. This is particularly the case given the national importance of Australia's city regions especially those fast growing areas driving the national economy like South East Queensland. The clear parallels between urban transport projects like the South East Busway in Brisbane, the proposed Gold Coast Light Rail and Commonwealth programs for reducing greenhouse gas, increased use of alternative fuels and improving urban air quality beg the question as to why more support is not given to urban transport initiatives.

Although the Commonwealth's reasoning for not significantly supporting urban transport is not clear, the implications of this strategy certainly are for Australia's capital cities. Urban transport is a critical component of a transport system

providing movement for residents going to work, to recreate or to study. It directly contributes to the quality of life and amenity of a city, making it more competitive in attracting and keeping globally mobile intellectual capital and commercial investment. Recent identification of SE Qld as a global lifestyle and urban amenity investment opportunity underpins that our quality of life is our most fundamental global competitive advantage and deserves higher national priority.

The cost of not aggressively tackling this problem through infrastructure expansion and demand management measures will be felt at a local, state and national level. As such, the transportation problem currently being experienced in Brisbane and the surrounding South East Queensland region, and the one likely to be faced in the future if the status quo is followed, stands to impact Australia's social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Given the broad implications of allowing this problem to fester, both the State and Commonwealth would be well advised to assist Local Government in rectifying the transportation problem. In particular, this requires greater commitment for funding from the Commonwealth to address the current imbalance between excise taken from transport related taxes and funding for urban transport or for proposals/initiatives that directly support urban transport investment in services or infrastructure.

Urban Land Use Planning

The Inquiry should recognise that the Commonwealth Government has a legitimate role to play in urban policy and more importantly, the direct funding of sustainable infrastructure projects. If we reflect on the past examples of when the Commonwealth pro-actively engaged in urban affairs, such as with the Better Cities Program, these demonstrate how successful the involvement can be in stimulating and delivering major policy initiatives such as urban renewal and providing important infrastructure.

The Commonwealth should administer a grants scheme designed to deliver real outcomes on the ground in metropolitan areas where comprehensive regional and metropolitan planning studies are being prepared or implemented in a way that demonstrably makes the region more sustainable.

The SEQ 2021 Regional Planning Project is a good example of where the Commonwealth could become pro-actively involved and support the delivery of major projects or infrastructure through SEQROC. These grants should be linked to the successful performance of projects delivered by local authorities that come together through regional organisations to address growth issues.

The predicted population growth in the South East Queensland Region will lead to an unsustainable urban form unless there is a significant shift in the amount of population housed in established urban areas with higher densities and well served by public transport as opposed to urban sprawl at low densities. The direct grants funding and an incentive based taxation system discussed above, could play a major role in changing patterns of development.

Water strategy

With a greenhouse-induced drying of the climate now widely accepted as the likely scenario and the expanding domestic and commercial demand of SE Qld, water efficiency is critical to the sustainability of the region.

The exceptional regional co-operation in water supply and the environmental management of the SE Qld Partnership indicate a region that is an exemplar of efficient performance. Accordingly, the Commonwealth Government should be favouring sustainable outcomes with a program of infrastructure funding.

While the region has not got the same urgency of a city like Adelaide, the lag period for change requires a focus on investment now. The contraction of the NHT funding has affected excellent programs like the Waterways Partnership with its science-based Water Quality Plan. Full funding should be returned to these initiatives to continue the excellent progress made.

The strategic values of water resources to the well being of South East Queensland are well known and understood. The ideal situation is to have the future well being of the region directly linked to the carrying capacity of our water resources so that utility of the resource is conditional upon regional benefits driven from shared costs, including well established trade-off options. Secondly, we need to acknowledge that these trade-off benefits and costs will evolve so that actions taken now do not adversely impact on future utility of the resource for alternative outcomes. The ideal is to be able to exploit the resource differentially as its value and demands change.

This approach sees the requirement to understand the water resource's capacities first. This means that the urban, then regional water cycle needs to be characterised. Demands can then be placed on this capacity to index the sustainable utility rate. The next step is to then establish community empathy towards the resource that will see the demand reflect the capacity rather than the current situation where demand is predicated on utility rates without regard to the resource.

The Commonwealth Government has recently assumed a welcome and widely-applauded leadership role in co-ordinating the water management of the Murray-Darling system. This role can be extended to smart taxation to favour re-use expenditure over consumption. The profile of natural resource utility needs to be on the national agenda. NHT 1&2, NAP, MDBC and the like are either crisis or spatially delineated approaches to environmental problems. They are reactive programs designed to solve problems and mobilise the Australian community to be aware of the issues, create community capacity and hopefully reorganise how we do business.

This energy needs to be refocussed to acknowledge the finite edges to resource use. In the case of water, to not get lost in the demand mechanics of the economy but to set our national aspirations aligned to efficient use of the resource. Governance of these efficiency objectives has to deal with issues of uncertainty and move away from protecting business as usual approaches. Urban water demands are going to increase with growth. Primary production needs are going to decrease becoming a strategy capacity issue rather than an economic issue as has happened in the case of the EU.

The Commonwealth government needs to understand this paradigm shift and set ESD objectives on resource use at a sustainable rate as a national goal. An Urban Water Commission that links the water management together in a national context would be a good start. This temporary institute could then draft TORs (perhaps developed by the Wentworth Group), linking LGA planning to National objectives. The State would be the agent to establish water resource utility capacities.

Based on this cascade of national objectives into local projects, a suitable package of taxation and funding incentives and penalties could, over time, allocate resources to the most efficient water conservation delivery. A market-driven system of national

water conservation is a fundamental of a sustainable nation as well as sustainable urban centres. In the short term, restoring Commonwealth funding to water quality and land management is essential to sustainability.

Water Sensitive Urban Design

WSUD as a strategic approach to water management objectives is a feature of a number of SEQ Councils development approval process. In the last decade the ecological, social and economic significance of urban water management has highlighted the need to treat all water as a resource. The community is now aware of the benefits gained in keeping water clean, using it judiciously, and protecting the soils that water erodes.

Brisbane City Council has developed guidelines for WSUD outcomes for private sector development industries, public sector activities and has developed, distributed and up-graded publications to foster WSUD ideals.

WSUD application to the total urban water cycle is the ideal. As an efficiency strategy it can be applied so that water pollution can be limited to issues of utility instead of the current situation where most pollution has more to do with water transport than water use.

Urban water management is becoming a most successful area in achieving good water management objectives. The highest benefits to society can be achieved by husbanding the water resources in the urban context. As urban centres grow the capacity to extract better water use benefits increases. This is distinct from the structural water use in primary industry, which has little capacity to alter volumes even if quality can be compromised.

The adoption of a Commonwealth policy framework toward urban water management would allow the benefits of WSUD principles to gain a national focus that is now limited to a few large urban centres. Given the uncertain outcome from some new approaches, it is essential that these are installed and quantified over a number of seasons to better gauge their role in off-setting infrastructure.

Waste minimisation and management

Despite many admirable innovations, the current systems for waste management in SEQ is clearly unsustainable as each household continues to send about a tonne of resources to disposal each year. Increasing consumerism and a reluctance by State and Commonwealth Governments to force producers to be responsible for their products leaves Local Government with an expensive waste problem.

Those wasted resources also represent an enormous environmental and economic loss. Recycling reduces those losses through energy savings and reduced environmental impact through reprocessing. Recovered resources feed local re-manufacturing. For example the current kerbside recycling system provides an estimated economic benefit of \$20 million and 1500 jobs to Brisbane.

However, to achieve long term sustainability in waste management outcomes, it is imperative that there is an attitudinal shift by waste producers and consumers in the community to embrace shared responsibility for the life cycle management of waste. Accordingly, the Commonwealth Government should establish an integrated policy and governance framework to facilitate this paradigm shift. Within this framework local government can, with a degree of certainty, pursue and implement systems

that deliver sustainable secondary resource recovery and residual waste management on a continual improvement basis for the community.

The Australian government could place a tax on plastic bags in supermarkets. The Irish Government's plastic bag levy has cut the use of plastic bags in supermarkets by 90% in just 5 months. The 26 cents per bag levy was introduced earlier in the year in an effort to reduce the amount of plastic bag litter produced by some of Ireland's 3.8 million residents. \$A 6.18 million has been raised by the tax program, which will be spent on environmental projects. Under the scheme, shoppers are charged for each plastic checkout bag they take from supermarkets and other retail stores.

The current Packaging Covenant has been a wasted opportunity due to a Commonwealth structure without recovery targets or significant penalties for non-achievement. The Commonwealth Government must consider strong extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation as a sensible alternative to the current Commonwealth policy failure. The Commonwealth Government has adopted a laudable EPR scheme for waste oil. It is time to expand the successful model into packaging, electronic wastes, tyres, and household hazardous wastes. Once targets are set, markets will establish the most efficient recovery interventions into the supply consumption disposal chain.

By setting targets and re-inforcing the system with smart taxation i.e. taxes that encourage recovery and penalise disposal such as the British landfill levy or the Irish plastic bag levy, the Commonwealth Government can significantly assist Australia become more resource and economically efficient. The contribution made to greenhouse gas reduction and the other mining, manufacturing and disposal impacts justifies this approach on its own account without the obvious economic benefits.

Energy Conservation

Currently energy demand is on the rise with the residential sector increasing their demand through an increased standard of living and rapidly increasing air-conditioner sales.

Commercially office buildings are not being designed to minimise their energy use. Given the long life of the built form, the current energy in-efficiencies will persist for decades. A stronger National code for energy efficiency is warranted with tax incentives for sustainable buildings. This system has worked very well in the State of New York.

The Sustainable Housing Code- a draft code being proposed by SEQROC addresses the use of energy in class one and class two buildings. If the Building Code Australia could match such initiatives, it would be a great step forward for South East QLD.

A complete review of the Building Code of Australia addressing an urgent need for energy conservation and energy efficiency, to reduce energy consumption by the residential and commercial sector.

“The goals of the BCA are to enable the achievement and maintenance of acceptable standards of structural sufficiency, safety (including safety from fire), health and amenity for the benefit of the community now and in the future.” These goals should be extended to include sustainable resource use in all built form.

The establishment of a nationally accepted rating tool, such as **Australian Building Greenhouse Rating (ABGR)** scheme or Green Star, to be mandated in the BCA with a 5 star minimum set.

The Commonwealth Government has a role to encourage natural gas infrastructure (reticulation) for commercial and residential sector, as a greenhouse abatement measure and a transitional fuel before future technology is available eg fuel cell.

A stronger commitment to greenhouse gas reductions at the national level, increased funding for greenhouse gas abatement least cost options, through CCP, Greenhouse Challenge and mandatory abatement for large greenhouse gas emitters will help ensure a sustainable future for Australia's cities.

Bushland Preservation.

The Commonwealth has a role in the preservation of natural and heritage values and should be more pro-active in supporting other levels of government in protecting these values.

Incorporate eco-efficiency principles into new buildings and housing.

The Commonwealth has a role to play in setting appropriate standards (eg. National Building code) The Commonwealth has a role in fostering (and supporting) research and guidelines.

The Commonwealth can provide taxation and other incentives for adoption of more sustainable materials and development and building practices. Further, the Commonwealth can demonstrate better practices through its own buildings and management practices.

9. Removing Incentives for Unsustainable Practices

A key focus for the Commonwealth Government is to audit its regulations and its financial arrangements that provide incentives for the continuation of unsustainable practices.

In a wide-ranging economic report card, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development said the Commonwealth and state governments have been slow to use taxes and charges to minimise environmental damage. "Substantial scope exists for achieving greater environmental policy coherence via the extended use of economic instruments," the OECD said.

The OECD has urged Australia to introduce taxes and charges to deal with the environmental problems of salinity, water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

On greenhouse gas emissions, the OECD said Australia's policies to date were high-profile but "administratively burdensome and of uncertain effectiveness". "To achieve significant emission reductions, structural adjustment towards a less greenhouse-gas-intensive economy would be required. "In the OECD's view, this would be most efficiently achieved by putting a price on emissions, either through an economy-wide tax or a permit trading scheme," the report said. It was also critical of the government's new fuel tax rebate introduced as part of the new tax system, saying it should be progressively eliminated.

The OECD also said water has historically been significantly underpriced. While water price reform in urban areas was well advanced, rural reform was lagging for fear of damaging a key Coalition constituency. Price reform would also help tackle salinity

by increasing the efficiency in water use and redirecting water use towards less damaging activities.

10 Commentary on the Inquiry Terms of Reference

With regard to the terms of reference for the enquiry, SEQROC offers the following summary comments:

1. The environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development;

There is abundant research material available on the costs and impacts of urban sprawl. The enquiry would be best served by informing itself of the key findings of such research and then moving swiftly to the most practical and effective measures for addressing such development and managing its impacts. Using urban sustainability considerations as a filter, the benefits and attractions of traditional 'suburban' development should be evaluated against the very clear limitations of low density residential growth on the fringes of Australia's cities. The obvious concerns can be listed as:

- inefficient use of available land for urban development,
- loss of valuable non-urban land (eg agricultural land or nature conservation habitat) to low density urban uses, and to the land price speculation caused by development for such urban uses
- the costs of providing urban services to low density suburbs distant from major service centres and from trunk infrastructure facilities.
- the traffic conflicts arising from settlement patterns almost totally reliant on the private car for transport purposes.
- The often high energy use, high water use, high waste generating and single purpose use (i.e. inflexible) characteristics of developments occurring in low density urban developments in fringe urban locations.
- The often low levels of social services, reduced social support and lack of opportunities for social interaction characteristic of low density residential development areas.
- The concentrations of persons and households of socio-economic disadvantage in fringe urban locations.
- Loss of local identity and a sense of place.

2. The major determinants of urban settlement patterns and desirable patterns of development for the growth of Australian cities;

The focus on the spatial determinants for the structure and arrangement of Australia's cities is welcome. However the dominant role of non-spatial financial incentives, industry practices and perceived market preferences must be acknowledged. Put bluntly, governments, industry financiers, developers and consumers find it much easier to deal with low density single purpose urban developments, that are easily defined into standard 'packages'. Despite the rhetoric, there are multiple disincentives for the achievement of higher density, multiple purpose, multiple use urban developments. The 'desirable patterns of development for new growth areas' are easy to identify: there are many award winning developments that can be used as examples. However a key focus would be an assessment of the relative difficulties of achieving such development when compared with the more traditional low density residential development. This should not be restricted to the development approval process, as to their credit, Council's have largely overhauled their planning requirements to now favour the more sustainable developments. Instead, the focus should be on all the other steps in the development process, from land acquisition, development financing, infrastructure provision, marketing and property sales.

3. A 'blueprint' for ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement, with particular reference to eco-efficiency and equity in the provision of services and infrastructure;

It is unlikely that the inquiry will reveal a blueprint for sustainable cities, at least in a spatial sense: all places have their own unique opportunities and challenges. There is no single urban pattern that will be more sustainable than all others. It may be more useful to identify certain thresholds for eco-efficiency and certain standards for urban services and urban infrastructure that all Australian cities can be assessed against in terms of their sustainability.

4. Measures to reduce the environmental, social and economic costs of continuing urban expansion; and

Useful measures to cope with continuing urban expansion will include at least three types of implementation 'tool boxes':

- Measures to limit urban expansion at the fringe, including urban growth boundaries and incentives for infill development and urban redevelopment.
- Measure for improved design and construction of new urban areas on the fringe of Australia's cities, so that where non-urban land is converted to urban use it is done so efficiently.
- Measures to better service existing and future areas of low density development, including innovations in infrastructure provision and transport services.

5. Mechanisms for the Commonwealth to bring about urban development reform and promote ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement.

One of the key findings of the enquiry should be that the Commonwealth must become more directly engaged in the development of Australia's cities. While the enquiry focuses on urban sprawl, this is just a symptom of the overall growth and development pressures facing Australia as one of the most urbanised nations on earth. Rather than simplistic solutions to the worst excesses of low density urban development, the Commonwealth should review land development processes and the financing and delivery of infrastructure so as to improve the quality of life for all Australians. Much good work has been done by Gold Coast City and other municipalities across Australia to work /towards a more sustainable future: the enquiry should identify, review and promote these good examples for urban sustainability.

11 Conclusion and Recommendations

The Concept of Sustainable Cities/Sustainable Regions

No city can be sustainable of itself. Even large cities with extensive hinterlands are unlikely to be self sufficient in terms of food production, energy production, water supply, raw materials production, employment needs, social service needs, health services, educational needs, entertainment and recreation needs. It is more sensible to think about sustainable city regions, and of course sustainable States and a sustainable nation. Nevertheless, all cities can strive to improve their sustainability: settlement patterns and eco-efficiency are important areas for such improvement. These are definitely worth investigating and promoting.

Australia's cities are well placed to respond to grass roots community concerns about the environment and to respond in a sensitive manner to the unique context of the Australian landscape. However with only some 4% of the national income base allocated to Local Government, major funding and resource assistance is needed from the State and Commonwealth governments to advance these sustainable city initiatives and programs.

The sustainable city of the future is about achieving a balance; it is the fast growing cities that have the greatest challenges in this regard. They need active assistance so that they can retain the biodiversity of Australia, have a developed infrastructure that gives efficient and equitable access to services and utilities, preserve the essentials of the 'Australian lifestyle' and contribute to the economic wealth of the nation.

The Commonwealth is commended for undertaking this inquiry. One principle of the Inquiry should be to offer an appropriate role for the Commonwealth in re-establishing an urban agenda and re-instating appropriate programs to provide effective support to other levels of government who are currently grappling with these urban challenges. Further, the Commonwealth should examine areas of influence under its responsibility where adjustments of policy direction (taxation policy, transport investment, statutory regulation, research and extension, and undertaking of demonstration projects) could make significant contributions to the sustainability of Australian Cities and City Regions.

Key Recommendations for implementation will include:

1. An audit of the excellent National Strategy for Environmentally Sustainable Development could establish what has and hasn't worked. Clearly, much recent and historic Commonwealth policy is antagonistic to a more sustainable Australia. Significant subsidies to sustainable transport and the removal of perverse subsidies to unsustainable behaviour could make an immediate quantum leap to long term Australia's sustainability.
2. Provision of adequate resourcing and assistance for Local Government in its land use and infrastructure planning and provision, waste management community and economic development functions is fundamental. Current funding available through existing revenue raising and grants from other levels of government restricts the scope and capacity of Councils to address sustainability.
3. The development and implementation of appropriate intergovernmental relations. Appropriate governance models and relationship need to be developed which draw on the experience, knowledge and capacity of Local Government. Significant potential exists with the creation of appropriate relationships for the harnessing of Commonwealth, State, Local Government, Industry and the community resources for cooperative and effective work progressing towards sustainable cities. SEQROC encourages the Inquiry to facilitate the development and implementation of appropriate intergovernmental relations, and to actively support regional planning projects and processes
4. The Commonwealth Government to apply its financial, revenue raising and taxation powers to promote action by individual, communities and industries. Local Government is seeking to assist residents and industries to act more sustainably, yet it is restricted in the scope of

incentives and initiatives through limited revenue raising powers. Significant scope exists for the Commonwealth Government to work in cooperation with Local Government and utilise its broad financial and taxation powers to provide greater incentives for individuals, industries and communities to implement and achieve more sustainable practices.

5. The development of a national Cities Policy. The Commonwealth's focus should clearly identify issues of national significance and should facilitate policy and program approaches at the levels of nation and state. It is essential that the Commonwealth shows some leadership on the issues of current and future patterns of settlement, the sustainability issues associated with these settlement patterns, and how government policy might ensure that developed areas retain an Australian lifestyle without diminishing the future value of Australian eco-systems.

SEQROC would be pleased to provide further information on the programs and projects mentioned in this submission. SEQROC's member representatives will be happy to further assist the Environment and Heritage Committee members with their Inquiry deliberations.

END OF SUBMISSION

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