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Environment and Heritage Committee  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Secretary: *A. Akbari*

**RECEIVED**

**31 OCT 2003**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

28 October 2003

Emailed 29/10/03

Dear Sir

**Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025**

Local Government is at the coalface of implementation of factors that influence sustainability. It is a level of government that plans for the expansion of urban areas, manages green spaces and provides infrastructure; so while a Commonwealth inquiry is a positive step forward in making Australian cities more sustainable, any resulting policies must be applicable to local government and consideration must be given to the resources available to local government for implementation of new sustainability initiatives.

The terms of reference do not transfer fully into the suggested set of visionary objectives for the Australian city. For example, there is nothing in the objectives that relates to social equity or cultural diversity. The objectives miss out on the importance of maintaining and protecting natural waterways and visual character and amenity of Cities and issues of community safety. Importantly, the objectives also do not address the economy as of key importance in achieving Sustainable Cities. Perhaps this is a reflection of a focus on larger metropolitan cities, however, for regional cities, the absence of a strong viable economy is the factor that is likely to limit progress towards sustainability. It is suggested that the objectives for a sustainable City should be reviewed to more fully address the components of sustainability, and issues of regional Cities.

In order to have a strong blueprint for Sustainable Cities 2025, Australia needs a strong corporate federal approach to managing sustainability. At present there are so many levels of government and different government departments controlling different aspects of sustainability that the approach has become fragmented, piecemeal and confused. Focus should be put onto the development of a strong co-ordinated approach that feeds down into on-ground action and can be practically applied by Local Government.

**1. Preserve bushland, significant heritage and urban green zones.**

*Questions for consideration*

- **Does the inclusion of green zones within city planning result in further urban sprawl, which has a greater detrimental effect for the environment by encroaching on more surrounding bushland?**

The areas of green spaces are probably insufficient in the total context of an area and do not significantly increase urban sprawl. In most cases, areas of green space are pieces left over or land that cannot reasonably be developed, eg creek lines. It is considered unlikely that provision for green space will have an impact on surrounding environment that is above and beyond that created by the urban development in the first place.

- **What are the possible impacts of either increasing or limiting the proportion of bushland and urban green zones?**

The provision of green zones is an aspect of the Australian lifestyle that is highly valued. The inclusion of urban green zones or bushland into an urban setting has community benefits by providing community space to enjoy life and may often provide a reasonable off-set to increased density developments. Urban green zones and bushland areas only work if they are co-ordinated with the needs of the community and fit in with the requirements for access and safety. However there are complicating factors that make the management of such areas, especially those of natural bushland challenging, for example a range of legislative requirements and costs in managing these areas, particularly relating to risk management and bushfire control. Many of these areas are created as a result of dedications resulting from the subdivision of the urban areas. The management of these areas often therefore falls to Councils, however extra resources are not provided for this management. This has the potential to influence the size and amount of green spaces that are dedicated to Councils and also to impact on the facilities that can be provided to the public in these green zones.

- **Can green zones be multi-purpose – serving the recreational and social needs of city dwellers while also providing habitat and environmental benefits for native flora and fauna?**

Only certain types of green space can be multi-purpose, and these areas have to be well planned, incorporating an analysis of needs in order to provide habitat for native species and also social/recreational benefits. The types of plants and animals that can be supported by such green zones are dependent on the size and type of the green zone and its level of use by the public. Ideally bushland areas are linked to provide corridors and facilitate the movement of native species. In addition they should be large enough to support populations of species and support a range of key habitat values such as large hollow bearing trees. In some situations they may need to be kept free of dogs and cats to continue to support native fauna species. The pressure to provide fuel free areas adjacent to housing may impinge on the existence of green zones. Multi-purpose use can add considerably to the management cost of green zones.

- **Is it appropriate to provide incentives to encourage partnership arrangements with land holders and developers to preserve remnant vegetation on private lands?**

Yes, although how this land is able to actually be used by the community and how this land fits into an sustainable urban city model is questionable.

- **How do we ensure that preserved sites of built heritage are culturally valued and appropriately integrated into planned developments?**

Assessments are required to understand the significance of heritage properties and disseminated to owners of the property and the community in general. In certain situations, such as industrial sites, heritage value may not be obvious or generally acknowledged. Heritage funding in the form of incentives or assistance for maintenance should be provided to help retain heritage values. Strategic planning should also be used to identify heritage properties, so that there are no unrealistic expectations of what types of development can be undertaken on such land.

- **How do we ensure that public green zones are integrated into new developments?**

Areas for public green zones need to be incorporated into the long-term planning process and integrated into urban design of new areas. For areas that have already been developed, there is a requirement to identify the needs for community space and recognition that provision of community green space is a valid alternative landuse for redevelopment in Cities. For new urban release areas public green zones need to be identified early and subject to developer agreements at the rezoning stage.

2. **Ensure equitable access to and efficient use of energy, including renewable energy sources.**

*Questions for consideration*

- **How might we implement a shift from the existing large-scale energy generation and distribution infrastructure towards an alternative model?**

There needs to be a strong commitment from the federal government to the reduction of greenhouse gas generating energy infrastructure and the promotion of alternative models. Such alternative models should have their benefits promoted to the community. There is already a range of technology that can be applied to alternative energy generation, however setting up alternatives may require Commonwealth assistance.

- **How can the uptake of renewable energy for residential and commercial properties be promoted?**

Our experience is that green energy is more expensive than conventionally generated energy. Therefore subsidies may need to be provided so that green energy becomes more affordable or conventional energy is more appropriately priced to reflect the costs to the environment.

**3. Establish an integrated sustainable water and stormwater management system addressing capture, consumption, treatment and re-use opportunities.**

Patterns of climate change, drought and reduced water availability mean that attitudes to water use within Sustainable Cities must change. The recent drought is a good example, when water restrictions were applied in many regional areas, but not metropolitan Sydney who use inter-basin transfers to top up their water supplies. Such attitudes to water usage must change, with alteration in pricing required so that water becomes an appropriately valued resource. More use of reclaimed water should be made in industry and for green spaces. Developments should follow the principles of water sensitive urban design, and incentives may need to be provided for systems of rain harvesting and recycling grey water, particularly in retrofitting existing urban areas.

**4. Develop sustainable transport networks, nodal complementarity and logistics.**

*Questions for consideration*

• **What initiatives can assist in the reduction of automobile dependence?**

Strategic planning and the provision of resources that facilitate alternatives to dependence on cars are required to reduce car usage. The layouts of subdivisions may also assist in reducing the need for travel by cars. The situation where obvious transport issues in large metropolitan cities are being dealt with by more roads and more sophisticated road networks that preclude the introduction of public transport means that this side of sustainability is not being dealt with. A complicating factor in achieving reduction in car use is the ability of regional cities to provide an effective public transport network. What is required is model cities of different sizes and characteristics that are developed to show how public transport can work in a variety of situations. More emphasis should be placed on land use component and the appropriate location of destinations e.g. facilities and workplaces rather than just the transport component.

**5. Develop urban plans that accommodate lifestyle and business opportunities**

*Questions for consideration*

• **What planning models and zones can we use to accommodate the different lifestyle needs and preferences of Australians in cities?**

The needs of different sized cities, in different regional areas need to be catered for in any planning models that are working towards a more sustainable city. What is relevant for larger cities is not necessarily the same for regional cities or cities throughout Australia which will often have different sustainability challenges.

For example water use may be a key sustainability issue for a western regional city, whereas, reducing car dependency may be a focus issue for metropolitan cities. Other differences that impact on achieving sustainability are occupancy rates of houses in coastal areas and unemployment rates in regional towns.

- **How do we transform existing suburban and inner city developments into more sustainable forms of community living?**

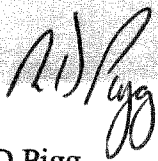
Develop mixed use communities that cater for needs of community safety and open space.

- **How do we ensure that further urban expansion occurs as planned community developments?**

Forward planning strategies that incorporate the capacity of the urban area to expand in relation to constraints based on land use, environmental considerations and limitations in infrastructure.

If you need further information about this matter, contact Sandra Jones, Environmental Planner on 4429 3491. Please quote Council's reference 1566.

Yours faithfully



RD Pigg  
General Manager