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An alliance of environmental and community groups from Lake Macquarie, Wyong and Gosford

Environment and Heritage Committee

House of Representatives

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

21st November 2003

Dear Sir,

Submission – Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

On behalf of the Central Coast Community Environment Network (CCCEN), I wish to make a submission in to the Inquiry in to Sustainable Cities: A Blueprint for the Future as follows:

Our submission is based on the seven components suggested in the discussion paper as visionary objectives for the sustainable Australian city of the future, but we do believe there is one overriding factor, which affects all these components and that is **population**.

Therefore it is critically important that the government has a strict population policy (eg. Immigration policy etc), so that all the impacts from the components are lessened; and it is very important for the government creates incentives to attract population away from the major cities and nearby metropolitan regions. Cities currently have unsustainable trends of consuming significant quantities of resources and have a major impact on the environment, within their current borders. These trends need to be substantially curbed and eventually reversed.

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

It is critically important to include green zones within city planning, and still protect the surrounding bushland on the city fringes, by limiting the city expansion, creating satellite cities and expanding the population of country towns. We support the integration of as much biodiversity as is reasonable within the city limits, and would encourage partnerships with landholders and developers to preserve remnant vegetation, threatened species conservation should have a higher priority than purely economic indicators.

We believe that the built heritage should be preserved through involvement by all levels of government and the community in the decisions on what is of heritage value.

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

To ensure that everyone has equitable access to energy there may be a need to curtail population growth, especially when there are recent examples in the USA of blackouts because supply cannot keep up with demand.

It is critical that we move to alternate forms of energy as soon as possible, due to the impending oil crisis within the next ten to twenty years and the need to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions.

The uptake of renewal energy for residential and commercial properties can be promoted by local councils including them in their development control plans for new buildings. The impediments being economic ones promoted by developers and the housing industry, and the current lack of green power. Higher efficiency standards should be mandated for all new dwellings, appliances and business operations.

Renewable energy generation should be promoted both at the single dwelling level and across city regions. This is expected to be able to do when hydrogen fuel cells become available.

Public transport systems should be encouraged to change to renewable energy sources (eg. Gas powered buses), especially when developing transport infrastructure for large-scale developments.

The main problem being the lack of public transport infrastructure.

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

We would support more localized, small scale systems of urban water management, and believe more in the “user pays” concept to encourage responsible water consumption, the inclusion of water tanks in to all new and house upgrading development control plans, water saving devices fitted on all taps and shower heads and consideration of reducing urban water pressures at the household.

In older cities it is very costly to upgrade water delivery systems, but government incentives should make this more sustainable; the use of ‘gray’ water should be installed in all new developments, more soft areas should included so that all the rain does not end up in stormwater drains and that water should also be used.

4. Manage and minimize domestic and industrial waste.

We believe that to get a more sustainable approach to waste management, more responsibility should be taken by the creators of products, which cause the waste. Recycling is only part of the answer, where re-use is achieved.

As in water use, the “ user pays” principle should be adopted on waste both for industry and the consumer, and container deposit legislation should be adopted in all states.

Industries should be encouraged to adopt the “ clean production” principle in all production methods, and closed loop production should be used where possible; thus creating no waste.

5. Develop sustainable transport networks, nodal complementarity and logistics.

In order to reduce car dependence the major initiative would be to increase spending on public transport infrastructure in favour of spending on roads; also have timetables that fit in with public requirements and locations and encourage businesses to subsidise their workers travel on public transport.

New transport technologies should be promoted for types of vehicles, especially on public transport, such as electric cars and buses; also the use of hydrogen fuel cells is currently being tested in these vehicles.

Decentralised nodal types of transport networks are appropriate for commuter and traveler needs especially when the population centers are moved to satellite cities and public transport hubs on city fringes are utilized for buses and trains. It is also critical that more freight is transported by trains and moved off the highways.

6. Incorporate eco-efficiency principles into new buildings and housing.

Green construction and refurbishment techniques can be integrated into standard building practices by implementing new state government planning laws and by local government development control plans.

In NSW, through SEDA, which has adopted efficiency standards for commercial buildings, and the through the BASIX web based application that will allow developers, builders and Councils to ensure that new residential developments meet targets for aspects of sustainability, including water, stormwater, energy, indoor amenity, landscape diversity, waste, materials, social and transport. This rating system will apply to all residential development applications submitted in Metropolitan councils from 1 July 2004.

The only impediment for eco-efficiency principles being taken up across new housing developments and commercial areas is the will of developers and the housing industry stating that it is uneconomic to include them in their pricing structures. It is crucial that more information is passed on to housing buyers that this eco-efficiency can, in fact, save them money in the long term.

7. Develop urban plans that accommodate lifestyle and business opportunities.

As people have differing needs at the various stages of their life it is important that there is a variety of housing within each suburb or collection of suburbs, so that people do not lose a sense of community when they move from one stage of their life to the next and change houses accordingly.

Urban hubs and communities concentrated around public transport nodes are an appropriate model to suit Australian lifestyle needs, especially with our ageing population's needs for smaller, affordable units for the elderly should be built near shopping centers and these transport nodes. Good public transport systems and roads should connect these urban hubs.

We believe that to ensure our future sustainability we must develop more compact cities in Australia, by combining landscape and buildings in new ways, by retaining some forms of biodiversity in the green areas and putting in the correct infrastructure required for peoples needs. It is important that we incorporate sustainability features into the design, construction and operation of new developments.

Conclusion.

The Central Coast Community Environment Network hopes that our comments will assist the Committee in their inquiry into sustainable cities.

We believe it is important that communities minimize their ecological footprint and recognise the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems.

John Wiggin. Secretary – CCCEN.