

SUBMISSION NO. 153

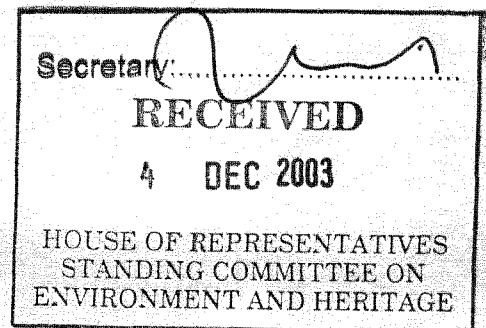
Hunter Environment Lobby

PO Box 449
SINGLETON NSW 2330

10 November 2003

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

Dear Sir/Madam



House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

The Hunter Environment Lobby wishes to make a submission to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities.

One important issue for the Inquiry to consider is the following question - *Why is it that despite the attention given to sustainability over the last decade, our cities and urban structures are increasingly moving in unsustainable directions?*

In relation to the following key issues identified by the inquiry, the Hunter Environment Lobby wishes to make the following comments:

1 The environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development.

The Australian Government plays a vital role in affecting urban development, particularly through its population, healthcare and regional development policies. This means that the implementation of these policies should have specific regard to land use implications, and it must be recognised that urban development issues associated with major cities are a national issue, and best not dealt with solely at the state or local level.

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

The major determinants of settlement patterns are primarily national economic policies. For example, policies actively encourage the motor industry and the use of motor cars and these undermine the efficiency and viability of public transport as an alternative. Taxes and disincentives for use of non-renewable oil based fuels should be substantially and progressively increased over time. Schemes to support the building industry such as the first home owners grant scheme, capital gains tax exemptions for homes and negative gearing for investment properties are distorting the housing market and encouraging unsustainable development. Transport policies and investments in major roads encourage use of road transport which increases the unsustainability of land use and concentrates urban development in major cities.

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 not possible to develop a simple blueprint for all situations. However, the most important issue to start with for new urban development is for the Australian Government to apply policies that:

- progressively increase the cost of motor vehicle transport, to a level that affects behaviour,
- invest in transport infrastructure that promotes public transport,
- provide incentives for use of durable building materials, and development types that are built for the long term,
- promotes a healthcare system that recognises the importance of environmental conditions in public health.

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

Major reform is required to ensure that the land use implications of economic policy are considered. In particular, taxation reforms should increase the taxes on petrol enough to affect consumer behaviour. Subsidies on 4WD vehicles should be removed, and the size of dwelling houses should be taxed, based on the use of non-renewable resources.

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

The Australian Government can influence urban development by ensuring that the implications of economic and social policies are considered more fully. This means that in major centres such as Sydney, there should be a recognised role for national leadership in promoting sustainable urban development, rather than leaving this issue to fragmented local and state government responses which are ineffective because they run counter to inappropriate national economic signals.

It is hoped that the above comments provide a perspective which is considered in the Committee's deliberations. Thank you for your consideration of the group's comments in relation to this matter.

yours sincerely



Jan Davis (President)