Submission to the Senate Committee on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

The Eastern Regional Organisation for Planning and Human Settlements (EAROPH) is the UN accredited peak body for the Asia Pacific Region addressing the challenges of sustainable human settlements within the context of a flourishing healthy natural world. We are multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral, and seek to connect practitioners to improve the quality of people's lives and the environment.

The Australian Chapter is a significant participant and our members were well represented at the *United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)* held in Quito, Ecuador in 2016, and at the more recent *United Nations World Urban Forum* held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2017. In our role within the UN-General Assembly of Partners and the UN-Habitat Professionals Group, EAROPH Australia contributed to the drafting of the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) that implements the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

a. *The understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community*

There is growing awareness of the SDGs and the NUA in Australia, however much greater communication is needed by the Australian Government for Australians to realise the benefit of the SDGs and to accelerate action.

EAROPH Australia co-hosted the *Implementing the NUA in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region Conference* held in Melbourne in May 2017 and was represented at the *Australian SDGs Summit 2018* held this month in Melbourne. At both these events, the lack of Australian Government promotion of the SDGs was raised as a significant issue by participants.

In addition, a lack of Australian Government presence at the UN World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur last month, which was held specifically to showcase implementation efforts of the SDGs and NUA to date and to develop shared initiatives for the Asia Pacific Region, raised concerns. Approximately 60 Australian delegates attended the event and were represented in a number of sessions.

While much of the work to implement the SDGs needs to take place at state and local levels, more leadership is needed by the Australian Government to set the direction and to create the impetus for change. Australian local governments were active in implementing the *United Nations Local Agenda 21* program that arose from the the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and that the Australian Government adopted at the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. The success in implementing *Local Agenda 21* Australia was due to the Australian Government setting strong direction and support for the initiative.

Lessons from implementing Local Agenda 21 could be considered in developing a national program to implement the SDGs, including supporting roles for government, the private sector and civil society action groups.

b. The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs

The SDGs now provide a means of comparing countries' use of resources in maintaining our social wellbeing. Australia has previously achieved its solid social foundation only at the expense of excessive resource use. The SDGs provide a framework through which the transition to a sustainable economy and society can be managed. The social and economic costs of "business as usual" in the way we are pursuing urban development are creating inefficiencies and dysfunctions that will be difficult and expensive to address in the future. The re-allocation of resources to local sustainable practices can be overseen by the Ministers of Finance through COAG. Reporting Australia's actual performance against the SDGs, including incremental change, can inform resource re-allocation.

Substantial work has been done globally in developing the SDGs and the NUA. Some cities are already seeking to align their development to SDG achievement, but need a legislative framework within which to initiate the required changes in policy and practice. For example fundamental changes to land use regulation are essential now that local developers compete in an international marketplace. Cities in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and other neighbouring countries are already requiring private and public sector entities to work with governments to achieve the SDGs and the NUA. Should Australia fail to expect this, it would attract the less accountable developers and lose parity with Asian cities.

c. What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes

A whole of governance approach that is both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' led by the Australian Government and local government, involving the private sector, other non-government groups and civil society is needed to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs. The Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) is the appropriate body to oversee achievement of the SDGs, replicating its previous role in relation to Local Agenda 21. Local governments are represented on CoAG by the Australian Local Government Association and this should continue.

We suggest that the Australian Government reviews models for implementing the SDGs from other countries. For example, South Africa has developed a 'roadmap' that is founded on a whole of society commitment to implementation. This means engaging government at all levels, working across all departments and portfolios, as well as with the private sector, communities and academia. All of these agencies have defined roles and must develop their own action plans that are closely integrated within a unified vision. The steps to engaging all these stakeholder groups are spelt out as the five 'A's:

- Awareness (building awareness of the new framework)
- Alignment (aligning policies, plans and activities)
- Association (collaborative partnership arrangements)
- Actors (defining the responsibilities of each agency within its own action plan)
- Activities (implementing the integrated action plans).

Implementation within Australia requires engagement of all stakeholders at the local as well as the national level. This requires some devolution of responsibilities and funding to local government. Housing is one of the functions that is seen as appropriately belonging to local government. Economic development is seen as another essential local function that should be integrated within spatial planning. Making productive linkages between small and large settlements and non-urban areas is also seen as important at the local and regional level. Building the capacity of local government to take on these new responsibilities is a fundamental requirement. The Australian Local Government Association needs to actively engage its members with the national and state governments in driving the appropriate reforms for achievement of the SDGs.

An early first step in implementing this model would be to require all state and local governments to review their planning schemes to embed the SDGs and the objectives of the NUA, ensuring that spatial planning aligns with social, economic, environmental and governance objectives for an inclusive and sustainable society.

d. How can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society

An integrated national monitoring program is needed, one that is cross-sectoral and includes specific tailored targets and measures for cities, so as to effectively co-ordinate the activities and investments of states and territories and local communities.

Assessing Australia's performance against the SDGs needs to focus on the most relevant issues and policy areas requiring collaborative action rather than being a benchmarking process between jurisdictions. It needs to be designed in the context of the NUA and other international policies such as the *Paris Climate Change Agreement* and *Sendai Framework for Disaster Resilience*. Some other countries are using a bottom up process, with local stakeholders contributing to a local action plan, subject to a local performance monitoring mechanism, enabled by national governments which can then collate the results. Civil society must be an active participant, not an observer, in this process.

Within governments, including the Australian Government, it is essential that all portfolios and departments are committed to making the appropriate changes to their activities, and contributing to performance monitoring. Isolating implementation and monitoring within a single department would undermine the objectives of the NUA and SDGs. However, there needs to be clear leadership in the process.

e. What SDGs are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program

It is hoped that all of the SDGs are being addressed in the context of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) Program. Implementation of the SDGs requires a cross-cutting approach as articulated in the NUA's integrated model. The ODA program could initially assist countries in tailoring their own response to the SDGs, and then help set priorities for implementation.

The supreme audit institutions within Australian parliaments already have access to an international methodology to assess achievement of SDGs. The following paper provides an outline of how to audit the preparedness of government for this.
(see:https://www.idi.no/en/elibrary/cdp/auditing-sustainable-development-goals-programme/303-auditing-preparedness-for-implementation-of-sdgs-a-guidance-for-supreme-audit-institutions/file).

The international approach expected of governments is:
- raising public awareness
- applying multi-stakeholder approaches
- tailoring SDGs to national, sub-national and local contexts
- creating horizontal and vertical policy coherence
- budgeting
- monitoring, reporting and accountability
- assessing risk and fostering adaptability.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) supports Pacific Island counties including their own supreme audit institutions in building their capacity to audit their achievements in relation to the SDGs. (see http://content.intosaicommunity.org/library/auditing-sustainable-development-goals/incosai-theme-papers/theme-i-regional-papers-presented-in-incosai/168-pasai-theme-i-regional-paper-english/file). The Pacific Island supreme audit institutions are accordingly implementing the following strategies:

3.1 Assess the readiness of national and state systems to report on progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and subsequently audit their operations and the reliability of the data they produce.

3.2 Undertake performance audits that examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of key government programs that contribute to specific aspects of the SDGs.

3.3 Assess and support the implementation of SDG 16 which relates in part to transparent, efficient and accountable institutions.

3.4 Supreme Audit Institutions establish models of transparency and accountability including auditing and reporting.

It should be noted that Pacific Island countries and other developing countries have developed a capacity for reporting against the Millennium Development Goals over the past ten years, These goals were less relevant to Australia than the new SDG framework, resulting in less

onerous reporting requirements. Australia may therefore have to catch up in relation to its global reporting capacity.

f. Which of the SDGs is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDGs

Again, it would be more appropriate for the ODA to focus on the integrated development platform promoted in the NUA rather than individual SDG targets. There will be different starting points for effective development support in each jurisdiction. Cross sectoral partnerships could be particularly helpful in implementation.

EAROPH is supporting the 'City Partnerships Challenge' – a capacity development and facilitation initiative of the UN Global Compact – Cities Programme, which could be used to help accelerate action via the ODA program. The City Partnerships Challenge is a contribution by UN Global Compact to the UN Implementation Facility for Sustainable Urban Development (IFSUD) that aims to catalyse effective, coordinated and results-based implementation of integrated sustainable urban development solutions through effective cross-sectoral partnerships (see https://citiesprogramme.org/get-involved/city-partnerships/).

g. How countries in the Indo-Pacific are responding to implementing the SDGs, and which of the SDGs have been prioritised by countries receiving Australia's ODA, and how these priorities could be incorporated into Australia's ODA program

EAROPH is a peak body with Chapters in six different countries in the Asia Pacific Region, and a broader membership of individuals and organisations spread through other countries. We have developed a Capacity Building Framework for mutual support across the Asia Pacific Region in addressing the NUA and SDGs, building on the relative strengths of each country. In Australia, our members have diverse skills covering areas such as strategic planning, sustainable development, systemic asset management, housing, local economic development. governance, infrastructure development and financial operations.

EAROPH Australia has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EAROPH Indonesia and the UN Global Compact – Cities Programme that aims to achieve greater cooperation in implementing the SDGs, NUA and other global agreements that involve:
• the exchange of expertise and knowledge
• enhanced cultural and historical understanding
• jointly pursuing collaborative sustainable development projects
• progressing joint ventures, funding opportunities, partnerships with government and academic bodies, and resolving issues of common concern.

EAROPH Australia is currently scoping a project with EAROPH Indonesia that seeks to address liveability challenges arising from the development of new towns in the Jakarta region and elsewhere that are situated in flood prone coastal and river areas, where informal settlements are prevalent. Opportunities for providing more integrated community-based solutions in accordance with the SDGs, NUA, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-

2030, are being explored. This project is expected to be the subject of an expression of interest for funding under the 'City Partnerships' initiative of the UN Global Compact – Cities Programme.

EAROPH Australia is also working on potential global partnerships projects for the Pacific Region in conjunction with the regional office of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. There are currently two options for this program which focus on Port Moresby as the largest city in the region, potentially demonstrating practices that have broader regional application. There is interest in developing Port Moresby's ten main fresh produce markets as hubs for delivery of services to the growing population, and there is also interest in introducing sustainable technologies for processing the organic wastes produced by these markets. An Australian study tour for NCDC personnel was recently facilitated by EAROPH Australia members looking at eight possible technologies, with workshops to discuss the relative costs and benefits of these. A further possibility under consideration is the roll out of a training program on *Building Local Economies* to the Smaller Island Developing States (SIDS) using the principles of the New Urban Agenda.

We would be pleased to discuss how the ODA program might be able to support these initiatives as well as other initiatives in the Asia Pacific Region.

h. *Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDGs from which Australia could learn*

A best practice manual was launched at the World Urban Forum, titled "*Leading Change*". This provides a template for what could be adapted as an Australian manual, particularly supporting local government in relation to its planning responsibilities. We would be pleased to assist in customising this manual for the Australian operating environment.

EAROPH Australia is collaborating with a number of other Australian organisations (universities, peak bodies, civil society organisations, representatives of local and State governments) in promoting awareness and implementation of the NUA and associated SDGs within Australia, linking to parallel initiatives overseas. We are currently planning an international congress to be held in Newcastle 1-3 November 2018 that will be focused on effective implementation of the SDGs and NUA. The participation of the Australian Government in this event would be welcomed.

We would be pleased to provide a presentation to the Committee on the global context for its deliberations, and the opportunities for Australia to benefit from this experience.

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