



SUBMISSION NO. 12

EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA

Submission

To

Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter

Submitted by: Clem Campbell, Chairman
EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA

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EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA

Griffith University, EcoCentre
Nathan Campus
NATHAN QLD 4111

PHONE: (07) 3875 5546
FAX: (07) 3875 7638
www.earthcharter.org.au

EMAIL: qld-earth-charter@mailbox.gu.edu.au

1. EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA strongly supports the concept of an aspirational Sustainability Charter for Australia and respectfully recommends that the Earth Charter be adopted as the Sustainability Charter for Australia

The Earth Charter (attachment 2) is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society and seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well being of the human family and the larger living world.

The Earth Charter International Secretariat outlines the origin and history of the Earth Charter -

The World Commission on Environment and Development "the Brundtland Commission" called for "a universal declaration" and "new charter" to set "new norms" to guide the transition to sustainable development

A draft UN Earth Charter was developed for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, but the time for such a declaration was not right. The Rio Declaration became the statement of the achievable consensus at that time.

In 1994, Maurice Strong (Chairman of the Rio Summit) and Mikhail Gorbachev, working through organizations they each founded (Earth Council and Green Cross International respectively), restarted the Earth Charter as a civil society initiative, with the help of the Government of the Netherlands. The initial drafting and consultation process drew on hundreds of international documents.

Messrs. Strong and Gorbachev convened an independent Earth Charter Commission in 1997 to oversee the final development of the text and to come to agreement on a global consensus document.

After numerous drafts and after considering the input of over 5,000 people, the Earth Charter Commission came to consensus on the Earth Charter in March, 2000, at a meeting held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The Earth Charter was later formally launched in ceremonies at The Peace Palace in the Hague.

Over the next five years, a formal endorsement campaign attracted over 2,400 organizational endorsements, representing millions of people, including numerous national and international associations, and ultimately global institutions such as UNESCO and IUCN. Many thousands of individuals also endorsed the Earth Charter.

Efforts to have the Earth Charter formally recognized at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002, came very close to success, resulting in numerous public statements of support from world leaders and heads of state.

The Earth Charter is now increasingly recognized as a global consensus statement on the meaning of sustainability, the challenge and vision of sustainable development, and the principles by which sustainable development is to be achieved. It is used as a basis for peace negotiations, as a reference document in the development of global standards and codes of ethics, as resource for governance and legislative processes, as a community development tool, as an educational framework for sustainable development, and in many other contexts. The Charter was also an important influence on the Plan of Implementation for the UNESCO Decade for Education on Sustainable Development.

The strength of the Earth Charter is that its ethical vision recognises that “ *environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development and peace are **interdependent and indivisible***”

Because of the global emphasis of the Earth Charter, in some respects, the Earth Charter principles and values are significantly broader than the parameters proposed by the Committee for a Sustainability Charter for Australia. However, *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* respectfully requests the Committee to consider the adoption of the whole Earth Charter

The five fundamental principles adopted by the Swedish Government in 1999 and outlined in the discussion paper are consistent with the principles and ethical values of the Earth Charter.

2. The aspirational aspects of a Sustainability Charter should not be diminished because key elements cannot be easily measured or assessed

Often significant factors are not identified as achievable targets simply because they are not easy to value or measure. For example how do we value peace, biodiversity or measure the importance of an endangered species or a healthy biosystem. Therefore, we need targets or measures that reflect values other than GDP. An important aspect of the successful implementation of a Sustainability Charter will be the general acceptance of measures and values other than those that only measure GDP or economic returns.

The development of a '*Genuine Progress Indicator*' needs to be investigated as an alternative to GDP as a measure of **community wealth and wellbeing**.

3. Genuine Progress Indicator

Donella Meadows, Founder of the Sustainability Institute, Dartmouth College, proposed that the agreed objectives for Sustainable development were:

- *To enhance individual and community **wellbeing** and welfare*
- *By following a path of **economic** development that safeguards resources for the welfare of future generations*
- *Provides **equity** within and between generations*
- *Protects biological diversity and maintains essential **ecological** processes and life support systems*
- *Nurtures the strength of **social** dynamics*

Sustainable Development is measured as the Stewardship of Four Capitals for wellbeing and living standards:

- *Built Capital – Economic and infrastructure – safeguarding future generations*
- *Natural Capital – environment – ecological processes & life systems*
- *Human Capital – survival – equity within & between generations*
- *Social capital – soul of the community*

The individual elements are best compiled on a regional/catchment/local basis, measured and targeted with world best benchmarks. This would also seem to be the most practical basis for measurement and targeting if an incentive program similar to the National Competition Policy incentives scheme for the states is to be implemented.

The specific elements to be measured are attached as an attachment 1 and applied to

- **Wellbeing**
- **Economic** development
- **Resource** management
- **Equity**
- **Ecology**
- **Social**

4. Discussion paper.

(i) *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* supports the concept of an Australian Sustainability Commission, independent of government, to report annually on the achievements or otherwise of the progress of the nation, states and regions with respect to agreed sustainability measures and targets. Targets and measures to be of a dynamic nature to respond to new and changing community views and environmental information.

(ii) *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* congratulates the Western Australian government for its initiative in development of the State Sustainability Strategy, and especially with '*the deliberate attempt*' to include social and economic aspects of sustainability

(iii) *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* supports the concept of a sustainability charter consisting of aspirational statements with a set of targets that need to be regularly reviewed

(iv) Research needs to develop the benchmarks of world best practice, elements to be measured, and establish an effective monitoring and reporting system of measures and targets

(v) A sustainability charter can be framed for integration into all levels of government decision making. A visit to the Earth Charter International website – www.earthcharter.org – provides examples of the Earth Charter in action at all levels of government.

(vi) *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* recommends that wellbeing measures in addition to environment reporting be included in a set of sustainability charter targets, which would include the key elements of the built environment, water, energy, public transport and ecological footprint

(vii) *EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA* recommends that the Earth Charter be included as an important tool for the development of curricula of sustainability studies in Australian schools

5. The Third Pillar. Mikhail Gorbachev in the preface for the book '*The Earth Charter in Action – Towards a Sustainable World*' launched in November 2005 described the Earth Charter - the third pillar of Sustainable development. Quote..... *I believe that the world is confronted today with three major challenges which encompass all the other problems; the challenge of security, including the risks associated with weapons of mass destruction and terrorism: the challenge of poverty and underdeveloped economies; and the challenge of environmental sustainability.....The first pillar is the Charter of the United Nations, which regulates the relations among states and thus sets the rules for their behaviour in order to secure peace and stability.*

The second pillar is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which regulates the relations between states and individuals, and guarantees to all citizens a set of rights which their respective governments should provide.

But it has become quite obvious that another document is missing, one which would regulate the relations amongst states, individuals, and nature by defining the human duties towards the environment..... In my opinion, the Earth Charter should fill this void, acquire equal status, and become the third pillar supporting the peaceful development of the modern world'

EARTH CHARTER AUSTRALIA is committed to the endorsement and adoption of the Earth Charter by all levels of government – local, national and international - and the community, and that the universal acceptance of the values and principles of the Earth Charter will be in integral factor for a just, sustainable and peaceful global society of which Australia can be a leading and influential nation

Attachment 1

Genuine Progress Indicator Measures

Wellbeing: Wealth
Health
Capability
Air quality

Economic development: productivity
Industry profile
Economic security

Resource management: water
Vegetation
Energy
Land
Waste

Equity: Gender
Education
Health
Location

Ecology: native condition
Biodiversity
Climate change
Freshwater health
Coastal and marine health
Land health

Social: pride and identity
Lifestyle
Safety
Cultural diversity
Social cohesion
Creativity index.

Attachment 2

The Earth Charter

PRINCIPLES

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. *Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.*

- a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.*
- b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.*

2. *Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.*

- a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.*
- b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.*

3. *Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.*

- a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.*
- b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.*

4. *Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.*

- a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.*
- b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.*

In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. *Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.*

- a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.*
- b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.*
- c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.*
- d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.*

- e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.*
- f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.*

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

- a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.*
- b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.*
- c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.*
- d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.*
- e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.*

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

- a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.*
- b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.*
- c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.*
- d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.*
- e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.*
- f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.*

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

- a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.*
- b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.*
- c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.*

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

- a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.*
- b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.*
- c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.*

10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

- a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.*
- b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.*
- c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.*
- d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.*

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

- a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.*
- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.*
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.*

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.*
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.*
- c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.*
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.*

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.*
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.*
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.*
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.*
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.*
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.*

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.*
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.*
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.*
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.*

15. *Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.*

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.*
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.*
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.*

16. *Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.*

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.*
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.*
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.*
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.*
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.*
- f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.*