

SUBMISSION NO. 56



# Nillumbik Shire Council

## Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter

Secretary: *Rain Little*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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## **INQUIRY INTO A SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER**

Nillumbik Shire Council is pleased to be invited to make a submission to the current Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter.

This Council has a strong history of both developing a strategic framework to support the implementation of sustainability initiatives, as well as the implementation of a holistic and comprehensive range of sustainability programs. This has been recognised at the national level through the Council receiving the 2003 National Awards for Innovation in Local Government for the Integration of Biodiversity Conservation into Local Government Planning.

Nillumbik Shire Council congratulates the Australian Government on both the adoption of the Sustainable Cities report and now the implementation of its recommendations.

### **What is Sustainability?**

A fundamental premise upon which the Sustainability Charter is based relies upon a clear understanding as to what is meant by sustainability. Whilst the definitions which are used in the Discussion Paper (eg. The Western Australia definition, refers to the 'integration of environmental protection, social advancement and economic prosperity') recognise the concept of a triple bottom line, the questions which follow appear to be primarily directed towards ecological sustainability.

In interpreting sustainability, as outlined in Recommendation 1 of the Sustainability Charter, the Inquiry is limiting this concept to ecological elements only. For any charter to be effective it ought to take an holistic approach that is based upon the triple bottom line. Such an approach would recognise the interdependency between ecological, cultural, economic and social sustainability. In this regard, cities are not sustainable if priority and emphasis is given to only one of these elements over the others.

The Discussion Paper also identifies that a reduction in the ecological footprint of Australia's major cities could be one of the major objectives that was included within the Charter. It notes that such an approach would provide a clear link between those targets that are most appropriate for cities as well as regional and rural areas.

The use of an ecological footprint is a useful tool to assess ecological performance, particularly given that it is an international measure incorporating 150 countries.

However the use of the ecological footprint is not a positive outcome if the calculation simply measures the growth in our increasing use of resources. The measure is effective when it is supported by actions to redress the balance between our use of natural resources and the availability.

In this regard, it is of interest to note that Recommendation 1 suggests that the Charter should set key national targets across a range of areas including water, transport, energy, building design and planning. It does not mention specifically reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as an area where targets should be set.

With 61 of the 79 Victorian Councils participating in the Cities for Climate Protection Program of ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) covering over 90% of Victoria's population, this Program commences from the principle of setting targets for greenhouse gas reduction. This is consistent with a Kyoto based solution of setting targets and establishing programs to meet such targets.

Given that local governments across Australia, as well as internationally, have embraced the concept of establishing targets for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and working towards their attainment, such an approach is equally applicable at the national level and is a matter that should be addressed in the Charter. In this regard, the Australian Conservation Foundation has identified five tests for policy performance, one of which is the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, establishing national mandatory targets of 10% renewable energy by 2010 and 50% reduction in energy use by 2025.

## **Partnerships**

The Discussion Paper briefly touches on the question of whether the Charter could be framed in order to ensure that it can be integrated into all levels of government decision making.

Victoria has taken a lead in this regard through the development of the Local Sustainability Accord. The Accord was developed through a partnership involving the Victorian Government, local government peak bodies (eg. MAV and VLGA) and environmental organisations (such as the Metropolitan Environment Forum, Environs Australia and ICLEI).

The Accord was also built around the five key principles that:

- **Build a shared understanding:** that demonstrates partnerships between levels of government in relation to policy development as well as program implementation.
- **Establish shared local goals and priorities:** that create opportunities for partnership.
- **Develop long term strategic resource allocation and funding:** that take account of both resource capacity and constraints.
- **Pursue alignment and cooperation in service delivery:** that seek to ensure that outcomes are relevant to all levels of government.
- **Improve procedures for regular, effective evaluation and review:** that ensure that feedback is incorporated into future planning.

Fundamental to these key principles is the concept of partnerships between various levels of government. This ought to form the framework for the Sustainability Charter. The Sustainability Charter would be lacking if an integrated and inter – governmental approach to its implementation was not embraced.

## **Built Environment**

The Discussion Paper poses a number of questions around the themes of the built environment, water, energy and transport. Whilst it is not proposed to respond to each of these questions within this submission, a number of these matters are of interest to Council and therefore cannot go unanswered.

In relation to the built environment, the question is posed as to 'Do we need to protect heritage buildings as part of the sustainability charter?' Council has recently made a submission on the draft recommendations of the Productivity Commission report on *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places*.

The Productivity Commission in their draft report proposed the dismantling of the current local planning protection for individually listed heritage places in favour of voluntary 'negotiated conservation agreements' with owners. Council was strongly critical of the Productivity Commission's draft recommendations, as was much of the local government sector. These criticisms included both the incorrect assumption of the draft recommendations that individual property owners have absolute 'development rights' and that development is always subject to the adherence to planning, environmental and common laws. The Council's other major concern was the administrative and cost shifting of important heritage processes to local government from the state and commonwealth spheres.

The inclusion of the protection of heritage buildings as part of the Sustainability Charter would be consistent with Council's submission to the Productivity Commission particularly in relation to the need for a more consistent approach between all levels of government (including financial support) to heritage protection. It also contributes to a more holistic (triple bottom line) approach to sustainability.

### **Public Transport**

A further area which is of particular interest to Nillumbik Shire Council relates to public transport, and therefore it is keen to comment on the question as to 'What transport infrastructure measures will reduce private transport needs?'

The Metropolitan Transport Forum (of which this Council is a member) launched, in November 2005, its report on public transport needs in Melbourne. In particular, it identified six priorities for public transport infrastructure investment.

These are:

1. Increase rail capacity, primarily through operational, timetabling and signalling improvements, and duplication of single track lines;
2. Extend train lines and construct additional stations in Melbourne's outer urban growth area and the Doncaster and Rowville corridors;
3. Connect all principal, major and specialised activity centres by high frequency, 7 day and evening routes;
4. Upgrade suburban bus services to serve all jobs and residents all day, every day;
5. Accelerate delivery of measures to achieve disability compliance across the system;
6. Reform franchising agreements and establish an accountable and integrated public transport planning agency in State Government.

The implementation of these six priorities will reduce private transport needs in Melbourne and the principles that underlay these priorities are applicable to all cities around Australia.

### **Sustainability Commission**

A final matter which is of interest to this Council is the proposal for a 'Sustainability Commission'. The Discussion Paper notes that a number of submissions to the Sustainable Cities report emphasised the need to adequately fund and support all levels of government. It suggests that ...' responsibilities should be linked to accountability and funding. A sustainability payment equivalent to competition payments could be the way to have this happen. Just as National Competition Policy allows for competition payments a sustainability commission may be able to pay those governments that meet or exceed targets set in the Sustainability Charter.'

Given that local government has been a leader in sustainability, such a commission should give due recognition to the work undertaken by Councils across Australia. However, such payments should not be at the expense of current funding sources such as NHT grants.

### **Conclusion**

It is a positive and encouraging initiative that the Australian Government is taking a strong interest in urban development and sustainability issues and continuing to implement the recommendations from the Sustainable Cities report. However, a holistic (triple bottom line) approach to sustainability is essential if the Charter is to be effective. The Charter must also be supported by an integration program of actions, involving effective partnerships between all levels of government.