



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

MEDIA RELEASE

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Chair: Mal Washer MP

Deputy Chair: Jennie George MP

Sustainable Australian cities – *Making it happen*

The future of Australian cities and regional centres lies in concerted national action. That is the message from the report ***Sustainable Cities*** released today by the House of Representatives Environment Committee.

House of Representatives Environment Committee Chair, Dr Mal Washer, said that “Australia, as one of the most urbanised countries in the world, faces enormous challenges, with water shortages, transport congestion and high energy demands”.

Environmental statistics paint a bleak picture of the effects of unsustainable practices. Australia creates 620kg of waste per capita each year, second only to the US. Australians are getting fatter and less physically active, with obesity costing the economy somewhere between \$680 and \$1,239 million per year. Australia’s water consumption is the highest per capita rate of water consumption in the world; higher than even the US.

“There is no doubt a number of Australian cities are in imminent danger of running out of water,” Dr Washer said.

“We urgently need to substantially increase the amount of wastewater that is recycled. Sydney is probably the worst case, recycling less than three per cent of its wastewater. Recycling has been taken off the agenda in favour of desalination in many cities.”

“Australian cities are also congested, and we need more funding for public transport. The committee heard evidence that if all the people who do travel by train to the Sydney CBD every day were to drive, Sydney would need to build another 65 lanes of freeway and more than 780 hectares of additional carparking.”

The report has 32 recommendations. While most of the areas covered are traditionally the preserve of the States and Territories, the committee believes it is time for the Australian Government to take a leadership role.

Some of the major **recommendations** in the report are that:

- the National Water Commission report on water options for all cities and regional centres;
- COAG fund a campaign on the benefits, economics and safety of using recycled water;
- the Federal Government significantly boost funding for public transport, particularly light and heavy rail, in the major cities;
- the Government review the FBT concession for car use and tariff rate on four-wheel drives;
- the Government increase the First Home Owner Grant to \$10,000 for homes that meet stringent sustainability criteria
- those States and Territories that do not have a 5 star rating for homes implement one as a priority

To oversee Australia’s move towards sustainability, the committee recommends the establishment of an **Australian Sustainability Commission** and an **Australian Sustainability Charter**. The Commission should explore the concept of incentive payments to the States and Territories for sustainability outcomes, along the lines of the National Competition Council model.

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“There is a lot happening on the ground and the committee was heartened to see that. But what is missing is coordinated action,” Dr Washer said.

“The message of the report is that sustainability is the responsibility of every Australian, but mechanisms need to be put in place for the Commonwealth, together with the States and Territories, to promote a ‘blueprint’ for our cities of the future.”

For media comment, please contact:

Committee Chair, Dr Mal Washer (Member for Moore, WA), tel (02) 6277 2114 (Parliament House)

Members of the House Environment Committee will hold a media conference at 1pm today (12 September) in committee room 1R4, Parliament House, Canberra.

For more detail on the inquiry and copies of the report, please contact:

The House Environment Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4580 or access the full report by visiting the inquiry website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/environ/cities/index.htm>

Members of the House of Representatives Environment Committee are Dr Mal Washer (Chair), Jennie George (Deputy), Russell Broadbent, Kelly Hoare, Harry Jenkins, the Hon Jackie Kelly, the Hon Duncan Kerr, Stewart McArthur, Malcolm Turnbull and Jason Wood.