

Contact: Michael Rogers
Phone: 9367 9114

13 November 2003

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

RE: Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

Leichhardt Council welcomes the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025 and thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Leichhardt Council is committed to building a sustainable future for the people of Leichhardt and their local environment. Through strategic planning and planning controls, infrastructure projects, ensuring compliance with environmental legislation and delivering environmental education, Council aims to reduce the impacts we have on our local environment. Council's objectives for Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) were developed in 1994 to guide policies and practice.

They are:

- To minimise waste and pollution
- To utilise and reuse waste products as resources
- To protect, restore, and recreate natural ecosystems and maintain biodiversity
- To maintain stable climatic conditions for a healthy human population and planet
- To reduce overall consumption of natural resources while maintaining our quality of life
- To use renewable resources at a sustainable rate which allows the resource to be replenished for continual use and future generations
- To utilise non-renewable resources wisely and allocate their use to the most effective and vital uses for the benefit of all society

These principles while applied at a local level are still relevant to providing a 'national map' of issues and approaches.

Need for Critical Reflection and Common Vision as First Step

Before priorities and agendas are set for sustainable cities, it is essential to critically reflect on our lifestyles and values. The types of lifestyles we want to lead will have a significant impact on the way we will need to develop our cities. It is important to have awareness concerning the environmental costs of our lifestyles.

It is meaningless having sustainable buildings if they only cater for lifestyles that are unsustainable. The traditional Australian lifestyle of dwellings on large blocks of land

cannot be sustained indefinitely. As the discussion paper points out, Australia is one of the highest consuming populations in the world and this rate of consumption is increasingly marginalising those without the spending power to maintain these levels. The environmental and social ramifications will only be exacerbated as Australia's population grows.

In order to develop sustainable cities there is a need for the delivery of programs that promote critical reflection on how we are living now and our visions for the future. Collectively, we need to clarify what is important to us and formulate a set of common values and goals. We need a common vision before we can decide on the most appropriate planning response.

Central to creating a common vision is involving all aspects of society in critical reflection of lifestyles and values. The government will need to play a major role in partnership with industry and the community in coordinating programs that facilitate reflection and visioning in this regard.

Need for Greater Consciousness

A lack of awareness and understanding of the problem is one of the major impediments to achieving more sustainable cities. There is a crucial role for government in raising awareness and bringing about attitudinal change by providing society the knowledge and skills to live in a sustainable manner, and the desire to do so.

There is a need for a comprehensive suite of remedies that are necessary to achieve this end including education, policy and market mechanisms. Government, at all levels, can coordinate education programs, introduce incentives such as rebates, subsidies, and taxes and make policy mandating more sustainable behaviour. A national approach is important and the Government, as a service provider and developer of public policy, also has a major role in leading by example.

There is a need for policies and tools such as the Building Sustainability Index (BASIX) to enforce more sustainable development. BASIX sets sustainability targets for new development and will help integrate sustainability into mainstream building practices. However BASIX only applies to the development of new buildings. There is a need for a more comprehensive approach, as there are many existing buildings that are not sustainable, and by fostering attitudinal change and greater consciousness, we can motivate people to retrofit existing development and make more sustainable lifestyle choices.

Through education programs, people can be made aware of the costs and benefits of green building design and how to implement sustainability principles into their daily life. Education can also increase awareness of the full social and environmental costs of lifestyle choices and actions. These costs can have implications far beyond the boundaries of local communities. As well as education programs, Government needs to address the issues of improving rating systems, regulating products available on the market, and improving product labelling, thereby allowing people to make more informed decisions when purchasing goods and services. The pricing of goods and services also must be reflective of their associated social and environmental costs, thereby forcing consumers to consider the impacts of their choices.

The Government needs to research and encourage sustainable industries and industries need to be made more accountable for their actions and be guided to operate on sustainability principles. Businesses and industry should invest in and contribute towards remedies for any environmental and social costs of their practices, including researching better manufacturing processes, or off-setting any impacts of their production process.

Organisations, including government agencies, responsible for developing and managing cities need to embrace innovation and new ways of thinking regarding sustainability issues. They must also pass on these techniques in order to build the knowledge base regarding sustainability issues in the community and industry.

Need for Greater Equity and Diversity in Cities

The discussion paper seeks to determine what community, commercial and biodiversity needs should be addressed in developing new urban centres. Two important considerations in this regard are diversity and equity. Sustainable cities must provide a diversity of opportunities and experiences and meet a diversity of needs. The development and management strategies of cities must also ensure they do not marginalise certain groups or are implemented at the expense of the quality of life of other communities. A truly sustainable city is not one that erodes the quality of the environment or the quality of life in other areas, because of resource needs and manufacturing processes.

The issue of equity is important in sustainable cities, not just equity in the opportunities and quality of life available to residents of the city, but also in the equity in the quality of the built and natural environment. There are a variety of social problems that will need to be addressed if cities are to become sustainable. Cities need to be made safer, to be accessible by people with disabilities, and to allow more people to take advantage of opportunities and spaces offered by them.

The growing costs of housing and the perception of prestige associated with owning a home will only add to the cost of living in cities. The Government needs to ensure that a growing majority of people aren't marginalised and disenfranchised by the growing wealth of a minority who are able to price people out of areas closer to employment, recreation opportunities, transport nodes etc. Welfare programs, as well as widespread infrastructure and service delivery are important in this regard. Cities need to be decentralised where more living, employment and recreation opportunities are available within individual neighbourhoods.

Sustainable Transport Networks

The discussion paper asks what can be done to develop more sustainable transport networks. It is important that public transport networks be made more reliable, convenient, safer and affordable when compared with the automobile. The use of a car, rather than the ownership of a car should be targeted and the cost of using a car should reflect its social and environmental costs, including pollution, fatalities and traffic congestion and associated loss of productivity. The Government attempts to make public transport a profitable enterprise should not be at the expense of increasing inequities in the community. Public transport is a service that helps maintain equity by connecting people who live on the fringe to the city, or who cannot afford to own a car or

are not able to drive a car. As the population ages, the need for a reliable and affordable public transport system will only increase.

The discussion paper also raises the issue of improving transport technologies. It is important for investment to be made into new public transport technologies to improve available transport options and to reduce maintenance and delivery costs. However, improving private vehicle technology will not necessarily result in a sustainable transport network. While there will undoubtedly be some benefit particularly with regards to vehicle emissions, other impacts of widespread car usage such as scarred urban environments, congestion and loss of productivity as well as the potential health impacts from communities being less physically active are not necessarily addressed.

The design of urban environments is also important in developing sustainable transport networks. Decentralising cities will reduce the need for commuting long distances. The development and management of urban areas should give priority to pedestrians and cyclists.

The freight transport network needs to also be examined. Cleaner and quieter modes of transport need to be developed on a national scale and rail freight needs to be increased thereby reducing the number of trucks and their associated impacts on the road network.

Managing and Minimising Domestic and Industrial Waste

How can a sustainable city bring about attitudinal change and encourage its inhabitants to accept greater responsibility for waste minimisation and management?

A key to achieving this is through consultation and public participation. National and local processes promoting the benefits of resource recovery and highlighting the direct links with lifestyle changes (both global and local) occurring from impacts of waste disposal and associated pollution will assist in bringing about a change.

An example of this can be seen through landfill and greenhouse gases. Waste disposal creates greenhouse gases which in turn contribute to global warming and changing weather patterns resulting in droughts and increased costs of personal insurance policies and the like. Similarly, waste disposal creates loss of vegetation and habitat and can have impacts on stormwater systems and waterways, and therefore impacts on recreation through reduced marine life and pollution of rivers and beaches etc.

Public participation is essential in developing collaborative partnerships with planning agencies to ensure informed communities that are capable of accepting responsibility for wastes that are generated for production of goods and services that meet their needs. It will also allow communities to cite appropriate resource recovery and disposal infrastructure within their own communities.

Another way attitudinal change can be brought about regarding waste minimisation and management is through responsible accounting. This would include the 'true cost' (that is, social and environmental externalities) of pollution associated with resource extraction for production and ongoing costs of landfill rehabilitation being reflected in waste disposal charges.

Additionally, the broadening of point of sale/deposit refund systems that provide an incentive for the consumer to accept responsibility for the product and its return could also foster this attitudinal change. Similarly, eco-efficiency and cleaner production practices by industry to develop responsible product designs that enable the community

to purchase products with minimal environmental impact will also promote a change in attitude. An example of this would include products that use recyclable packaging for instance.

What types of industry are appropriately located within cities, and how do sustainable cities respond to production processes and waste treatments that exist to meet city consumption patterns but occur outside of city limits?

It is important to phase out toxic and hazardous substances in the production of goods and materials wherever possible. Industries with cleaner production practices could locate within cities as long as there are appropriate buffer zones to surrounding development.

Technological advances in systems and machinery that minimise noise, dust and odour emissions would enable material reuse facilities (plants for the production of recycled content products) to be located within city limits thereby minimising raw material extractions and the siting of disposal facilities outside of the city.

Similarly, low tech processing plants for garden and food organics at local and regional levels could appropriately locate within certain areas of a sustainable city.

The location of industry and associated recovery facilities outside city limits requires a close integration with broader infrastructure requirements of the city, in particular transport networks such as rail systems etc. This would allow the most efficient transportation of goods and materials.

What strategies are appropriate to encourage eco-efficiency and the reduction of domestic waste?

There are a number of strategies that can be employed to encourage eco-efficiency and the reduction of domestic waste. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes are one method to achieve this end. An example of an efficient EPR scheme would include requirements for industry to take back products of high domestic use (ie computers, TVs, batteries) that are hazardous and therefore problematic for disposal but contain high value reusable components.

Another example of a scheme that can be employed to encourage eco-efficiency is the imposition of levies and/or taxes on certain items with high environmental costs for which there are readily available sustainable alternatives. For instance, a levy on plastic bags at supermarkets would not only make consumers aware of the environmental costs of producing and disposing of the bags but would also encourage the use of environmentally sound alternatives such as reusable bags etc. The income gained from such levies and taxes should be used to further research or fund similar sustainability programs.

Similarly, the development of guidelines and planning controls for not only new developments but existing developments requiring on site recycling systems of organic material combined with on site waste water reuse and filtration systems would contribute significantly to the reduction of domestic waste.

The development of curriculum such as high school subjects or technical and university institutions to train and educate future practitioners for implementation of domestic on site waste treatment facilities is an important means of encouraging eco-efficiency. Public education, consultation and participation programs referred to above will enhance the capacity of the community to make informed purchasing decisions with regards to eco-efficiency and the reduction of domestic waste.

What strategies are appropriate to encourage eco-efficiency and the reduction of industrial waste?

As discussed above, EPR schemes are an important method in encouraging eco-efficiency and industrial waste. Producer responsibility of a product can control and reduce some of the impacts on the production process through the specification of the materials input, design, contents, packaging and manufacturing process of the product thereby helping create the demand for recycle material and ensuring waste minimisation at each level of production. EPR schemes provide the greatest opportunity to eliminate and reduce waste at the source and avoid the huge expenditure and resourcing required for 'end of pipe' solutions such as collection systems and litter reduction strategies.

Greater transparency and accountability mechanisms are required from industry on materials collected, the end use of these products and disposal figures. Reporting mechanisms across sectors should be consistent ie Industry should be required to monitor and report its tonnages of waste generation and recycling on a regular basis in the same way that Governments are required to do on a quarterly/annual basis to the state government. A meaningful and 'user friendly' approach to reporting is required, most importantly to ensure community understanding and acceptance.

The integration of EPR schemes and eco-efficiency programs in curriculum training facilities especially technical and university institutions to train and educate future industry practitioners in the implementation of cleaner production programs is an important step in ensuring eco-efficiency and the reduction of industrial waste. This could also be supplemented by research and development (particularly for markets) into resource recovery opportunities and alternatives to the use of toxic materials.

Are there economic impacts for a sustainable city in dictating higher environmental standards and waste treatment?

Leading companies are increasingly recognising the connection between effective management of sustainability issues and enhanced business. There are many case studies highlighting the cost savings of cleaner production processes and waste management plans. They highlight that these processes and plans formulate part of any good business plan for efficient practices and Occupational Health and Safety compliance. The positive impacts can also be evidenced through businesses with a 'green image' becoming increasingly attractive investments on the stock market.

What is the role of industry in ensuring sustainable cities, and what incentives or standards are appropriate to achieve this?

Industry can play a leadership role in ensuring sustainable cities by raising the public awareness of their waste minimisation achievements. This can be achieved through a number of means including the showcasing and acknowledgment of innovation, together with mentoring schemes (particularly to assist smaller business).

An appropriate standard that can be employed by industry to ensure sustainable cities are requirements for labelling of products that meet certain environmental considerations and criteria such as recycled content or the use of recyclable packaging. Similarly, taxes and/or tariffs on incoming or local goods that do not meet designated

environmental considerations could be applied to encourage and reward the use of sustainable materials and practices.

How can industry be encouraged to be more socially and environmentally responsible, and to work in partnerships with local communities?

Building partnerships between industry and local communities is an important step in working towards sustainable cities. Consultation between industry and communities through environmental assessment schemes that provide education and information on eco-efficiency programs combined with relevant legislation can provide the first step to ensure that industries are aware of and can take action towards best practice in their operation. Industry and educational institutions within local communities can work together to exchange information and labour via apprenticeships and the like to encourage partnerships and practices that contribute to attaining a sustainable city.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025. If you have any queries or wish to discuss any of the above in further detail please do not hesitate to contact myself or the officer listed above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Thompson', written in a cursive style.

Jeff Thompson
MANAGER STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING