

GETTING IN STEP with the ENVIRONMENT

an Environmental Charter
for Western Australia



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Surveys tell us over and over again how highly people value the environment. Yet in Western Australia, development often pits the environment against economic growth - with the environment usually suffering. Most people know this can't continue.

The capacity of the environment to continue growing our food, providing our clothing and shelter and absorbing our wastes is strictly limited. Under our current way of doing things this capacity is being stretched to breaking point. We have witnessed Swan River damage by algae blooms, more of our agricultural areas being lost to salinity, continued clearing of native vegetation, and grave warnings of the effects of global warming.

To ensure a bright, clean future for our children and our State, we need to steer our economy away from its addiction to private transport, fossil fuels, waste, and growth for growth's sake. The future that promises most for all is one where our economy is built on the sustainable use of the earth's natural resources. It is prudent and necessary to invest in our natural capital, live off the interest and maintain our natural assets.



FIVE KEY STEPS TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In Western Australia political leadership on the environment has lagged well behind community expectations. WA's conservation groups have combined to produce a charter to help bring the State's political system into step with what the community expects and the environment needs.

This charter contains five key steps towards an ecologically sustainable future - a series of signposts to guide our political leaders.

STEP ONE GOVERNING SUSTAINABLY

Only the Government, with its regulatory powers can take the necessary lead in achieving sustainability. In enlisting industry and the community to play their part, it must show the way, and provide the regulatory framework to give the environment the same weight in decision making as economic, social and political factors. Environmental considerations can no longer be treated as optional extras to be discarded if they become too expensive, inconvenient or contentious.

A Sustainability Commission should be set up to oversee the incorporation of environment as core business in our financial and accounting systems, health services, education system, resource management practices and planning processes. WA's Government laws and institutions must be updated and work effectively to place the necessary priority on the environment.

This will make ecological sustainability a key objective for everything Western Australians do - a fundamental and necessary change. Such change should be systematically introduced with the same vigour as National Competition Policy reform.

Priorities for Governing Sustainably:

- Establish a Sustainability Commission, with supporting legislation;
- Develop a Sustainability Strategy;
- Review and reform all State legislation to embed sustainability principles;
- Restore the integrity of the Environmental Protection Act;
- Require the development of sustainability policies by all government agencies, audited by the Sustainability Commission.



STEP TWO -

LAND AND WATER MANAGEMENT

Since European settlement the exploitation of natural resources has driven the generation of wealth in Western Australia - often at great expense to the environment and indigenous rights. Sustainable natural resource management is about using our natural resources in a way that doesn't damage the environment or compromise the ability of future generations to enjoy a decent quality of life. It also means working to repair the damage caused by past over-exploitation and ignorance.

Legislative reform is essential to sustainable natural resource management. Such reform must encompass concepts such as ecologically sustainable development, dealing cautiously with risk, respect for indigenous rights and aspirations, and public participation in both the making of decisions and the enforcement of environmental laws. Natural resource management must be integrated - WA's salinity problems are evidence of the damage caused by exploiting one natural resource in isolation from others. We must manage our landscapes holistically, which also means that our natural resource management agencies need to be better integrated and adequately funded.

Priorities for Land and Water Management:

- Require the Sustainability Commission to develop a State Natural Resource Management Policy and implementation plan;
- Develop and pass a Natural Resource Management Act;
- Better integrate natural resource management agencies;
- End broad-scale clearing of remnant native vegetation;
- Increase funding for the implementation of the State Salinity Strategy;
- Develop and implement Environmental Protection Policies and Statements of Planning Policies for WA's coastal zone and groundwater supplies.

STEP THREE – LIVING CITIES

The ecological integrity of Western Australia's urban areas is under constant pressure from competing demands for the air, water and land that sustain them. Our urban areas are expanding at an unsustainable rate with little thought for the future. The small remaining patches of relatively intact urban natural habitat - highly valued by local communities - are being steadily eroded by urban development.

Living Cities (continued)

Our urban environment urgently needs protection. This will mean putting in place adequate systems of growth management including improving the way we deal with urban development, waste, motor vehicles, energy and water, and setting limits to the expansion of our cities. It will require education, incentives and the means for people to use less space, take the bus or train, reduce their resource use and recycle. It will also mean protecting and adequately managing natural habitat, air and water quality within urban areas.

Priorities for Living Cities:

- Develop growth management strategies for urban areas;
- Protect remaining urban bushland;
- Reform and consolidate the State's antiquated Planning Legislation;
- Increase funding for the implementation of Perth's Air Quality Management Plan;
- Establish an independent Waste Management Authority;
- Introduce and implement legislation to manage and pay for the clean up of contaminated sites.

STEP FOUR -

CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

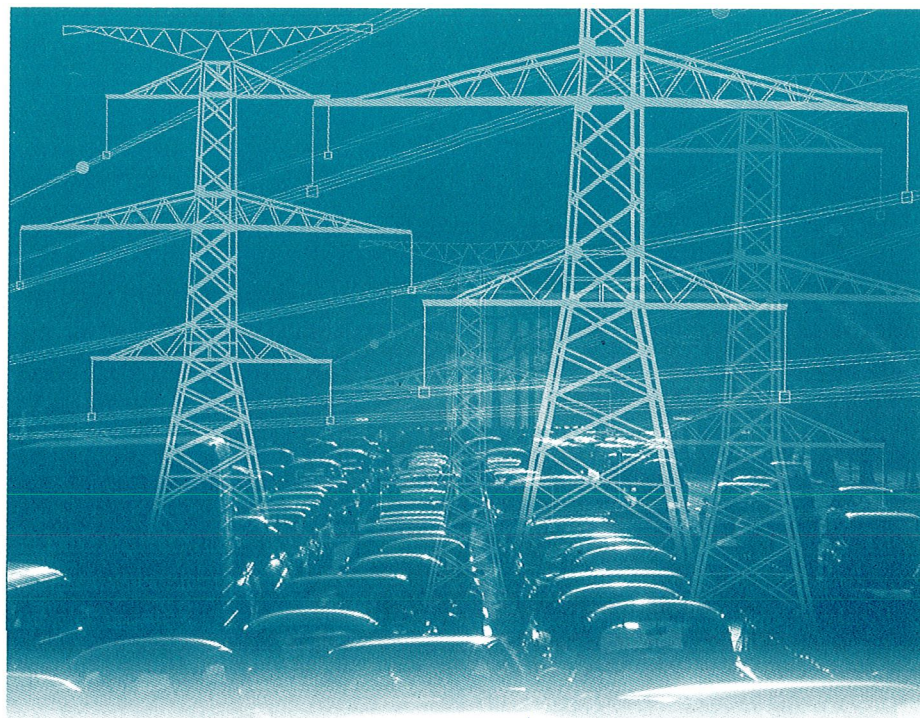
Western Australia is endowed with an extraordinary range of plants and animals, and unique natural habitats that support them. We also have one of the highest rates of extinction in the world and many more species are becoming endangered every year. This is the legacy of land clearing, poor land management practices and an inadequate conservation reserve system that takes second place to development.

Our biodiversity needs to be supported with its own dedicated legislation - with teeth. We urgently need a Biodiversity Conservation Act that genuinely conserves our biodiversity. This needs to be underpinned by a biodiversity strategy and a secure reserve system reflecting our great diversity and range of habitats. We must immediately stop the destruction of old growth forests, wetlands, marine habitat and wilderness areas. Conservation reserves must be for conservation - not logging, mineral exploration and mining, fishing or resort development.



Priorities for Conservation of Biodiversity:

- Develop and implement a Biodiversity Conservation Act and a Biodiversity Strategy;
- Undertake a comprehensive biological survey of the State to enable the immediate completion of WA's conservation estate;
- Protect as marine parks and reserves areas identified in the Marine Reserves Selection Working Group Report;
- Halt all logging of old growth forests;
- Ban mineral exploration and mining in all national parks and nature reserves.



STEP FIVE -

ENERGY AND GLOBAL WARMING

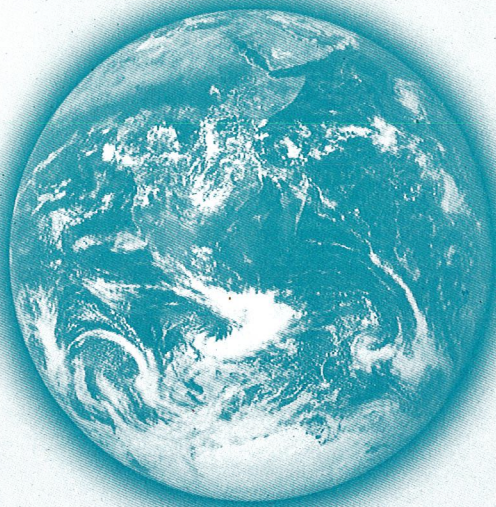
Western Australia's economic expansion has been supported by cheap and plentiful fossil fuel energy, which has led us to be inefficient in the way we use our energy. Issues such as global warming and the inevitable depletion of non-renewable resources have always been treated as secondary issues to the State's economic growth.

We need visionary leadership to address these longer-term issues now and steer the State towards a much more sustainable energy base. Sustainable energy production (solar thermal, biomass, wind, photovoltaics), and energy conservation are an economic growth area in other states of Australia and overseas, while 'old' energy jobs are shrinking. With renewable energy resources that are the envy of the world, we have a natural advantage that must not be squandered.

The WA Government should urgently create a Sustainable Energy Development Authority with a commitment to research, development, demonstration, implementation and education about renewable energy and energy conservation.

Priorities for Energy and Global Warming:

- ♦ Create a Sustainable Energy Development Authority;
- ♦ Develop and implement a credible Greenhouse Strategy that aims to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in WA;
- ♦ Immediately develop and implement legislation to make WA nuclear free;
- ♦ Develop and implement sustainable transport and energy policies with challenging and achievable targets.



THE WAY AHEAD

Global Responsibility

It's easy for Western Australians to forget that our activities at a local level can have a global impact. But issues such as uranium mining and greenhouse gas emissions contribute to problems well beyond our State and national boundaries. Just as we have an obligation to protect the Western Australian environment, we also have a responsibility to ensure our actions don't adversely affect communities and environments in other parts of the world. Thinking globally also presents WA with some exciting opportunities to play a positive environmental role with other nations in the export of environmental technology and expertise.

Switching to Sustainability

With environmental issues high on the agenda, Western Australians are looking for strong political leadership to carry us to an ecologically sustainable future. A failure to follow this community expectation will result in people expressing their frustration at the ballot box – and those parties with poor environmental policies will lose support.

But this is more than just a political imperative. We have abused our life support systems to the point where we no longer have a choice about changing our ways. Switching to sustainability is an ecological, social and economic imperative. Our future depends on it.



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The WA Environmental Alliance consists of the Conservation Council of WA, Australian Conservation Foundation, Wilderness Society of WA, WA Forest Alliance, Perth Bushwalkers, Urban Bushland Council, Wildflower Society of WA, Sustainable Transport Coalition, Guilderton Community Association, Friends of Moore River, Anti-Nuclear Alliance of WA, Environmental Weeds Action Network, Peel Preservation Group and Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population.