

Ian Macdonald AG21

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ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL AGENDA 21

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Organised by Logan United Citizens Association and Concerned Residents Action Group

Mayor Santagiuliana, as he departs, Professor Hughes, Professor Kirkpatrick, Professor McBride, Mr Freeman, other Councillors from a number of Local Authorities around this area, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed a pleasure for me to be with you today and to be able to talk to you about the Commonwealth's role in Ecologically Sustainable Development. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, the junior Minister in the Environmental area, as a former Shire Councillor myself, and as a Queensland Senator I'm particularly interested in the way we can develop our Local Communities in an Ecologically Sustainable way.

Can I perhaps at the beginning congratulate the people who have organised this Forum, it is tremendous that people do get involved and of course that is what Ecologically Sustainable Development is all about. A partnership between Governments of all levels, between business and industry and most importantly involving community groups.

As I say I wanted to talk to you about the Federal Government's view that the key to implementing Ecologically Sustainable Development is through those partnerships between all the various groups that have an interest and are involved in various communities.

Commonwealth's approach to ESD

The concept of sustainable development has been with us now since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and action has been guided at the international level by Agenda 21.

At the national level, action has been guided by the 1992 National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments as well as the Australian Local Government Association.

The aims of the National ESD strategy are to encourage economic development, provide equity within and between generations, and protect biological diversity and the life support systems upon which all life depends.

Senator Hill, re-affirmed at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) last June Australia's commitment to the principles of the National Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy.

Turning to ESD goals and principles, we have to get those principles into results on the ground and that presents quite a considerable challenge.

The Commonwealth Government is taking action on a number of fronts to promote the implementation of ESD in partnership with other spheres of government, with industry and community groups. I wanted to

highlight a few key areas where the Commonwealth Government is involved and they are the Natural Heritage Trust, Climate Change, the Oceans and some environmental legislation.

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST

Above all, the Government's commitment is underscored by the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust. This Trust not only implements Ecologically Sustainable Development but also reflects the partnership approach.

The \$1.25 billion that the Commonwealth Government has invested in the Natural Heritage Trust is largely directed at activities which encourage further involvement by other stakeholders and takes an integrated approach to sustainable land, water, biodiversity and vegetation management. And this Trust lays the foundation for a cooperative partnership between Commonwealth, State and Territories, Local Governments, community groups and individual landholders and managers for implementing sustainable development outcomes.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Australia is taking domestic action to address global climate change. The Prime Minister, John Howard, on 20 November last year, in his statement 'Safeguarding the Future: Australia's response to Climate Change' announced a number of initiatives including the Household Greenhouse Action Programme and the start up of the Australian Greenhouse Office to implement the other domestic climate change initiatives as well as the Cities for Climate Protection program which I will mention shortly.

OCEANS

Under the Coalition, Australia will become one of the first countries ever to develop a national oceans policy to protect biodiversity and promote sustainable ocean based industries. We have consulted very widely on that program, including with local government, and hope to be very shortly releasing a draft policy for discussion.

LEGISLATION

The Government is also completely overhauling and modernising its approach to Commonwealth/State roles and responsibilities for the environment and its own environmental legislation. This will we believe, promote better protection of the environment, reduce duplication and more effectively focus Commonwealth action on matters of national environmental significance.

Local Agenda 21: Translating ESD Into Action At The Local Level

I just want to turn to how Ecologically Sustainable Development is being implemented at the local level.

Local Government is, as Senator Hill has described it, at the "coal face" when it comes to key areas of environmental management such as "urban planning, environmental health, water supply, pollution control, sewerage treatment, waste management and disposal, and natural resource management."

Local Agenda 21 has become the focus for translating ESD into action at the local level.

In recognition of the importance of this process the June 1997 meeting of APEC Environment Ministers undertook to double the number of APEC Local Agenda 21 Cities by the year 2003.

According to Environs Australia, which as you may know, is the Local Government Environment Network at least 119 of Australia's 750 councils have either established or are developing local sustainability strategies. At least 33 have a Local Agenda 21 process in place.

Since the "Pathways to Sustainability Conference" which was held in Newcastle last year, there has been a sudden and widespread surge of interest in Local Agenda 21 by Australian councils.

When you boil it all down, Local Agenda 21 is about implementing ESD in local communities. Local Agenda 21 rests on the development of a web of successful partnerships between government, industry and community groups.

Commonwealth initiatives to support the implementation of Local Agenda 21

Commonwealth policies are a catalyst for the development of these dynamic partnerships. The Commonwealth has several initiatives designed to support and provide a catalyst for the development of Local Agenda 21 in Australia.

The Environment Resource Officer (ERO) Scheme is operated by the Department of Environment to work in partnership with Local Government. The Scheme funds part of the cost of a dedicated environment officer in a peak Local Government organisation in each State to work with Councils to maximise positive environmental outcomes.

Last year we also funded a National Environment Resource Officer to be based in Environs Australia.

This ERO scheme is one of the main ways the Commonwealth communicates with and provides information on Commonwealth environmental policies and programmes to Local Government.

The Commonwealth has recently changed the work plans of the Environment Resource Officer in response to this upsurge in interest following the Newcastle conference. Promoting and assisting councils to develop and implement Local Agenda 21 is a significant part of the Environment Resource Officer's work plans for the current financial year.

In addition, a major task of the National Environment Resource Officer is to provide advice on national themes and options for promoting Local Agenda 21 to councils. This includes developing implementation strategies.

To add impetus to Local Agenda 21 the Commonwealth has recently commissioned the development of a new how-to-do it manual for Local Councils which is due for release mid year. This manual will go about assisting Local Government and local communities to forge and build local partnerships for sustainability.

The manual will draw on and incorporate the wealth of experience in developing and implementing Local Agenda 21 which has taken place around Australia and throughout the world since the 1992 Earth Summit

The manual will provide a series of practical steps for those Councils who do wish to implement and become involved in and undertake a Local Agenda 21.

Communities & Climate Change

By using the example of Climate Change, I want to just briefly focus on how the Commonwealth is assisting to implement ESD at the local level through a partnership approach.

Climate change is one of the more formidable environmental challenges confronting the world, and has major implications for all Australians. The Prime Minister's statement recognises the significant role which local government will play and needs to play in partnership with other parts of the community in any greenhouse response and includes a significant Cities for Climate Protection programme which offers the opportunity for every local council to participate in addressing this complex global problem.

Australian households, as many of you may be aware, generate almost one fifth of Australia's greenhouse gases - more than 18 tonnes per household per year - through everyday activities like transport and household energy use. Local government is an important stakeholder in the greenhouse response.

Launch of Cities for Climate Protection Australia

The Cities for Climate Protection programme has been piloted in Australia over the past year and there are currently 25 Councils participating in the pilot. I am delighted to say that the Logan City Council and Maroochy Shire Council from the south-east Queensland area have joined in this pilot program and another twenty Councils have processes underway to participate in the pilot.

The local governments involved agree to complete various milestones which lead to an implementation plan locally. These milestones cover not just local government's own emissions, for example from their own vehicles, but also emissions from the community within the local area. This gives the programme a strong community focus. Public forums like this one today, are of course a very important and crucial part and play a very valuable role in involving the community in actions towards ecological sustainability.

The international Cities for Climate Protection Programme, has been running for four years and now involves some 178 local governments around the world.

Results in some cases have been quite dramatic. And I mention just a couple. In Portland, Oregon, that local authority implemented a business assistance programme that provided technical assistance for 300 local businesses, and helped them to reduce emissions by more than 25,000 tonnes per year, and also that led to the adoption of a new residential building code which saw energy used in newly constructed homes fall by some 35%.

The success of the programme overseas indicates what we can achieve through similar partnerships in Australian cities. In addition to reducing emissions, participants have enjoyed reductions in operating costs, the creation of new jobs through supporting energy efficient businesses, improvement to air quality and public health, and enhancements in urban liveability and comfort.

There is considerable scope for action by Australian local government, and a number of councils are already providing leadership in this area. And again I mention just a couple:

- The Manningham City Council in Melbourne has appointed a Greenhouse Officer whose salary has been quite substantially offset by the \$35, 000 per annum that the Council has saved as a result of energy efficiency actions undertaken by that officer;
- In Sydney the Leichhardt City Council has decided to apply energy efficiency standard to all new homes and major renovations.

Conclusion

So Local Agenda 21 is all about the realisation of sustainable development through partnerships between different levels of government and local communities. And as a Commonwealth Government we look forward to working with communities like those in the south-east corner of Queensland and in fact all around Australia in pursuit of these goals towards Ecological Sustainable Development.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, it is tremendous to see so many of you taking an interest in this and I hope that as the months and years roll on that we as a Commonwealth Government can assist you and work with you in that goal we all seek so congratulations to those who organised this and I'm sure your deliberations today will be very useful and worthwhile for all of you.