

The State Plan and sustainability – linkages with local government

Speech delivered to the Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW) Sustainability and Ashfield Special Interest Groups, Thursday 24th May 2007

Hon Verity Firth MP, Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water (Environment)

The State Plan – brief overview

NSW is a great place to live and it can be even better. The State Plan is about exactly that – making NSW better.

Launched on the 14 November 2006, the State Plan sets a clear vision and direction that reflects the hopes and goals of people across NSW, for the future of our state. In preparing the Plan more than 4,000 groups and individuals provided us with their views as part of an extensive consultation process.

The NSW Government delivers a diverse and complex range of services and functions. It has a major impact on the lives and opportunities of the nearly seven million people of NSW. On behalf of the community, government must balance competing demands in a climate of constant economic, social and environmental change.

The State Plan marks a profound shift in the way government approaches these challenges and opportunities. Ultimately, the Plan is about delivering better outcomes for the community from NSW Government services.

It does this by setting clear priorities for government action, with targets that guide decision making and resource allocation.

Set out in terms of five main areas of government activity, the State Plan contains a number of broad goals with particular priorities set against them - 14 goals, 34 priorities. Importantly, each priority has one or more performance targets that the Government will be held accountable for. The main area of activity relevant to today's theme is "Environment for Living".

Particular Ministers and agency CEOs are accountable for leading the delivery of each priority and for meeting individual targets.

Ministers and agencies are now working towards finalising "Priority Delivery Plans" which will drive the actions of State agencies in delivering the priorities. Local

government has already been involved in the development of the State Plan through the consultation process. It will be closely involved in the delivery of the priorities.

Agencies will continue to work together with councils to tailor delivery of the priority actions at a local level. The Regional Coordination Management Groups will play a critical role in regional NSW to develop and monitor local solutions in partnership with local government, business and non-government organisations. There are 9 regional groups across the State, and of course local government already works closely with agency representatives of these groups.

In my portfolio assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water, the Department of Environment and Climate Change works closely with local government across a broad range of sustainability issues. I'll return to this theme in a minute.

Sustainability and the State Plan

The broad definition of sustainability adopted by the State Government comes from the UN's Brundtland Commission of 1987. It is "sustainable development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The concept encompasses a range of issues important to the community – greenhouse gas reduction, water efficiency, energy efficiency, waste minimisation, pollution reduction, managing land use, public transport.

93% of respondents in the NSW "Who Cares about the Environment 2006" research say that the environment is important or very important to them. It was ranked third in important issues after family and friends. Environmental knowledge and understanding has grown markedly since the first of the research in 1994.

Some of the links between sustainability and the State Plan are clear. For example, Priority E3 is "Cleaner air and progress on greenhouse gas reductions". Achieving the priority's target of a 60% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2050 will in itself mean sustainable practices must continue to be developed and taken up.

Priorities E1 "A secure and sustainable water supply for all users" and E2 "a reliable electricity supply with increased use of renewable energy" also are directly tied to issues of sustainability.

Other priorities such as E5 "Jobs closer to home" are connected to targets for improving the efficiency of road infrastructure, increasing the availability of public transport and reducing vehicle journeys.

Priority S6 is "Increasing the share of peak hour journeys on a safe and reliable public transport system". Achievement of these goals will go a way to achieving air quality improvements, greenhouse gas reductions and reducing the impact of human activity.

Some of the other targets, such as E8 “Increasing visits to parks” will have spin-off benefits not only by increasing community well being, but also in promoting community understanding and support for biodiversity, and the conservation of native vegetation and our waterways.

So, how does the State Plan work with other Plans?

Sitting along side the State Plan are many other initiatives.

The State Plan does not undermine any of the existing strategies or plans on particular sustainability issues. On the contrary, it provides the linking framework.

To give two examples, the NSW Greenhouse Plan and the Waste Strategy both live and breathe within the goals of the State Plan.

Greenhouse Plan

The NSW Greenhouse Plan sets out action for the NSW Government to reduce the emissions of its own activities and to work with other stakeholders to reduce the emissions from their activities.

The main objectives of this Plan are to:

- Increase awareness among those expected to be most affected by the impacts of climate change.
- Begin to develop adaptation strategies to those climate change impacts we cannot avoid.
- Put NSW on track to meeting its targets of limiting 2025 emissions to 2000 levels; and reducing emissions by 60% by 2050. These targets have been incorporated into the State Plan within Priority E3.

As part of the commitment of the NSW Government to backing practical ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainability, the Premier announced in February that a new Climate Change Fund would fund a range of initiatives.

Climate Change Fund

The new \$310 million Climate Change Fund will build on the NSW Government’s existing programs to help local government, business and industry save water and energy.

It includes \$100 million for household rebates for rainwater tanks, hot water systems and insulation and will support existing local council programs to help residents reduce water and energy use and save greenhouse gas emissions.

It also include a \$30 million Public Facilities program to implement water and energy saving projects in public buildings, educational and community facilities, including those managed or run by local government.

The \$20 million School Energy Efficiency Program and \$20 million Rainwater Tank in Schools Program will also reduce community water use and greenhouse emissions and take the sustainability message from classrooms into homes.

Other elements of the Climate Change Fund include renewable energy development and \$100 million for recycling and stormwater harvesting.

The Climate Change Fund will take over and improve on projects funded through the Water and Energy Savings Funds, which operate currently.

Funding also supports business, industry and local government to implement water and energy saving projects, many of which are now underway. Local Councils have been very successful in securing funding from these sources.

Under the Energy Savings Fund, local councils have secured \$4.5 million for four projects, saving more than 15,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas a year.

They include \$4.1 million to the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils for a Street Lighting Improvement Program which will replace 85% streetlights in 29 local council areas with energy efficient lamps.

Councils can continue to access funding for projects through the Public Facilities Component of the new Climate Change Fund.

So you can see that the priorities of the State Plan in relation to greenhouse issues are built upon the NSW Greenhouse Plan. The priorities are backed with real dollars for local government and others to help achieve sustainability through greenhouse gas reduction, and water and energy savings.

The Waste Strategy

Turning now to the Waste Strategy, the *Waste Strategy 2007* is being finalised following public consultation last year and builds on the inaugural 2003 Strategy.

It identifies priority actions that will guide the work of all key groups, including local government in NSW, in contributing to the minimisation of environmental harm from waste disposal and the conservation and efficient use of our resources.

Research is showing the sustainability benefits of tackling waste – for example reducing greenhouse gases, water and energy savings, conservation of virgin resources and soil health. DECC has developed a **Benefits of Recycling Calculator** for Councils to enable them to calculate the greenhouse, water and energy benefits from the tonnages of material recycled through household kerbside collections.

There has also been a growing understanding that in people's minds there is a strong connection between actions across environmental issues. That is, action taken by a

person on one environmental issue will have a positive flow-on and promote actions in other areas.

This means that continuing to encourage waste related actions, such as recycling, that are practical and relatively easy to undertake, can naturally lead to actions on other important environmental issues such as reducing energy and water consumption.

The 2007 Strategy will reinforce these links. It will continue the aggressive targets for resource recovery from waste streams.

How is the Government working with local government on sustainability?

Delivering on community expectations articulated in the State Plan will be achieved through a combination of new and existing programs – many of which rely on strong partnerships between state agencies and local government.

Within my portfolio, there is an impressive range of initiatives involving local government and DECC working together that target sustainability. In addition are other programs where DECC is working with householders and small to medium businesses that will have a direct impact on council's measures of sustainability.

The funding for these projects is significant by any measure.

In addition to the funding I have already outlined that will be available through the Climate Change Fund, there are a number of other major sources of grants and support.

Urban Sustainability Grants through the Environmental Trust

In November 2005, the NSW Premier announced the City and Country Environment Restoration Program, which increased the programs administered by the Environmental Trust by \$316 million over 5 years.

The major initiative aimed at promoting sustainability and partnering with local government is the \$80 million Urban Sustainability Program. This Program will encourage local government to work in partnership with business, state government and the community.

The first round of grants saw \$29M worth of projects funded, involving 78 Councils. The second round closed in March with applications from 115 councils and 10 local government organisations.

Support for working with local communities

The Environmental Trust continues to provide \$4.5M in grants annually for local government and community organisations to develop their capacity to tackle restoration and rehabilitation, environmental education challenges.

From on-ground works to supporting Aboriginal Communities through the Protecting our Places funding this investment in encouraging communities to work together to tackle local sustainability issues has been a hallmark of the Environmental Trust Programs since 1990.

Climate Action Grants

The Government's Climate Action Grants have been a key driver to link local government to resources to support innovation in tackling climate change.

As part of these grants the Community Action Grants Program includes:

- \$222,000 to Parramatta Council to develop Smart Transport options including free shuttles, car sharing and research into barriers.
- \$136,000 for St George region of Councils businesses for an Environmentally Sustainable tomorrow
- Hunter Councils received \$250,000 for their Understanding and Adapting to Climate Change
- Coffs Harbour City Council have received \$58,000 for the Five a Ride project to improve cycling take up through provision of infrastructure, cycle training, communications and a bicycling recycling trial.

The State Government has also provided the LGSA with \$250,000 for the development of a climate change tool kit for Councils across NSW.

Concluding Remarks

The State Government is serious about sustainability. It forms part of the priorities of the State Plan. Targets have been set that the Government will be held accountable for. It is backed by significant funding. Our involvement with local government in this endeavour is serious and long-term.