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25 January 2014

The Manager
Environment and Waste Services
City of Greater Geelong
PO Box 104
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Dear Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the **Draft Environment Management Strategy 2013 – 2017.**

Having read both the City Plan and the Environment Management Strategy in detail, I then happened upon an interview with Rodney Thomas on The Sustainable Hour (94.7 The Pulse). In that interview, Mr. Thomas conveyed considerably more meaning to the Environment Management Strategy than I was able to gain from the document itself.

To the lay reader the document seems to be something of a hotchpotch with multiple authors, multiple influences and no clear pathway evident. Sadly, there is no aspirational beacon of leadership, no clear overarching vision of how much more sustainable our built and natural environments will be by 2017. It would have been great to see one major statement or theme or tag or vision to inspire and sustain the community and engender co-operation and confidence. We want to hear that Council really believes ‘things can improve by 2017’. It is hard to find that inspiration in the EMS.

That said, while the strategy is not the beacon many may have hoped for, it does include some excellent concepts that deserve full acknowledgement and support, such as the Environmental Sustainability Principles (One Planet Living), the Future of Cities references and the analysis of Local Government Trends.

Sadly though, it is difficult to see where these positive influences are translated into Indicators and Targets. This is probably because the Strategy has adopted almost all of its indicators and targets directly from the City Plan (without explanation) and this is why they seem so at odds with the descriptive content of parts of the document.

From a community perspective, it would be preferable to see targets better described and with the addition of a time factor. After all, this is a five-year plan, and surely the targets do not all mean “to be achieved by 2017”. And the terms ‘increase’ and ‘decrease’ are unacceptable, even in relation to the City Plan. Surely the City has some benchmarks for outcomes that were measured at the end of the preceding Plan period, so a target could say “20% increase over 2012 level by 2015” for example. It is non-committal statements such as ‘increase’ and ‘decrease’ that fuel the cynicism of the community.

However, I do commend you on the addition of the new indicators and targets you have established in relation to:

- Renewable energy
- Life cycle assessments
- Green procurement
- Embedding sustainability across departments

- Redevelopment of the Biodiversity Strategy
- Indigenous vegetation and plantings
- Benchmarking sustainable urban developments, and
- Community greenhouse gas emissions.

And I must say that the most encouraging sections of the Strategy, and the sections that inspire the most hope and positivity for the future, are the sections following each list of indicators and targets; those entitled Objectives and Priorities.

Why did you not put more emphasis on these sections rather than burying them in the procedural planning rhetoric of the document? Coming after Indicators and Targets makes it seem as though they are less important. I think the sequence should be Strategic Outcome, Council Role, Objectives, Priorities and lastly, Indicators and Targets.

Assuming Objectives and Priorities are the real guts of the Strategy, you could do well to loose a bit of the desk-top-publishing bling and make the most of your planned actions and less of the dis-spiriting indicators and targets.

I absolutely endorse every objective and priority action listed in the EMS. However, of the 30 priorities listed only one has dared to mention a timeframe. This is a five-year plan, surely some indication can be given of when projects are expected to begin, or be completed or when reports are due.

Many of the priority actions in Strategic Directions 4. Greener Economy and 5. Sustainable Living, hinge on influencing and changing behaviors, in both industry and the community. Though vital, such activity is time consuming, often slow and difficult to measure. The budget allocation to Future Proofing Geelong in 2013-14 was a meager \$344,500. This sum will need to increase if their outcomes are to constitute around two-fifths or 40% of the total outcomes of the EMS.

And given that Sustainable Built and Natural Environment is one of the four critical pillars of the City Plan, one would hope that in the upcoming 2014-15 budget your section will be resourced at better than the current 9.3% of the overall budget - Community Wellbeing currently receives around 40%, Growing Our Economy 30% and How We Do Business 21%. If the EMS is to have any teeth in the City Plan, it needs a greater percentage of the City's resources.

A few suggestions:

- Specific references to advocating and promoting sustainable residential design and retrofitting.
- More specific references to local food production.
- Establishment of a Sustainable Design and Retrofitting Service – similar to the Heritage Advisory Service.
- Continued support for Sustainable House Day.
- Support for Geelong a Solar City – with a target of 10% (or greater) rooftop solar for Geelong.
- Demonstrable generation of additional renewable energy, both wind and solar, on prominent City buildings.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Environment Management Strategy 2013 – 2017. While many of my comments are critical, I hope they will be read as constructively critical. Overall the Strategy has my complete support.

Yours sincerely,
Vivienne Burke

Member of Geelong Sustainability Group, Transition East Geelong.