



Keynote Address: Enabling Sustainability Assessment in Western Australia

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OUTLINE

1. Forms of Sustainability Assessment
2. Background: Sustainability Assessment in WA
3. Sustainability Assessment Principles
4. Enabling Legislative and Policy Provisions for Sustainability Assessment in WA



1. External/internal forms We can categorise sustainability assessment according to...

Who does the assessment:

- **Internal** – by body responsible for decision (proponent)
- **External** – by third party (government decision-makers)

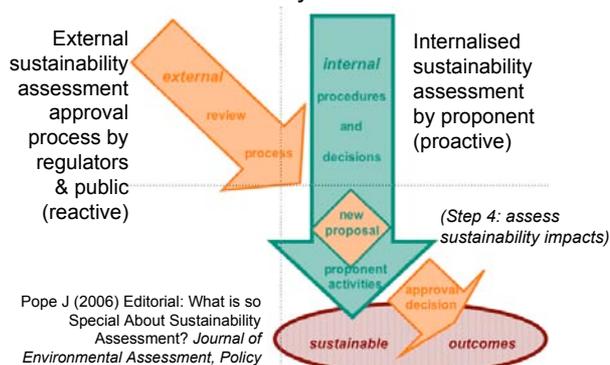


When it is done:

- **Proactive** – during the preparation of a proposal
- **Reactive** – after the proposal has been largely completed and/or implemented (like EIA)



External & internal forms of sustainability assessment



2. Background – the Keating Review (i)

Review of all WA development approval systems in 2002
– recommendations for sustainability assessment

- for regional strategic environmental assessment & planning
- taken up in *State Sustainability Strategy* (in preparation at the time)

[Office of Development Approvals Coordination (ODAC) established in October 2005 - ongoing....]



Independent Review Committee (2002)
Review of the Project Development Approvals System: Final Report, Dept. of Industry & Resources,
<http://www.doir.wa.gov.au/881.aspx>



WA State Sustainability Strategy 2003 Definition of sustainability

Meeting the needs of current and future generations through an integration of environmental protection, social advancement and economic prosperity

- 'three pillars' or triple bottom line
- 'win-win-win' approach
 - enduring social gains
 - enduring environmental protection/enhancement
 - enduring economic gains in an equitable way



Govt of Western Australia (2003), *Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*. Dept of Premier and Cabinet, Perth, WA.



(External)

Sustainability Assessment Process (i)

State Sustainability Strategy concept of sustainability assessment (SA):

- build on environmental impact assessment (EIA)
- develop SA of complex or strategic proposals
- apply it to projects, plans, policies & programmes undertaken by government agencies



(External)

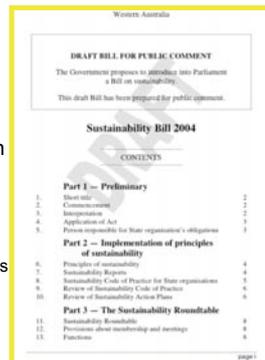
Sustainability Assessment Process (ii)

No formal regulation for SA

- Draft *Sustainability Bill* released for public comment in 2004 (never enacted)

Several SA processes carried out on ad hoc basis

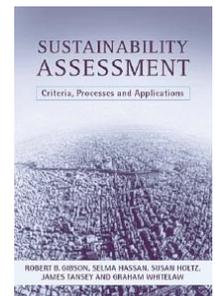
- Gorgon gas fields, Fremantle Outer Harbour, South West Yarragadee Water Supply, Kimberley LNG Hub
- based on existing approval processes in WA for environmental, social & economic matters (e.g. EIA)



3. Sustainability Principles: *International*

Gibson's 8 sustainability criteria:

- socio-ecological system integrity
- livelihood sufficiency and opportunity
- intragenerational equity
- intergenerational equity
- resource maintenance and efficiency
- socio-ecological civility and democratic governance
- precaution and adaptation
- immediate and long term integration



(Gibson, R, S. Hassan, S. Holtz, J. Tansey & G. Whitelaw 2005, *Sustainability Assessment Criteria, Processes and Applications*, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London)



Sustainability Principles: *Western Australia*

State Sustainability Strategy

Foundation Principles:

- long-term economic health
- equity and human rights
- biodiversity & ecological integrity
- settlement efficiency & quality of life
- community, regions, 'sense of place' & heritage
- net benefit from development
- common good from planning

Process Principles:

- integration of the triple bottom line
- accountability, transparency & engagement
- precaution
- hope, vision, symbolic & iterative change



Sustainability Principles: *Synthesised List (i)

PRINCIPLE 1 – Precaution

Respect uncertainty, avoid even poorly understood risks of serious or irreversible damage to the foundations for sustainability, plan to learn, design for surprise and manage for adaptation.

PRINCIPLE 2 – Inter-generational equity

Favour present options and actions that are most likely to preserve or enhance the opportunities and capabilities of future generations to live sustainably.

[*Thanks to Nicole Hodgson for these]



Sustainability Principles: Synthesised List (ii)

PRINCIPLE 3 – Ecological integrity and biological diversity

Protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems.

PRINCIPLE 4 – Equity and quality of life

Ensure equity of opportunity for everyone, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community and seek to create a good quality of life for everyone.



Sustainability Principles: Synthesised List (iii)

PRINCIPLE 5 – Efficiency

Reduce overall material and energy demands on social and ecological systems.

PRINCIPLE 6 – Democracy and governance

Ensure that proposals are developed through active public participation in transparent decision-making processes.

PRINCIPLE 7 – Immediate and long-term integration

Decision-making processes should reflect the equal importance of each principle of sustainability, and mutually supportive benefits should be sought without compromising any individual principle.



4. Enabling Legislative and Policy Provisions for Sustainability Assessment in WA



PRINCIPLE 1 – Precaution

EPAct 1986

4A . Object and principles of Act

The object of this Act is to protect the environment of the State, having regard to:
– *the precautionary principle ...*

State Sustainability Strategy (2003) –

Sustainability requires caution, avoiding poorly understood risks ...

State Planning Framework Policy –

Adopt a risk-management approach which aims to avoid or minimise environmental degradation ...



PRINCIPLE 2 – Inter-generational equity

EPAct 1986

4A . Object and principles of Act

The object of this Act is to protect the environment of the State, having regard to:
– *the principle of intergenerational equity ...*

State Sustainability Strategy –

All development... should strive to provide net environmental, social and economic benefit for future generations.



PRINCIPLE 3 – Ecological integrity and biological diversity

EPAct 1986

4A . Object and principles of Act

The object of this Act is to protect the environment of the State, having regard to:
– *the principle of the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity ...*

Statement of Planning Policy – Environment and Natural Resources Policy –

Protect significant natural, indigenous and cultural features ...

Network City Strategy –

Protect and enhance the natural environment, open spaces and heritage



PRINCIPLE 4 – Equity and quality of life

State Planning Framework Policy –
To respond to social changes and facilitate the creation of vibrant, safe and self-reliant communities



Health Impact Assessment Discussion Paper –
Equity – the opportunity for a healthy life is linked to social disadvantage ...



EPA Position Statement 6: Towards Sustainability –
A sustainable community would be secure, healthy and equitable, and have a clear sense of place ...



PRINCIPLE 5 – Efficiency

EPA Act 1986

4A . Object and principles of Act
The object of this Act is to protect the environment of the State, having regard to:
– principles relating to improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms ...
– the principle of waste minimisation ...



Network City: Community Planning Strategy for Perth and Peel –
Reduce the ecological footprint of Perth, Mandurah and Murray



PRINCIPLE 6 – Democracy and governance

State Sustainability Strategy –
... institutions should have triple bottom line accountability, regular sustainability audits ... should be conducted, and that public engagement lies at the heart of all sustainability principles ...



Network City Strategy –
Plan with communities



Draft Health Impact Assessment Discussion Paper –
Strong, democratic societies can be achieved through active public participation in transparent decision making processes ...



PRINCIPLE 7 – Immediate and long-term integration

State Sustainability Strategy –
Sustainability requires that economic, social and environmental factors be integrated by simultaneous application of these principles, seeking mutually supportive benefits with minimal trade-offs ...



Statement of Planning Policy – Environment and Natural Resources Policy –
... the key to sustainability in the planning sector is integrating, ecological, economic and social considerations into decision-making ...



Integration and the EPA Act 1986...

s3 definition of 'environment'
vs
s4A sustainability principles



Can we conduct full sustainability assessments under the EPA Act 1986?

Yes!

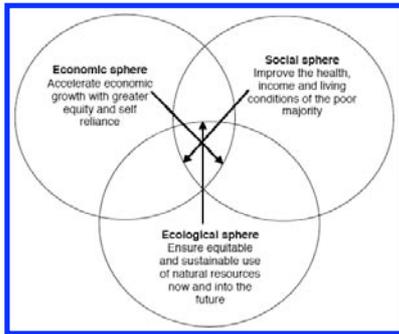


What this means for sustainability assessment practitioners in WA

There is nothing to stop us doing sustainability assessments!
– the legal/policy framework already exists ...



Pushing the sustainability vectors



Weaver A, J Pope, A Morrison-Saunders & P Lochner 2008 Contributing to Sustainability as an Environmental Impact Assessment Practitioner, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 26(2): 91-98

Conclusions

- We have the legal/policy framework to do sustainability assessments in Western Australia
- Let's push the sustainability vectors!
 - internal processes within organisations
 - external approval processes for projects, plans, policies ...

