

Symposium Proceedings

Session 8: Closing Roundtable

The State of Sustainability Assessment in Western Australia

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- We're doing it!
- Growing body of experience and information
- Demonstrated incremental improvement in practice over the past 6 years (since draft State Sustainability Strategy released)
- Collaboration and dialogue amongst practitioners – working together rather than competing
- Diversity of practice across sectors
- Committed, skilled people
- Interest and enquiry continuing to grow
- Demonstrated application and life-cycle innovations by leading businesses (e.g. Nokia, Toyota)
- Personally and professionally rewarding for practitioners

Weaknesses

- Lack of agreed societal vision for sustainability
- Lack of adequate policy frameworks
- Lack of rigorous requirements for the application of sustainability assessment (not on political agenda)
- Not adequately applying sustainability thinking
- Sustainability language can be off-putting – tempting to resort to ‘dumbing down’ (e.g. framing everything in terms of climate change)
- Sustainability is still an add-on and not part of normal business
- Stress amongst practitioners undermines personal sustainability
- Social dimensions often under-done

Opportunities

- Strong drivers for change, e.g. climate change, drought (Water Corp experience)
- Reframing sustainability as ‘future management’
- Sustainability as an overarching framework for planning and decision-making
- Strong connections between the aims of planning and aims of sustainability assessment
- ‘Greenwash’ gives us a starting point, something to work with
- Community demanding sustainable decisions and increased involvement in decision-making
- Non-diversified economy WA - we can make a big impact by focusing on a small number of industries/sectors
- Nationals with balance of power – more regional projects in WA?
- Create groundswell as practitioners and set the agenda, even in absence of sustainability policy frameworks
- The potential of a young, unique society
- Apply sustainability assessment locally – i.e. by local government
- Take a strategic approach to local issues – e.g. Regional Councils
- Other sectors – e.g. land planning/development and local government - can learn from what has already been done (‘leapfrog’)
- Communicate good news stories – demonstrate sustainable outcomes
- Strategic engagement with key people (business, political)
- Sell sustainability assessment - identify ‘what’s in it for you’
- Challenge cognitive biases through sustainability assessment
- Neutralise business-as-usual and reward innovation within organisations
- Re-ignite Network City and other strategic initiatives

Threats

- Cultural presumption in favour of development (by government decision-makers amongst others)
- Disappearance of past sustainability initiatives with change in political leadership e.g. Network City, State Sustainability Strategy
- Peak oil, climate change, global financial crisis – sustainability initiatives may get lost in times of crisis
- Private land rights versus public good
- Complacent society, apathy – ‘she’ll be right’ attitude
- Sustainability has become a meaningless buzz word
- Unstrategic political leadership
- Unwillingness to challenge the status quo
- Local government under-resourced to take up sustainability assessment challenge