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Senator Jan McLucas
| Senator.McLucas@aph.gov.au

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Dear Senator

Re: Central and North Queensland Taskforce

Thank you for your invitation to provide input to the ALP's Central and North Queensland Taskforce.

Firstly, we notice and commend the goal of 'sustainable development'. As the 'voice for the environment' in the north Queensland region, NQCC totally supports sustainability. This support is not just emotionally based; it is based on the First Law of Thermodynamics: viz, that energy can neither be created nor destroyed.

In other words, we live in a world of finite resources. It is this immutable but, in a society captured by consumerism and 'growth', hard-to-accept scientific fact that is the basis for our embrace of the need for 'sustainable' development. On a planet with a large and expanding population and yet finite resources, it is no longer a case of make, consume, throw away, make more etc.

If this Taskforce is to be anything other than yet another talkfest and does not accept that continual quantitative (as different from qualitative) growth is unsustainable, and that we need to entertain a paradigm shift in how we operate as a society, we might all just as well 'go home'.

However, the term 'paradigm shift' does not need to strike fear into the hearts of politicians. Very many, possibly a majority, in the community (voters) are increasingly aware that 'business-as-usual' is no longer an option if we are to deal with the problems that beset us – probably the largest of which is climate change.

The challenges for politicians will be (i) to sell the messages of the need for structural change and the fact that this does NOT automatically mean a decrease in living standards, and (ii) to resist spinning the truth in order to maintain current models and thereby to assuage 'big business'.

Before moving to comments on the specific areas, we note with disappointment and concern, the acknowledgment of the environment in this proposed 'sustainable development' model is constrained to 'renewable energy'. While this is

an extremely important issue, there are many other environmental issues that need to be addressed – water use and quality, erosion of soil, sedimentation, vegetation destruction, types and location of agriculture and livestock production to name but some.

We forget the importance of environmental issues at our peril for, as former US Senator Gaylord Nelson said: ‘The economy is the wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around’. Without an environment there will be no economy.

We can read these words and return to a ‘business-as-usual’ model, or we can read them and commit to significant change in the way that we do things – for if we don’t the future will be grim indeed.

That said, we offer the following suggestions.

1. Strong and healthy communities

- Recognise that population growth is not compatible with sustainable communities, and implement changes in attitude and policy such as:
 - Welcome rather than decry downward trends in population growth.
 - Remove incentives to reproduce.
 - Improve access to and education about contraception and support ‘pro choice’ initiatives. Focus especially on the young and those in disadvantaged areas.
- Limit the drain on health services by focussing on preventative health measures, such as:
 - Limits on advertising of junk food
 - Support for community fitness programs
 - Banning of sales of junk foods in schools
 - Support for participatory rather than spectator sports
 - Introduction of features such as Scotland’s [‘Daily mile’](#) campaign into schools.
- Assist individuals, families and communities to create more healthful lifestyles, for example by:
 - Promoting community food growing
 - Providing energy efficient public transport and encouraging its use
 - Tightening building controls (eg ban black roofs and providing incentives for environmentally friendly design)
 - Mandating clear food labelling.
- Acknowledge and promote the understanding that a declining population base will limit the tax base BUT simultaneously reduce the demand for health services. No one loses.
 - Support and encourage minimal impact eco tourism industries
 - Recognise the mental and emotional benefits of having access to “natural” areas, such as forests
 - Protect national parks from commercial activities
 - Focus more strongly on species maintenance.

2. Education and industry skills

- Acknowledge that much but not **all** 'new development' is beneficial to the community at large, and:
 - Educate for future industries – renewable energy, aged care, health services, technology, sustainability, tourism, localised networking
 - Support the arts as well as the sciences
 - Design and implement just and fair transitions from 'old' to 'new' jobs and industries.

3. Economic development and jobs

- Appreciate that technology will often reduce the demand for labour (after all, that was the attraction in the 1950s – freeing us from 'drudgery')
 - Selectively support 'new' technology that has sustainable benefits to the community, with little downside
 - Exploiting the fact that this region is ideally suited to solar and wind energy
 - Penalise industries that harm society
 - Design and implement measures for 'employing' those thrown out of work
 - Appreciate that rectification of impacts (such as mine site rehabilitation) contributes as much to jobs and incomes as does exploitation
 - Investigate new ways of measuring 'benefit', 'success' and 'growth' (eg, challenge an accounting system that regards a war as beneficial but not the birth of a child).

4. Renewable energy

- Support renewable energy industry
- Tax polluters (of water, air, land)
- Rapidly phase out coal-fired power stations
- Refuse applications for new coal mines
- Ban single use plastic bags and introduce strong packaging laws designed to minimise packaging – especially plastic packaging
- Reward rather than penalise households for becoming independent of high maintenance and high impact infrastructure by, for example, "going off-grid."

5. Cost of living

- Foster a debate on quality of life rather than just quantity of life
- Differentiate between the 'cost of living' and the 'cost of lifestyle'
- Implement a more equitable tax system
- Tax financial transactions.

The move to a society based on REAL sustainability will inevitably generate some challenges for any government. For example, what to do with all those poles and wires.

But a real and rapid change to sustainability is the only way in which we can as a species maintain a planet that is comfortable and workable (not to mention beautiful).

AND You might be surprised by how many people would agree with this approach and support such change!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wendy Tubman". The ink is a light grey color.

Wendy Tubman
Coordinator