

Victoria Division Launches Ecological Sustainability Agenda

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The Victorian Division of Engineers Australia recently launched an Action Agenda aimed at achieving ecological sustainability in Victoria. The Agenda, the product of extensive consultation through the *Finding Solutions* program run by the Victorian Division, urges decisive action from the state government, and calls for government and professionals to take the lead in making Victoria a sustainable state. Three metropolitan and regional forums were held in bringing together engineering and other professionals and stakeholders to engage in setting sustainability priorities for the state.

The Agenda for Ecological Sustainability was launched at a breakfast forum in Melbourne on the 6th of April 2004 with an impressive guest list of over 200 interested participants. The guest speaker was Hunter Lovins, a prominent sustainability figure and co-author of *Natural Capitalism*, amongst several other books on the topic. The Agenda was launched by Tim Gosbell, the new Chair of the Victorian Division, who urged the government to lead by example. 'The government, as client for major products and services is ideally placed to exert a powerful impact on industry by ensuring its own procurement and project delivery practices are based on sustainability principles', says Gosbell.

He also called for immediate action, and a framework for sustainability in Victoria, similar to the well-publicised Western Australia State Sustainability Strategy. 'The environmental problems we face demand radical action. One significant barrier is the lack of a plan for Victoria. We want government to lead the way, but if they don't have a plan they can't even begin the journey. It is essential that governments take the lead in meeting the challenge and they must do this with a holistic, long-term approach that rises above short-term political agendas. A sustainability plan for Victoria is long overdue' says Gosbell.

So where is Victoria currently? Catalysed through election commitments and Premier Hon. Steve Bracks' 'Growing Victoria Together' framework, environmental sustainability, together with economic growth and social equity have become core to the State's vision for the future. Sustainability is also one of Melbourne 2030's foundation principles, and as such is core to government policy. The Commissioner for Ecological Sustainability for Victoria has recently been appointed under the Environmental Sustainability Act 2003. Hence, the launch of the Agenda has been timely. And the government should take note of the key recommendations made:

- ❑ State and Local Governments should set bold targets for sustainability and develop holistic, well-resourced implementation plans to achieve them.
- ❑ The State Government should publish a Victoria 2030 plan that includes these bold targets and implementation plans for achieving them.
- ❑ State and Local Governments should amend their procurement processes, beginning with large infrastructure projects, to require their service and product suppliers to meet sustainability standards
- ❑ Engineers Australia Victoria Division will adopt a set of sustainability principles for procurement that Engineers Australia members working in public and private enterprises can use when developing procurement policies and systems for their enterprise.
- ❑ Engineers Australia Victoria Division will consult with other professional associations and industry groups to develop a set of common standards for defining, measuring and implementing sustainability.

- Resource pricing should reflect the real cost of the resources, including externalities, with water and energy urgent priorities for action.

Government leadership and agenda shaping are corner-stones to increasing awareness of, and improving performance in ecological sustainability. The concept of sustainability was first articulated in the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development titled 'Our Common Future' (the 'Bruntland Report'). There is much to be done to leave the state of Victoria to future generations the way we inherited it – the engineers are making bold moves to build this common future.