

Agenda 21

Sustainable Development



Agenda 21 is an international blueprint that outlines actions that governments, international organisations, industries and the community can take to achieve sustainability. These actions recognise the impacts of human behaviours on the environment and on the sustainability of systems of production. The objective of Agenda 21 is the alleviation of poverty, hunger, sickness and illiteracy worldwide while halting the deterioration of ecosystems which sustain life.

Agenda 21 represents international consensus, following two years of research, drafting and intensive negotiations at the four meetings of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Preparatory Committee.

Adopted at the UNCED Summit meeting on 14 June 1992, Agenda 21 covers all the issues referred to UNCED by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution 44/228 of 1989.

Agenda 21 is divided into four sections:

- **Social and Economic Dimensions** – examining the underlying human factors and problems of development, along with the key issues of trade and integrated decision-making;
- **Conservation and Management of Resources for Development**– the largest section of Agenda 21, presenting the range of resources, ecosystems and other issues, all of which must be examined in detail if sustainable development is to be achieved at global, national and local levels;
- **Strengthening the Role of Major Groups**– looks at the social partnerships necessary if sustainable development is to be a reality. It recognises that Government and international agencies cannot alone achieve sustainable development and that the community, through representative and industry organisations, must be a key player in the development of

policy and in achieving the necessary changes; and

- **Means of Implementation**– examines the question 'how do we get there?'. The section looks at the resources which must be mobilised in support of sustainable futures. While finance and technology are key elements, this section also deals with aspects of education, institutional and legal structures, data and information and the building of national capacity in relevant disciplines.

Essential to a proper understanding of Agenda 21 is an appreciation of several major themes and ideas, which run through the document. These include the key role that must be played by strategies, plans and policies at a national level, the need for integrated decision making at all levels, and the importance of community involvement in the implementation of Agenda 21.

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of UNCED decisions. The first CSD meeting, in 1993, was an organisational meeting, while the second, third and fourth sessions in 1994, 1995 and 1996 were substantive reviews of groups of Agenda 21 Chapters. The first round of the reviews was completed in 1996.

The fifth session of the CSD in 1997 was devoted to preparing for a special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS) for an overall review of the implementation of Agenda

21. UNGASS, held in June 1997, marked the fifth anniversary of the Rio summit and considered progress on sustainable development and identified key priority areas for further attention by the international community.

UNGASS did not redraft Agenda 21, it picked out the key areas or sectors where progress has been slow or where there are no institutions or agreements dealing with those issues. These were then scheduled into a work plan for the Commission on Sustainable Development, which nominates a sectoral theme, a cross-sectoral theme, and an economic sector or major group to be considered each year. For example, in 2000 the sectoral theme was integrated planning and land management of land resources.

In December 2000, the UN General Assembly resolved to review progress in achieving sustainability since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at a Summit-level

meeting - the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

The WSSD was hosted by the Government of South Africa, was held in Johannesburg, from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The main focus of the WSSD was the future direction of the global sustainable development agenda and pursuing effective means for its implementation. For further information on the summit, see www.deh.gov.au/commitments/wssd/index.html

For further information about Agenda 21, including Australia's National Reports to the CSD on implementation of Agenda 21, see: www.deh.gov.au/esd/publications/index.html



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June 2002, revised January 2004