

A platform for change

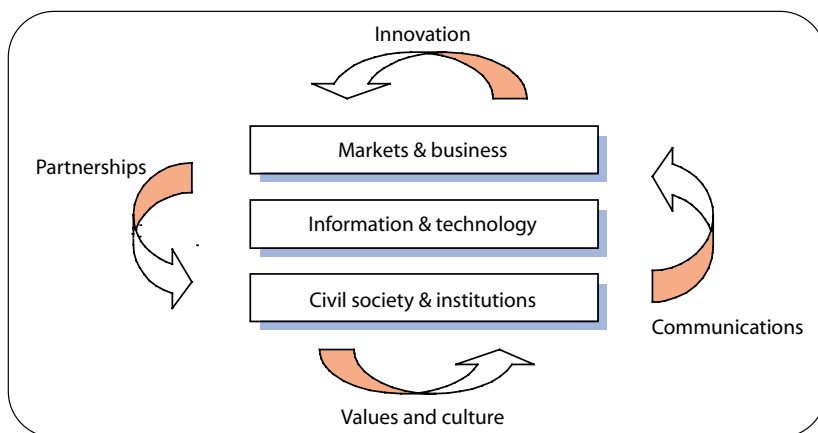
The Natural Edge Project argues that, with better integration across society, today's key drivers of unsustainable practice in Australia could be re-harnessed as the engines of real progress.

In the April–June 2003 edition of *Ecós* (issue 115, page 23), a feature on the Wentworth Group showed that sustainability issues are significant, multi-faceted, systems problems that need more integrated approaches to achieve progress. The feature identified topics such as values of our nation, ('The Murray or the MCG?') and leadership, and stated that governments must organise their incentives and constraints.

As many are realising, the complexity of issues pertaining to sustainability is not unique to natural resource management (NRM). Our present unsustainable production and consumption patterns arise from complicated causes involving the market, information and the institutions. Integrated approaches need to be developed to enable appropriate communication, innovation and partnerships to meet the needs of society based on its values and culture.

It is possible to turn key drivers of unsustainability around to become drivers for sustainability. Once the need for integrated approaches is recognised, then it becomes a question of what partnerships, alliances, information gaps and institutional reforms will need to be addressed? What market incentives need to be developed?

There are key lessons for sustainability, for instance, to be learned from the experience of NRM experts. One of the major lessons from the last 10 years is the value of assessing the culture and values underlying assumptions in industry. Peter Newman, Director of the WA Office for Sustainability, writes, 'When the WA government announced clearing bans for agriculture in 2002, there was some political risk but the Landcare movement in Australia is now so broad and engages so many in the bush, that it was seen as almost a non-issue.'



The Platform for Change: the dynamic commences with civil society conveying values and culture to institutions which then more loudly communicate them to business who create innovative solutions for the market. These harmonise with society's needs, the environment, and development of enabling technologies. Business, through the market, then partners with society and institutions to influence information flows, patterns of consumption and behaviour.

Fortunately, unlike 10 years ago, in Australia there are now more systematic attempts to address the information gaps across society that hamper coordinated progress.

For example, we now have peak industry groups like the Australian Council of Infrastructure and Development who are publishing their 'Sustainability Framework for the Future of Australia's Infrastructure – Handbook 2003',¹ and who are calling for a national council to develop a 25 to 50 year plan for Australia's infrastructure.

At the highest level, the Federal Government has made achieving an environmentally sustainable Australia one of the country's four main research goals², and, more broadly, there is a much greater, deeper understanding in the public and in our institutions about the environment.

Practically, we also have many more demonstration models and working examples of best practice in sustainability from which to build. It is, therefore, much easier now to build partnerships and alliances for sustainability in Australia than ever before.

Reflecting this, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's preferred scenario encapsulates an integrated approach modelled on jazz music where everyone is playing the same song (in partnership) with various leaders at particular times, and where innovation and trials are constantly being attempted³. The 'Jazz' scenario requires that we recognise the essential value in all three sectors: the market, government and community. When they work together they are unstoppable.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has developed online case study folders featuring best practice, the relevant existing networks, and peak bodies working for each area of sustainability in Australia. These folders are integrated into the ACF's *Natural Advantage: Blueprint for A Sustainable Australia*⁴ (2000).

Similarly, the Natural Edge Project⁵ is working with bodies such as ACF, CSIRO, and Engineers Australia to develop the publication *Natural Advantage of Nations*. It brings together the basis for national natural competitive advantage based around the whole-of-society approach, and utilises the dynamics of the Platform for Change.

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¹ Australian Council for Infrastructure Development (AusCID), Sustainability Framework for the Future of Australia's Infrastructure – Handbook 2003; <http://www.auscid.org.au/index.html> (See papers section)

² http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/2002/media_release2018.htm

³ World Business Council on Sustainable Development (1997). *Exploring Sustainable Development: Global Scenarios 2000 – 2050*. World Business Council on Sustainable Development, London.

⁴ Natural Advantage: Blueprint For A Sustainable Australia web site, <http://www.acfonline.org.au/na/asp/pages/default.asp>, developed by the Australian Conservation Foundation

⁵ The whole of society approach, Natural Edge Project web site: <http://www.naturaledgeproject.net>

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