

# Government and business agree on an action plan

At a specially convened trans-Tasman summit held on 13 June in Brisbane, Australian Environment Ministers and company CEOs acknowledged that a bolder, more urgent pursuit of sustainability initiatives is essential to underpin Australia's future growth, prosperity and quality of life.

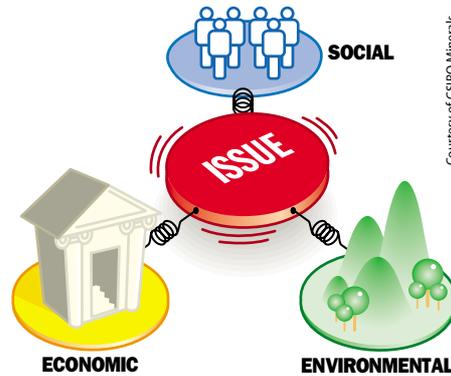
Chiefs from 20 leading companies engaged with government and industry to discuss the case for sustainability, and agreed that a plan of action would be developed over the next year to identify specific initiatives through which business and government can increase sustainability.

The meeting also highlighted that although it is ten years until the next World Summit on Sustainable Development, this is not a long time in the context of making the changes needed to build on the outcomes of the 2002 Summit to improve business sustainability.

A small working group of CEOs and senior Commonwealth and State Officials will be appointed to commence work on the action plan and will also develop recommendations for Environment Protection and Heritage Council Ministers to promote sustainability to industry more broadly.

The Ministerial Business Sustainability Summit was hosted by the Queensland Minister for Environment, Mr Dean Wells, on behalf of the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC), and chaired by the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr David Kemp.

The Summit agreed that Governments



Leaders recognise sustainability's three interdependent influences.

alone cannot achieve sustainability, and that all sectors of society should be encouraged to incorporate environmental concerns into both their long-term visions and their day-to-day practices.

'Today we have laid important groundwork for fostering cooperation and developing the necessary partnerships that will enable this to occur,' Dr Kemp said.

Business in particular was acknowledged as having an important role in promoting sustainability, because of its capacity to provide innovative, practical and cost-effective solutions to environmental problems. The challenge for governments is how to harness the experience and expertise of business to capture the benefits of sound environmental management.

CEOs acknowledged that operating sustainably not only improves the environment and community but can also improve profitability.

A number of key drivers towards business sustainability were identified at the meeting, including the need for:

- a regulatory environment that promotes sustainability;
- continuing government/industry partnerships to support innovative technologies and solutions to threats to sustainability;
- industry disclosure of environmental, social and economic impacts and improved corporate governance;
- better education for consumers and business owners on the impact of their consumption and production decisions;
- promotion of 'sustainability success stories' to inform businesses that eco-efficiencies can add to profitability;
- governments and all levels of industry to play a leading role in promoting sustainability;
- governments to be mindful of their role as purchasers;
- improved information flows through supply chains to increase efficiencies of production;
- a channel of communication between EPHC and industries with a commitment to sustainability;
- governments to have regard to industry sustainability measures in place in dealing with industry; and
- open dialogue between business and government to ensure the changes needed to increase sustainability are practical, cost-effective and achievable.

'It is pleasing to see many more companies coming on board and realising it can be a boon, rather than a burden for business,' Dr Kemp said.

Ministers and CEOs will meet again in 12-18 months to monitor progress and identify new approaches to promoting sustainability.

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The USIS unit generates a low emission steam exhaust.