

Statement by Australia

Second Preparatory Meeting UNCSO
7 March 2011

Session 1 – Objective of the Conference

In the twenty years since the first Earth Summit there has been no shortage of activity directed at achieving sustainable development, and progress has been made. However, as we are all aware, critical gaps remain. Moreover, sustainable development faces new challenges and growing complexities

The 1st Intersessional in January this year acknowledged the value of assessing progress, and gaps remaining, in the implementation of outcomes of the major summits:

Rio +20 must build on these experiences, rather than duplicate past decisions there must be coherent guidance and a framework to enable assessment progress and gaps at the national level.

Ultimately, if we don't recognise how far we have come, it will be impossible to determine how far we have to go in the future.

We would like to focus on two of the questions posed by the Secretariat.

Question 2. Which emerging issues and challenges pose serious threat to sustainable development in your country?

Australia faces a number of ongoing as well as new and emerging challenges to achieving sustainable development. There are three in particular that are of concern to us but also of wider interest:

Firstly, a growing challenge is the sustainable development of aquatic and marine resources. As we have heard this morning from a number of countries particularly small island states in the Pacific sound management and the sustainable development of these resources is vital to sustainable development. A key element of the 'green economy' will be dedicated work to support action to promote the conservation of the oceans, its resources and the estuaries, coral reefs and seamounts which house its biodiversity.

A related issue is that of water - its quality, availability and management, and the effect of this on global food security at both national and global levels:

Australia's soils are poor and very fragile, rainfall is highly variable and rivers ephemeral. We are not alone in having these characteristics and effectively managing in these circumstances is a major challenge for sustainable development in a range of countries.

Secondly the ongoing loss of biodiversity and ecosystems is a major challenge. Australia's biodiversity continues to be under pressure due to pressures from human impacts, alien invasive species and climate change. Again we are not alone in needing to manage this issue.

The emerging challenge is to focus more strongly on the area of natural capital and the services that biodiversity and natural ecosystems provide.

Thirdly increasing urbanisation is an emerging issue. Australia is a very large country in geographic terms however more than 80 per cent of Australia's total population live in urban centres – most of them within 50 kilometres of the coast. This emerging issues poses particular challenges particularly in relation to transportation and waste issues.

In relation to all of these issues I would observe that the emerging consequences of climate change will challenge the ability of all countries to manage each of these issues effectively.

Question 5. What have been the major factors contributing to the gaps in implementation of sustainable development initiatives and how are these best addressed?

Despite over two decades of significant effort and investment in processes for planning, impact assessment and measuring economic achievements we remain challenged in the integration of environmental considerations into economic and sectoral discussions and decisions.

The goal, and the ultimate test, of sustainable development is the convergence among the three pillars of economic growth, social improvement, and environmental protection.

To address this issue we need to increase our ability to track, monitor and report on success. We need to support key initiatives through the identification measures that promote convergence including appropriate indicators, better measurements for success, as well as improved data availability.

These measures of success must work across economic, social and environment pillars and clearly extend beyond the narrow economic measures to those which reflect our broader wellbeing.

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