

**On overview of SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS: 10 year strategy to enable urban systems transformation - Realising sustainable development opportunities for all Australians**

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The Australian Academy of Science’s *Future Earth Australia* collaboration initiative, published a study entitled “*SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS 10 year strategy to enable urban systems transformation*” in December 2019. The 58-page publication is a cross-sectoral, national plan for achieving sustainable cities and communities across the country by 2030. Implementing this strategy would set Australian cities on track for future prosperity and sustainability, and equip all stakeholders to address systemic urban problems such as transport congestion and biodiversity loss, among others.

The publication was developed through extensive consultations around the country and overseen by leading urban research, practice and policy experts.

Four strategies have been identified by the *Future Earth Australia* that address the barriers preventing urban and regional areas from achieving sustainable development:

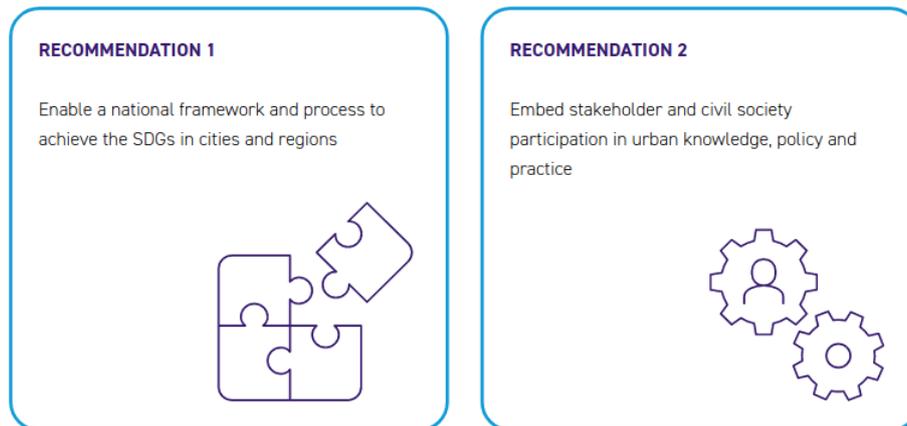


Fig. 1. Vision for action

(1) Vision for action. Build coherent visions for cities and regions to achieve United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This can be achieved by enabling a national framework and process to achieve the SDGs in cities and regions; and embed stakeholder and civil society participation in urban knowledge, policy and practice.

Case studies:

- Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework <http://npf.ie/>
- Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan <https://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/Council/Our-Responsibilities/Newcastle-2030>



Fig. 2. Enable innovation

(2) Enable innovation. Grow a national urban innovation system to achieve urban and regional visions. This can be achieved by creating a national institutional framework to link urban and regional research, policy, and practice communities; and establishing a national network of innovation hubs to empower local urban and regional innovation across Australia.

Case studies:

- European Creative Hubs Network and associated Fora <http://creativehubs.net/>
- The creative economy driving sustainability of smaller Australian cities - The creative economy, an often overlooked component of designing sustainable cities, employs around 600,000 Australians and is set to increase dramatically. Adelaide and Hobart, for example, has become a hub for creative industries, with regional cities like Newcastle and Townsville expanding their creative offerings.



Fig. 3. Connect knowledge

(3) Connect knowledge. Invest in information and communication infrastructure to share urban and regional knowledge. This can be achieved by establishing and sustaining an integrated urban and regional knowledge platform for data analysis and exchange across the research, policy, and practice communities; supporting new capability to connect diverse knowledge across sectors, disciplines, and professions to achieve urban and regional visions.

Case studies:

- UN Habitat Global Urban Observatory <https://www.urbanobservatory.org>
- Circular economy drives sustainability of primary industry cities - As their economies of cities shift like Perth and Newcastle which historically relied on coal mining and steel making industries, are finding different ways to diversify by turning to principles of a regenerative economy - stabilising their economies and improving their long-term sustainability.



Fig. 4. Build capacity

(4) Build capacity. Train and employ a new cohort of urban and regional researchers and practitioners skilled in inter-disciplinary visioning, knowledge and implementation. This can be achieved by establishing a national program to expand researcher and practitioner capability for knowledge exchange across urban and regional research, policy, and practice communities; and funding a national program to embed researchers and practitioners within relevant organisations linked to knowledge production for the SDGs.

Case studies:

- The Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research's CAPaBLE Program <http://www.apn-gcr.org/programmes-and-activities/capable/>
- Collaborative networks and trans-disciplinary capacity building - Future Earth Australia, ICLEI Oceania, and the Urban Climate Change Research Network (UCCRN), National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF).

Australia was already one of the most urbanised nations by the end of the 19th century. Unlike European and North American countries, Australia's pattern of settlement did not have a neat urban hierarchy. The gap between the large and small towns was huge. These patterns have intensified in the decades since federation, especially after the second world war.

Responsibilities and fiscal resources across Federal, State and regional council levels are also divided, creating obstacles to effective planning and infrastructure provision. Arguments between federal and state governments are heavily politicised.

No Australian city has a long-term vision showing how a future stabilised population might be supported with the essential resources of food, water and energy. Our urban knowledge and practices are not guided by a clear, long-term agenda.

The *10 year strategy* discovers that sustainable transformation of Australia's cities and regions is being held back by the lack of an over-arching vision, institutional silos and perennial under-funding, and the country's best innovations and research breakthroughs are not being shared across cities. The group has also found out that different parts and processes of our settlements lie within the responsibility of different, often fragmented players: three levels of government, private and community sectors, and research groups. The disconnect between bottom-up and top-down strategies is noticeable. This points to a clear role for a coordinated effort in enabling Australia's transition to sustainable development.

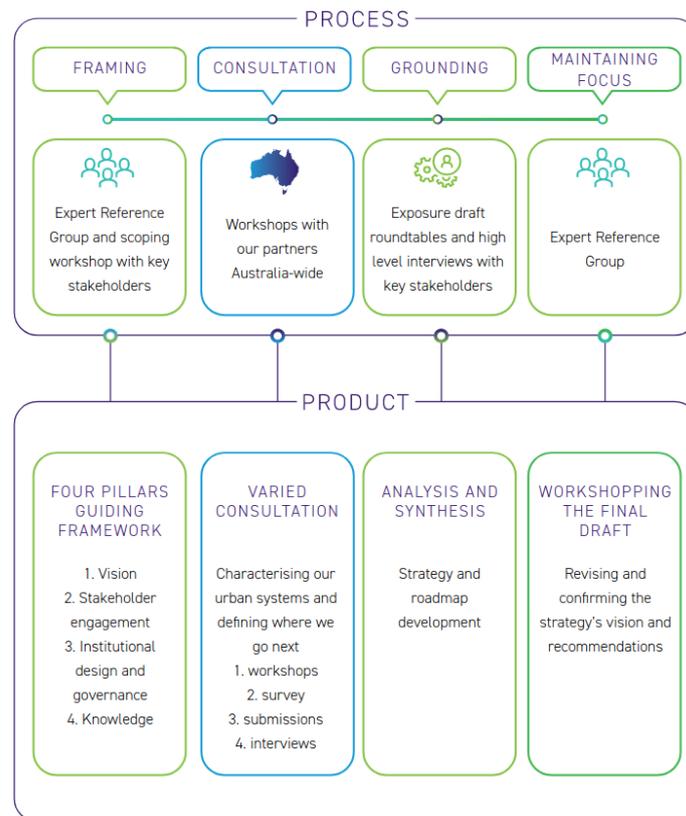


Fig. 5. The Future Earth Australia Secretariat co-production process

This quality of inter-connectivity between our planning strategies and climate change will eventually play a major role in forcing our transition towards sustainability.

In order to transition to a sustainable future, we need capacity-building for researchers, innovators and practitioners, although stifled by institutional silos and disciplinary or sector specific remits. We need to create ways of working within the current institutional frameworks and still be able to respond to the rapid changes in the next decade.

In order to fully realise the potential of the SDGs, we need to harness innovation and disruption more effectively. We also need to have communities of practice actively engaged throughout, and in doing so, enable societal transformation across the nation so people get the best from their cities. We can draw from and build on the nation's current institutions that have been creating valuable knowledge for specific stakeholders and sectors, such as:

- Cooperative research centres for Low Carbon Living and for Water Sensitive Cities, which break down silos across sectors and disciplines to address issues systemically, create highly practical tools and outputs, and make their work accessible to all
- The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), which is an exemplary organised network model for housing and urban research
- CSIRO Urban Living Labs, which provide a space for government, researchers, communities, and industry to innovate together in locally relevant ways
- The Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN), which provides data and modelling for evidence-based decision making in cities

The group's consultation process, coupled with deep working knowledge brought by its Expert Reference Group, revealed the weaknesses that are holding our cities back, and the opportunities to transform our cities into drivers of sustainable development.

An urban systems transformation is viable and doable and it brings with its immense opportunities and efficiencies for Australians. Putting sustainable development at the forefront of a nationally coherent vision and framework will see our cities and regions drive the implementation of the SDGs and thrive as a result.

There is hope for a sustainable future, though. The federal, state, and territory governments have recognised the importance of cities to Australia's future.

On the Federal level, the Building Up & Moving Out cities' inquiry undertaken by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities in 2018 detailed a range of barriers to our cities becoming drivers of economic and environmental gains and social inclusion.

At the state and territory level, there has been a greater attempt at creating integrated urban plans over the medium term, such as Greater Adelaide's 30-Year Plan, the Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million Plan, the Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, and the Greater Sydney Region Plan. A few cities, including Darwin and Hobart, have agreed on City Deals with the federal and state or territory government to identify strategic levers for systemic improvement.

*Future Earth Australia* assures that it will continue to use its convening power to drive action. The group also hopes that the Strategy provides the foundation for action to transform our urban futures, deliver better outcomes to their inhabitants, and meet the goals of sustainable development. The strategies and recommendations presented in the publication address these core barriers. Government, industry, the research sector, peak bodies, the philanthropic sector and civil society all have parts to play in driving this change.



**Sources:**

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