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**Submission to the Productivity Commission, commenting on the
Draft Report of its inquiry into Implementation of ESD**

The ESD Inquiry's terms of reference require the Commission to "*evaluate how those Commonwealth Government departments and agencies . . . which undertake activities which directly impact on the achievement of ESD, have incorporated ESD into their policy formulation, decision-making processes and programs.*"

The Draft Report fails to do this.

The Inquiry process has allowed departments to self-select as to whether their policy areas are ESD relevant. It has, especially, allowed the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) -- a department delinquent in relation to its ESD responsibilities -- to escape scrutiny.

Please note that the May 1992 IGAE required all levels of government to "inform" all policies and programs by ESD principles. The principles, clearly stated in the May 1992 IGAE, are reproduced on page 27 of the Draft Report.

What possible use is it for Government to make a commitment to ESD objectives so unambiguously, yet allow departments to ignore the Government's commitment? And even worse, to allow delinquent departments to go unchastened when their recalcitrance is ignored by an Inquiry set up to examine those same departments' progress in implementation of their ESD responsibilities?

We select DIMA because it especially fits the description of a department that undertakes "*activities which directly impact on the achievement of ESD*". And because Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) has consistently drawn DIMA's attention to its ESD responsibilities.

In our recent annual submission to DIMA, concerning the size of the 1999-2000 immigration intake, we wrote:

Australia's population is *not* living sustainably within its environment - as demonstrated by forest depletion, soil degradation/erosion/salinisation, plant and animal extinctions, excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and declining fresh and marine water quality. This claim is supported by Australia's prestigious scientific organisation, CSIRO, which believes that, "Australia can carry its present population - or a higher one - in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable way **only** [our emphasis] if the nation is prepared to change the way it does things.

Australia lacks the necessary knowledge and understanding to manage effectively its current population at current living standards. Every extra person and every unit increase in consumption increase the need to rectify this situation" (*Australia's Population 'Carrying Capacity': one nation - two ecologies*, page 137).

It is now abundantly clear that DIMA is the wrong department to have carriage of population policy. The Department has repeatedly shrugged off calls for ecological concerns to be addressed in any review of the immigration program, and has proved itself incapable of understanding the issues involved.

Given that SSEC and other environmental organisations, have repeatedly called on DIMA to 'inform' its policy-making and programs with ESD principles, it is striking that DIMA has evaded a response to this Inquiry's questionnaire.

DIMA's submission to this Inquiry admits that, "Population growth rates may affect the achievement of ESD" (sub. 39, p.5). Yet DIMA actively intervenes to artificially increase Australia's population size, and to promote a population growth rate in excess of the rate that would occur naturally as a result of Australia's birth and death rates.

DIMA goes only so far as to note that:

The environmental and economic impact of population have been examined in the recent past by two inquiries: the 1991 report of the National Population Council entitled *Population Issues and Australia's Future* and the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies report of 1994 entitled *Australia's Population Carrying Capacity* (the Jones Report). Both reports focused on the relationship between population, the environment and ESD, and the question of population carrying capacity (sub. 39, p.6).

But both reports recommended the development of a Population Policy for Australia! In addition, the Jones Report recommended that, "Australia should adopt a consumption strategy, to be developed around the challenge of learning to move from high levels of consumption to lower levels of consumption based on lower levels of material throughput per unit of consumption" (*Australia's Population Carrying Capacity*, Recommendation 11). DIMA conveniently ignores this.

The Federal Government, through the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, has refused to respond to the Jones Report or to develop a Population Policy. Yet the population's size and its consumption pattern go to the heart of ecological sustainability. Than this, indeed, nothing is more crucial to this Inquiry!

Dr. Recher, Foundation Professor of Environmental Management at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, and Chair of the National Biodiversity Council, wrote in *The Canberra Times* on 4 March 1999:

[Australia] is a fragile and environmentally exhausted land with little scope for additional population without exchanging present lifestyles and personal freedoms for a much more regimented life in an even more degraded environment (*Populate Australia? Perish the Thought*).

Professor Ian Lowe, Chair of the 1996, State of the Environment Report Advisory Council agrees:

"There is no prospect -- even in principle -- of a sustainable pattern of development unless we devise a socially acceptable way of stabilising the human population" (Paper delivered to AESP Conference, Sydney 1997).

Thus, notwithstanding the well-known views of two of Australia's most prominent scientists -- that population size is a fundamental ESD issue -- DIMA refuses to accept its ESD responsibilities. Surely the final Report of this Inquiry will not encourage their delinquent behaviour!

SSEC submits:

- THAT the terms of reference require the final Report of the ESD Inquiry to comment on the non-compliance of delinquent departments (like DIMA), and to recommend that those identified departments and agencies should set up working groups to advise them of their ESD responsibilities under the May 1992 IGAE; and
- THAT the final Report should recommend that a Commission for Sustainable Development should be set up. Duties of the Commissioner would include reviewing the extent to which Commonwealth Departments have met the objectives of the May 1992 IGAE, developing a consumption strategy (as recommended by the Jones Inquiry) and co-ordinating State of the Environment Reporting.

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