Submission to Tasmania's Draft Sustainability Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committed to achieving them by 2030.[1] 2023 marks the halfway point, and the global community is far from on track to meeting this commitment - only 15% of SDGs are on track to be achieved by 2030.[2] *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023* (the "Update Report") highlights that the achievement of SDGs by 2030 is "in peril", and outlines five key areas for urgent action to ensure the SDGs are delivered. The first three points place the onus on national and subnational governments:

1) Heads of State and Government should recommit to seven years of accelerated, sustained and transformative action, both nationally and internationally
2) Governments should advance concrete, integrated and targeted polices and actions
3) Governments should strengthen national and subnational capacity, accountability and public institutes to deliver accelerated progress towards achieving the SDGs.[3]

The Update Report also emphasises that the delivery of SDGs must be integrated into national and subnational planning if we are to achieve what is required to maintain a healthy planet for our own well-being.

[1] United Nations (2015), *Sustainable Development Agenda,* https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/
[2] United Nations (2023), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report: Special edition*, p 4, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf
[3] Ibid, p 5.

The Tasmanian Government's Sustainability Strategy is being developed to achieve "better outcomes for future generations through a holistic and coordinated approach to sustainability targets and actions" and to "[align] efforts with the 2030 Global Agenda and the SDGs".[4] The development of such a strategy provides an opportunity to develop policy that will contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs. More importantly, it is an opportunity to scrutinise existing policies and assess whether they are helping or hindering the success of SDGs at a state level.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet has released a preliminary discussion paper to guide consultation for the development of a draft Sustainability Strategy.[5] The discussion paper for the Sustainability Strategy outlines possible approaches for Tasmania to implement SDGs, drawing on examples from other jurisdictions. It does not, however, provide any reference to sustainability issues in Tasmania, nor provide any examples of how governments, industry, the private sector and the wider community can address them.

SUSTAINABILITY DEPENDS ON A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Biodiversity conservation and environmental protection

Tasmania's Sustainability Strategy should be underpinned by a strong commitment to protect, conserve and sustainably manage Tasmania's marine and terrestrial natural environment. Protecting biodiversity, enhancing ecosystem functions, and fostering climate resilience should be central to the Strategy, as these are integral to achieving social and economic sustainability into the future. Climate change poses a significant threat to the health and functionality of Tasmania's natural and built environment, as well as presenting health risks and economic uncertainty. The discussion paper highlights the benefits of Tasmania's renewable energy profile and net zero status, but the Strategy itself should also acknowledge the risks of failing to take ambitious action on climate.

The intrinsic link between the health of the natural environment and the wellbeing of societies is now widely acknowledged. In 2022, the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.[6] Australia's most recent national State of the Environment (SOE) Report furthered this notion, and explicitly

[4] Department of Premier and Cabinet (2023) *Discussion Paper,* https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper.

[5] Ibid.

[6] UN General Assembly, *The human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment*, UN Doc. A/RES/76/300 (28 July 2022).

recognised the negative impact of a deteriorating environment on human health, living standards and connection to Country for Indigenous Australians.[7]

The UN's update report stresses that humanity's relationship with nature must be shifted to achieve the environmental objectives of the SDGs, and that the global community must "realise that nature is the root of our life of earth".[8] The recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework reinstates the importance of this, outlining four goals to be achieved by 2050 and 23 targets to be achieved by 2030. Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is as follows:

> Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas.[9]

Tasmania falls short of adequately protecting and conserving its natural environment and associated biodiversity, particularly in the marine environment. Tasmania has some of the highest levels of marine diversity and endemism in the world, yet it is the worst performing Australian state jurisdiction when it comes to marine protection.[10] Only 1.1% of state waters are fully protected, and there is currently a moratorium on any new marine or terrestrial protected areas in Tasmania. Industries such as native forest logging[11] and inshore salmonid aquaculture[12] to have significant environmental impacts yet continue to receive support from the Tasmanian Government.

Climate action

Climate change poses a significant challenge to the health and functionality of Tasmania's natural and built environment, as well as presenting serious risks to human wellbeing and economic security. It is therefore critical that building climate resilience and taking

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[7] Cresswell et al (2021) *Australia: State of the Environment 2021 – Overview*, p 67, https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/soe2021-overview.pdf.

[8] United Nations (2023), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report: Special edition*, p 4, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf

[9] United Nations Environment Program (2022) *Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity*, https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf.

[10] Grech et al (2014) Australian Marine Protected Areas, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293079951_Australian_marine_protected_areas .

[11] In Tasmania, native forest logging is estimated to emit 4.65 million tonnes of $CO2_e$ (carbon dioxide equivalent) annually.[11] Not only is the sector unsustainable when it comes to both environmental protection and addressing climate change, it is an economic burden. In the 20 years from 1997 to 2017, it is estimated that over $1 billon in government subsidies and grants was provided to the Tasmanian forestry industry. Over the same period, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, a government agency, lost over $1.3 billion.

[12] Conservation Advice for Zearaja maugeana (Maugean skate) (environment.gov.au)

ambitious action on climate change is central to Tasmania's Sustainability Strategy. While the discussion paper highlights the benefits of Tasmania's legacy renewable energy production and net zero status, it needs to also acknowledge the consequences of failing to take ambitious action to address and adapt to climate change.

Recommendation: Strong action on climate change, including protecting the natural environment, should underpin Tasmania's Sustainability Strategy.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A TASMANIAN SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The Australia Institute Tasmania supports a strategic, long-term plan to protect and enhance the wellbeing of present and future generations of Tasmanians, guided by the UN SDGs. The primary purpose of Tasmania's Sustainability Strategy should be to identify current unsustainable practices and policies and provide a roadmap for addressing them. The discussion paper states that the development of the Strategy is about "coordinating, celebrating, and taking advantage of what we are already doing,"[13] and details how existing policies relate to SDGs. The discussion paper does not provide actions or targets and does not identify areas in which Tasmania is fallings short.[14] The final Strategy needs to go beyond this and outline the key areas in which Tasmania is falling short on SDGs, and not simply attach SDGs to pre-existing policies.

Priority areas, clear targets and implementation strategies

The Australia Institute Tasmania supports the possible sustainability priority areas for Tasmania suggested in the discussion paper:[15]

- Climate action and renewable energy
- Natural environment
- Health and wellbeing
- Education and skills
- Circular economy and waste
- Housing, liveability and the built environment
- Fair, equitable and inclusive society

However, these priority areas must be supported by clear, ambitious, quantifiable and time-bound targets that are evidence-based and will result improved sustainability outcomes for

[13] Tasmanian Government (2023) *Tasmania Positive: our state's sustainability strategy – About,* https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/about

[14] Department of Premier and Cabinet (2023) *Discussion Paper,* https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper

[15] Ibid, p 21.

Tasmania. Targets should be accompanied by implementation strategies, and interim update reports should be published for each priority area.

It is essential that sustainability targets necessitate Tasmania to improve its practices. For example, the discussion paper's suggested target of "net zero, or lower, greenhouse gas emissions by 2030" under the *Climate and renewable energy* priority area is not an appropriate sustainability target. Tasmania achieved and has maintained net zero emissions since 2014, enabled by the substantial decline in plantation forestry rather than decarbonisation of the state's economy.[16] Consequently, modelling suggests that without concerted action on decarbonisation, Tasmania's emissions will exceed net zero by 2050.[17] If Tasmania is to sustain its net zero emissions status and take action on climate change, it is critical that active decarbonisation is central to the Strategy.

The table below provides examples of appropriate targets for two proposed priority areas and possible goals proposed in the Sustainability Strategy's discussion paper.[18]

PRIORITY AREA	**POSSIBLE GOALS**	**EXAMPLE TARGETS**
Climate and Renewable Energy	All Tasmanians have access to affordable clean energy; transition to fossil fuel alternatives; reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.	Reduce emissions from transport, energy, industrial processes, and agricultural sectors by 50% of 2005 levels by 2030.[19]
		Develop a state-wide coastal adaptation strategy, informed by an updated *State Coastal Policy.*[20]
		Reduce emissions and ensure a sustainable timber

[16] ReCFIT (2022) Tasmanian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report, Tasmanian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2022, recfit.tas.gov.au.

[17] Point Advisory (2021) *Tasmania: Net Zero by 2030 – Emissions Pathway Summary Report*, https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0029/136829/Tasmanian_Emissions_Pathway_Review_-_Summary_Report.pdf.

[18] Department of Premier and Cabinet (2023) *Discussion Paper,* p 21, https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper

[19] Tasmanian Policy Exchange (2021) *Blueprint for a Climate-Positive Tasmania*, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/349239/UTAS_-_Submission_Act_and_Action_Plan.pdf.

[20] Simpson et al (2023) *Submission: Tasmania's Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023-25*, Submission: Tasmania's Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023–25 - The Australia Institute

		industry by ending native forest logging by 2025.[21]
		Electrify all Tasmanian households by 2030.
		Develop adaptation strategies for climate-driven impacts such as bushfires, invasive species, ocean warming, coastal inundation etc. by 2025.[22]
Natural Environment	Strong natural resources and environmental management through protection and regenerative practices across all sectors to preserve the quality of air, land and water, and enhancing biodiversity	Fully protect 30% of Tasmania's terrestrial and marine environments, in line with Australia's commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.
		Restore degraded marine and terrestrial habitat
		Prevent species extinctions.
		Adopt a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach to planning and resource management.

[21] Sanger (2022), *Tasmania's Forest Carbon: From Emission Disaster to Climate Solution,* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b20f09dcfc4f2bd6b0c171/t/63ddce424a52643d2f6008cf/1675480999178/Tasmanias+Forest+Carbon.pdf.

[22] See the Victorian Government's impact-specific plans outlined in the *Natural Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026,* https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/558264/Natural-environment-Climate-Change-Adaptation-Action-Plan-2022.pdf

Recommendation: The Sustainability Strategy should be based on clear, ambitious, quantifiable and time-bound targets that are evidence-based and will result improved sustainability outcomes for Tasmania.

Reporting and accountability

Reporting on sustainability progress should be an integral part of Tasmania's future Sustainability Strategy. Without a formal reporting mechanism for regular, independent reporting and ongoing monitoring, the Sustainability Strategy will have no accountability and therefore would be unlikely to result in any positive progress towards achieving SDGs.

The Australian Government's Reporting Platform on the Sustainable Development Indicators[23] provides a template for SDG progress reporting, using the indictors determined by the United Nations SDG framework. This format should be adapted for Tasmania to provide a thorough and transparent reporting platform against established indicators for SDGs.

A comprehensive, up-to-date State of the Environment (SOE) Report is an essential component of a Sustainability Strategy. Victoria is now incorporating sustainability and progress towards SDGs into the state's statutory SOE reporting.[24] The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability who is responsible for delivering Victoria's SOE reports has released a framework, *Science for Sustainable Development*, which provides a detailed outline of how Victoria's progress towards the SDGs will be scrutinsed. The framework notes that "[SOE] reports that are not integrated into decision-making processes and adaptive management cycles are insufficient to engender change".[25] Tasmania can look to Victoria's model for a best-practice example of reporting against SDGs in the context of the health of the environment.

However, the Tasmanian Government has not produced a SOE Report since 2009, despite a legislative requirement to do so every five years.[26] The TPC has now committed to producing a SOE Report by June 30, 2024. However, with less than a third of the funding that it cost to produce last time, almost 15 years of environmental data to be analysed, and less than 12 months until the next report is due, producing a SOE Report that meets appropriate standards is unlikely.

Tasmanians are in the dark about the scale and detail of environmental decline that is occurring across the state. Further, the development of the state's Sustainability Strategy is

[23] Australian Government (2023) *Reporting status*, https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/reporting-status.

[24] Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria (2023) *Science for Sustainable Development*, https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CESV_Framework%20Report%202023_FINAL_WEB_OCT.pdf

[25] Ibid, p7.

[26] State Policies and Projects Act 1993 s29.

being done in absence of this essential appraisal of the health of Tasmania's environment. It is difficult to see how the Sustainability Strategy can be meaningfully prepared in the absence of information about the foundation of sustainability: the impact of humans on the environment.

Recommendation: The Sustainability Strategy should have regular reporting of progress against SDGs, including yearly update reports and online reporting against SDG Indicators.

Recommendation: The findings of Tasmania's SOE Report should inform goals and targets of the Sustainability Strategy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The delivery of the UN's SDGs must be integrated into national and subnational planning if there is to be any chance of success at a global level. Tasmania's forthcoming Sustainability Strategy provides an opportunity identify sustainability issues in Tasmania and develop a roadmap to address them. Achieving the SDGs at a state level requires ambition from all sectors, but it hinges on a strong commitment from the Tasmanian government to take strong action to address sustainability issues.

To ensure the Sustainability Strategy will drive Tasmania's achievement of the SDGs, the Australia Institute Tasmania recommends the following:

1. Strong action on climate change, including protecting the natural environment, should underpin Tasmania's Sustainability Strategy.

2. The Sustainability Strategy should be based on clear, ambitious, quantifiable and time-bound targets that are evidence-based and will result improved sustainability outcomes for Tasmania.

3. The Sustainability Strategy should have regular reporting of progress against SDGs, including yearly update reports and online reporting against SDG Indicators.

4. The findings of Tasmania's SOE Report should inform goals and targets of the Sustainability Strategy.