

# **2010 CLAIR Forum:** **Balancing the environment with regional economic development**

## **Review and reflections**

**Graham Sansom**  
**Director, ACELG**



# ACELG overview

- NOT a research institute: practical focus on needed change and improvement in local government
- Consortium: UTS (Centre for Local Government); University of Canberra (ANZSOG Institute); ANZSOG; LGMA; IPWEA
- \$8m federal 'endowment' for minimum 5-year operations: total budget about \$12m over 5.5 years (contributions by consortium partners, other funds)
- Currently expect at least 7 years operations: major evaluation after 3 years and long-term sustainability plan
- Inaugural Board meeting held 1 October 2009
- Official launch and Project (business) Plan adopted in December 2009: Plan to be reviewed annually



*The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government is a unique collaboration of universities and professional bodies committed to the advancement of local government. The Centre's vision is: **World-class local government to meet the emerging challenges of 21st century Australia***

[Home](#)
[About ACELG](#)
[Programs](#)
[Library](#)
[Partners](#)
[News & Events](#)
[Contact](#)

## Welcome to ACELG



ACELG was established in mid 2009 to showcase innovation and best practice across local government and encourage the adoption of innovative practices and solutions.

On this website, you will find information about the governance structure of ACELG and information on ACELG's various programs.

[read more »](#)

## Program Quick Links

› [Research and policy foresight](#)

› [Innovation and best practice](#)

› [Governance and strategic leadership](#)

› [Organisation capacity building](#)

› [Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government](#)

› [Workforce development](#)

## News & Events



### ACELG Website Launch

30th April 2010, Sydney

This website was launched on 30 April and will be under further intensive development over the coming months. [more »](#)



### Research Forum

26th April 2010, University of Canberra

ACELG convened the first Research Forum on 22 March 2010. It involved almost all of the currently active local government researchers from more than a dozen universities together with representatives from local government associations and professional bodies, [more »](#)

## › [Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

# Review

- Fundamental value and importance of natural resources:
  - Environmental quality ('clean and green'), biodiversity, agricultural production (food security)
- Scope for environmentally sensitive development
- Lifestyle factors: apparent attractiveness of more 'environmentally friendly' living, but what about major urban areas?
- Goal of 'transformational change'
- Need for forums to discuss and set clear objectives, plus effective decision-making frameworks

# Three dimensions of sustainability

- Meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of **future generations** to meet their needs (inter-generational equity)
- Maintain and where possible improve quality of life within the **carrying capacity of ecosystems** (retaining biodiversity)
- Effectively **manage the inter-relationships** between economic, social and environmental elements (balance and trade-offs?)

# NSW legislation

- Refers to ESD - ecologically sustainable development - Australia was the only country to adopt this term
- No definition of ESD, but reference to 'principles' in LG Act and elsewhere:
  - **precautionary**
  - **inter-generational equity**
  - **conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity**
  - improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms
- Other commonly applied sustainability principles:
  - social justice
  - public participation
  - cultural diversity

# Role of local government

## NSW Council's Charter:

- to exercise community leadership
- to engage in long-term strategic planning on behalf of the local community
- to properly manage...the environment...in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- to have regard to the long term and cumulative effects of its decisions
- to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights

*\* section 8 of Local Government Act*

# Integrated Planning and Reporting

- Requires a 10+ year Community Strategic Plan
- Four essential elements mirror Council's Charter:
  - **Economic, social, environmental, civic leadership**
- Plan is to be 'owned' by community with council as the 'steward'
- It is to deal with all the key issues facing the local area – not just the council's direct responsibilities
- It must be the product of extensive and genuine community engagement
- Therefore a potential mechanism for achieving 'balance' and handling trade-offs, but:
  - **How is this to be done?**
  - **What about the other dimensions of sustainability?**

# Can we achieve a viable balance?

- Need to address all three dimensions of sustainability
- Club of Rome 1972 'Limits to Growth':
  - Interaction between population growth, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion
- 6<sup>th</sup> key factor: need to reduce gap between rich and poor and make room for economic growth in developing world
  - Highlighted by Greenhouse problem: some argue the emissions reductions required in developed countries are inconceivable
- Are we willing to re-visit the concept of the 'steady state' economy? (1970s discussions before 'globalisation')
  - 'Development' rather than 'growth'?
  - How to explain and promote the lifestyle changes required? (confronting our affluence and reducing unnecessary consumption)
  - An alternative measure to GDP? (focus on 'wellbeing' not growth)

# The debate

- ‘Big Australia’ or ‘Sustainable Australia’ ?
- “...it is time to stop pretending that mindlessly chasing economic growth is compatible with sustainability...an alternative to this doomed model is now a priority before a global recession, an unstable climate, or a combination of the two forces itself upon us.”
  - Prof Tim Jackson, UK Sustainable Development Commission