



# City Of Melbourne Submission to the Australian Senate Enquiry Into The Sustainable Development Goals

29 March 2018

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29 March 2018

Committee Secretary  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA VIC 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Committee

## **SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE ENQUIRY INTO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

City of Melbourne is pleased to provide a submission to the Department of the Senate – Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Today, Melbourne is the nation's fastest growing city and is driving the nation's economy by contributing almost a third to all growth in gross domestic product. With a \$92.1 billion economy, a weekday population of almost one million, 455,800 jobs, 16,600 businesses and more than two million visitors annually, the City of Melbourne is undergoing tremendous technological, economic and ecological change, and is at the heart of Melbourne's growth<sup>1</sup>.

City of Melbourne has a vision of Melbourne as a bold, inspirational and sustainable city. To achieve this, we must become more nimble and more responsive to our community's needs. We must be better at anticipating and responding to challenges and opportunities as they emerge, recognising the global context in which we operate.

City of Melbourne congratulates the Australian Government for adopting the SDGs in 2015. Specifically, City of Melbourne recognises SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities is a global response to the fact our planet will soon need to support up to nine billion people and our cities consume the most resources, produce the most waste and use the most energy. In addition to this, we are currently witnessing a rise of social and economic inequality.

While the SDGs were designed with national governments in mind, City of Melbourne recognises the 2030 Agenda requires action from a broad range of stakeholders and partnerships. As a major Australian capital city, we have a key role to play in localising and addressing the issues articulated in the Goals.

As a local government organisation that has strong ties to the community, we are well positioned to assist the Australian Government to progress the Goals. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government to identify opportunities for collaboration.

City of Melbourne recommends the Australian Government develop:

- an integrated implementation plan that can guide Australian business, all levels of government, NGOs and the community to assist in the delivery of the SDGs. A coordinated approach will strengthen partnerships and understanding across sectors of how different SDGs interconnect
- a toolkit or guideline for different sectors to take action on the SDGs, to help deliver on the targets adopted by the Australian Government and feed into national performance indicators

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<sup>1</sup> City of Melbourne Council Plan 2017–2021

- a reporting and evaluation framework all levels of government and business can easily feed into, that doesn't contribute to additional reporting burden
- a communications campaign to raise awareness and incite action amongst business and the community.

Please note that this feedback is provided on behalf of the management of the City of Melbourne and does not represent an endorsed view from Councillors.

## **Response to the Terms of Reference**

### **A - the understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community;**

#### **Context**

City of Melbourne recently conducted a desktop assessment to understand how it was delivering against the SDGs and to identify opportunities for improvement.<sup>2</sup> The assessment revealed there is an opportunity to improve the knowledge of the SDGs across the organisation and how they can be used in practice to achieve outcomes for the community. Furthermore, the assessment involved a desktop review of other local governments in Australia and it was determined there was low engagement in this sector to date.

City of Melbourne has not engaged with the community to gauge levels of awareness of the SDGs.

There is significant opportunity yet to be realised for the SDGs to be utilised by organisations, including local governments, as a practical global reference point to think holistically about sustainable development, while providing a common language to engage and communicate with the community to enact positive change.

#### **Opportunities**

However, the communication burden on local government is already high. Local government would not be able to achieve a broad communication program in isolation. Opportunity exists for a national communication approach to effectively raise awareness and understanding and communicate performance against the SDGs in a way that engages government, businesses and the public.

#### **Proposed recommendation**

The Australian Government has a stronger role to play to raise the profile of the SDGs and articulate what they mean for the Australian community. This could take the form of a team within the Federal Government or an independent body whose focus is to:

- articulate and communicate what the SDGs mean for Australia, all levels of government and different sectors of society
- articulate and communicate what the SDGs mean for the Australian people and how they can play a role at an individual level
- implement a national communications campaign to raise awareness and understanding about the SDGs targeted at the community, business and local and state government
- develop, articulate and communicate Australia's plan to implement the SDGs
- ensure appropriate resourcing to deliver against the plan to implement the SDGs
- promote how local governments and non-government organisations are progressing on the SDGs

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/sustainable-development-goals.pdf>

- facilitate knowledge sharing between business, community and government via summits, conferences or community events.

## **B - the potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDG;**

### **Context**

[Future Melbourne 2026 Plan \(PDF 2.98MB\)](#)<sup>3</sup> is the primary document that guides City of Melbourne's future planning and focus. The first phase of engagement to develop Future Melbourne 2026 required community input framed around five [future trends](#).<sup>4</sup> The five future trends address issues encompassed within the SDGs. However, City of Melbourne can see the value in how the SDGs provide a holistic approach to sustainable development aligned with the rest of the world.

A large number of community engagement programs currently inform Council Planning on issues of importance to the community. While the scope of the engagement is quite wide, these issues are not always considered in the context of a clear global agenda (with the exception of aligning to the Paris Agreement), placing the Council at risk of failing to identify issues of importance the community is unaware of or don't consider to be important, but which may impact them.

The internal stakeholder group undertaking the City of Melbourne desktop assessment agreed that using the SDGs as a holistic global reference point would assist in driving integrated thinking across the organisation. The SDGs are not just environmental goals – they highlight the interconnectedness between social, ecological and economic issues. The SDGs have the potential to provide City of Melbourne with a common language to engage people in meaningful conversation to achieve positive outcomes and recognise synergies in our work; which could be strengthened by a set of targets and indicators that all staff could collectively work towards. As a result, there is opportunity for the Australian Government to set the Australian context in which to operate and for the City of Melbourne to align its strategy, targets and performance indicators.

For City of Melbourne, the desktop assessment identified an opportunity to prioritise and strengthen delivery against key SDGs to promote integrated thinking across strategies and plans: SDG 1 No poverty, SDG 2 Zero hunger, SDG 4 Quality education, SDG 5 Gender equality, SDG 10 Reduced inequalities, SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 14 Life below water and SDG 15 Life on land. If these issues are not addressed they would undermine progress against the other goals, in particular affecting those people who are the most vulnerable in our community.

Notably, Indigenous peoples globally are most affected by lack of progress on the SDGs. The City of Melbourne is committed to a city with an Aboriginal focus and the SDGs provide a pathway to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Melbourne to ensure their interests are reflected across a range of sustainable development issues.

### **Opportunities**

There is a lack of awareness and clarity on what the Federal Government is doing to address the SDGs and how to translate the national effort to state and local levels.

City of Melbourne is commencing work to incorporate the SDGs into strategic planning processes.

Specifically, incorporating the SDGs will assist thinking about how strategies can contribute to multiple outcomes and integrate with other strategies to amplify those outcomes.

Without a clear picture of what the SDGs mean practically at a federal and state level, there is a risk of inefficiencies and lost opportunity. Furthermore, there is risk competing priorities may work against each other

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/future-melbourne-2026-plan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/future/trends>

if a coordinated approach is not undertaken. A risk to realising the full potential of the SDGs would be if Government departments worked in silos focusing on Goals they deem relevant to their specific sector, while not engaging in Goals that intersect. We need to maximise the opportunity the SDG Framework presents in approaching these issues holistically.

Opportunity exists to embed the SDGs in local government and non-government organisations' strategies. The following case study demonstrates how applying an SDG lens across sectors can bring about benefits and new opportunities:

### **Case study: Applying the SDGs to City of Melbourne Strategy Development**

It was identified that a number of departments could work together to achieve better outcomes by applying an SDG lens and raising awareness of the intersection between SDGs:

- Low Carbon Team: priority to reduce emissions
- Waste Management Team: priority to improve amenity by removing waste across the municipality
- Urban Forest and Ecology: priority to ensure a resilient green infrastructure.

Following the desktop assessment, an SDG lens was applied to the development of our new Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy. This process highlighted leaf litter as a major street sweeping waste stream contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Future consideration by the Urban Forest and Ecology Team to select tree species near roads that drop fewer leaves would lead to reduced need for street sweeping and waste to landfill. Furthermore, waste management practices could consider collecting leaf litter and returning it to parks and gardens in the form of compost, improving soil conditions for growth. All of the above action reduces carbon emissions delivering on multiple priorities (including potential cost reduction), which could also act against each other.

The outcome of this process highlighted the Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy could deliver on SDGs that were more obviously linked to other Departments and strategies across the organisation. This highlights the need for a multidisciplinary integrated implementation plan at a high level supported by a more localised toolkit that can guide Australian business, all levels of government, NGOs and the community to assist in the delivery of the SDGs. A coordinated approach will strengthen partnerships and understanding across sectors of how different SDGs interconnect.

### **Potential Costs**

Unless the SDGs are integrated or streamlined with existing reporting frameworks (e.g. the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework) there is a risk of added costs to Councils with regard to increased resourcing to meet additional reporting requirements. It will be important that the Australian Government consult with State and Local Government before developing a reporting framework to ensure there is no net increase in reporting burden.

The benefit to a streamlined, integrated measurement framework for Local Government to contribute to is that we will have the ability to compare and learn from other Local Government organisations. For example, cities will be able to benchmark against other cities and identify specific areas where we can collaborate or replicate initiatives that are working.

### **Proposed recommendation**

The Australian Government has a stronger role to play to progress a coordinated effort to ensure opportunities are realised, risks are mitigated and the overall benefit represents best value for money. This could take the form of a team within the Federal Government or an independent body whose focus is to:

- develop a coordinated implementation plan for the Australian Government to deliver the SDGs
- ensure appropriate resourcing to deliver against the implementation plan for SDGs
- provide resources including potential funding opportunities to encourage innovative thinking and initiatives that further SDGs – particularly focussed on SDGs need to be accelerated
- develop a toolkit for business, community, NGOs and all levels of government to take action on the SDGs to assist in the Australian Government's efforts to deliver the SDGs
- promote progress of the SDGs
- facilitate knowledge sharing at events for different sectors (conferences, community events, summits, etc.)
- track performance and identify opportunities for collaboration.

## **C - what governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes;**

### **Context**

While the SDGs were designed with national governments in mind and are a voluntary agreement among the United Nations' 193 member states, the SDGs can also be used by local governments and non-government organisations.

Cities will play a key role supporting the Australian Government to deliver on the SDGs, as our cities generate the majority of economic activity but also consume the most resources, produce the most waste and use the most energy.

To enable efficient uptake of the SDGs, a coordinated approach is needed from the top down. A clear articulation of what the SDGs means for Australia and the Australian Government would facilitate improved uptake by state and local government and improved alignment to support delivery of the SDGs by the Australian Government.

### **Opportunities**

There is a lack of clarity and awareness of how state and local government can meaningfully contribute to the requirements set for the Australian Government to progress the SDGs. Opportunity exists to provide clarity about accountability for the SDGs.

### **Proposed recommendation**

The Australian Government has a stronger role to play to ensure state and local governments are contributing to the SDGs. This could take the form of a team within the Federal Government or an independent body whose focus is to:

- set the Australian Government targets our state and local governments should be contributing to and develop a guideline as to how these levels of government can feed up in to reporting at the Federal level
- collate data from state and local government reporting mechanisms to contribute to the National Voluntary Review
- develop a coordinated implementation plan for the Australian Government to deliver the SDGs
- develop a toolkit for business, community, NGOs, all levels of government to take action on the SDGs to assist in the Australian Government's efforts to deliver the SDGs

- provide resources (potentially in the form of grant funding, toolkits, guidelines, networking opportunities, interactive website or events) to assist state and local governments to deliver on the SDGs.

For state and local governments, the SDGs can then be localised further to address specific issues that are relevant in a local context that work to contribute to the national and global effort. To ensure accountability, existing state and local government reporting processes could provide the mechanism to report performance towards the set national targets.

Capturing data to demonstrate how we are progressing and being transparent about both positive and negative performance is key to determining where resources and efforts should be placed. A 'National Scorecard' should be filtered down throughout all levels of government and sectors of society.

Refer [City of Melbourne's high level scorecard \(PDF 268KB\)](#)<sup>5</sup> developed through the desktop assessment.

A collaborative review with Local and State government to understand the reporting requirements that already exist for Local Government is strongly suggested before developing any further reporting mechanisms to improve efficiencies and reduce reporting burden, not add to it.

City of Melbourne produces an annual report which complies with State Government legislation. Reporting requirements are stipulated by the *Local Government Act 1989 Vic* and associated regulations, and there are specific frameworks in place we must adhere to. City of Melbourne also uses the Global Reporting Initiative as an operational reporting framework, reports against Council Plan performance and various Council commitments (note: 40 per cent of SDG indicators are directly and/or indirectly linked to GRI disclosures). City of Melbourne also contributes to other city indicator sets for example the City Performance Framework. These existing frameworks could be utilised for a more efficient and integrated approach.

## **D - examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.**

A number of cities around the world have started mapping the SDGs against local initiatives and indicators, ahead of efforts to decide specific 'indicators' on which their national government will report their implementation progress.

The U.S. has made the most progress overtly through the development of the U.S. Cities SDG Index. There has been no work undertaken in the Australian city context to take a similar approach.

### **U.S. Cities SDG Index**

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) partnered with SDG USA, a non-governmental organisation that aims to spur interest and focus on the SDGs in the United States, to create the U.S. Cities SDG Index. The SDSN promotes the achievement of the SDGs worldwide by partnering with universities, governments, think tanks, and community leaders to accelerate SDG progress. The U.S. Cities SDG Index uses the 17 SDGs as a lens to examine progress towards sustainable development in the 100 most populous U.S. cities.

The U.S. Cities SDG Index hopes to encourage progress against the SDGs and amplify other good practices across America by providing an American-centric snapshot of sustainable development at the local level. The U.S. Index consists of 49 indicators that capture the most pressing challenges facing American cities, as well as spanning the breadth of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

The U.S. Cities SDG Index includes:

- a consolidated database of indicators to monitor sustainable development in America

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/sustainable-development-goals.pdf>



- a snapshot of where U.S. cities stand on SDG implementation to help identify priorities for early action in each city
- a list of data gaps that are hindering cities' and the federal government's ability to effectively monitor sustainable development at the local level.

The Index and indicators within it can also serve as a tool for benchmarking progress on different aspects of sustainable development and help city administrators prioritise policy and investment areas. San Jose, Baltimore and New York City are taking steps to implement the SDGs within their jurisdictions. They are surveying how their citywide plans and data monitoring systems could be made more holistic and ambitious, consulting local stakeholders to define priorities, and developing strategies to achieve sustainable development through evidence-based policy and investment.<sup>6</sup>

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Enquiry.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>6</sup> <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/us-cities-sdg-index/>