

Dr Col Gellatly  
NSW State Plan  
Premier's Department  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

8 September 2006

**Re: Response to the draft NSW State Plan**

Dear Dr Gellatly,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft NSW State Plan.

We welcome the development of a Plan which will drive government policy and planning and provide for increased accountability of Ministers and departmental heads to the people of New South Wales. We also support the 'whole of government' approach to long-term planning and the triple bottom-line reporting framework embodied in the Plan.

While we support many of the priorities and measures of success highlighted in the draft Plan, we believe significant improvements can be made by realigning the focus towards one of community harmony and shared prosperity. In particular, we wish to highlight a few key points:

1. The critical task of overcoming socioeconomic disadvantage needs a far greater focus in the Plan than is found in the draft;
2. The theme of 'Respect and Responsibility' should be re-framed as 'Safe, vibrant and harmonious communities', with strategies and measures realigned accordingly;
3. The theme of 'Growing prosperity across NSW' should be re-framed as 'Growing prosperity for all', with strategies and measures realigned accordingly;
4. The theme of 'Environment for Living' should be re-framed to focus on the needs of the environment itself rather than service provision.

We also look forward to seeing more detail in the final Plan concerning how it will be integrated with existing Strategies and Strategic Plans, what specific indicators will be used for each 'measure of success', how policy distortion will be avoided, and how the Government will report on its progress.

Detailed comments on each of the above points are provided on the following pages. There is also a summary of recommendations at the end of the submission.

UnitingCare NSW.ACT looks forward to continuing to work with the Government on the implementation of the Plan.

Regards,



Rev. Harry Herbert  
Executive Director

# Detailed Response to the draft State Plan

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## ***About UnitingCare NSW.ACT***

*UnitingCare NSW.ACT* is the peak body for all community services, chaplaincy, and social justice and advocacy activities of the Uniting Church in the New South Wales Synod. *UnitingCare NSW.ACT* is one of the Boards within the New South Wales Synod and is part of the national network of *UnitingCare Australia*.

The Uniting Church is one of the largest non-government providers of community services in New South Wales. These services include aged care, childcare, services to disadvantaged children, young people and families, counselling and mediation, and support for people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities.

Our view of social justice is guided by the Christian scriptures, theological reflection, insights of social, political and economic analysis, the statements of the Synod and Assembly, and our encounters with people and their life experiences in our work. *UnitingCare NSW.ACT* operates under a Social Justice Charter which guides our internal operations, relationships with service users and advocacy work.

## ***General Comments***

*UnitingCare NSW.ACT* supports the development of a State Plan which integrates the different strategic plans and policies of the NSW Government into a coherent policy direction. We also support the use of a controlled number of benchmark indicators which will provide the basis for increased accountability to the community on the wellbeing of the state. Through NCOSS, we have been advocating for such a Plan for many years.

We also support the triple bottom-line (social, economic, environmental) reporting framework adopted in the draft Plan. It is important that we measure the wellbeing of the state holistically, taking into account non-financial indicators of welfare. After all, economic growth is not an end in itself, but rather a means to improving wellbeing as experienced through health, education, safe and vibrant communities, and lifestyles that appreciate, rather than degrade, the natural environment.

We have some concerns about the apparent haste with which the Plan is being put together. We note the absence of any consultation with the community or the NGO sector prior to the release of the draft Plan, and the short time frame between its release and the scheduled publication of the final Plan, which leaves little time for changes and suggests an unwillingness to hear critical feedback.

We also notice that the summary page of the Plan has different wording to the main text (including on the measures of success), and even seems confused as to whether 'planning what we do' (yellow) is a theme or not. Furthermore, some performance measures are quite vague, while others are precise, and no information has been provided on the specific

indicators to be used in measuring them. We suggest the final Plan provide very specific measures and include an additional column with the name of the indicator(s) to be used for each 'measure of success', so this is clear from the outset.

One thing that is not clear from the draft Plan is how it will sit with the numerous other plans, policies and strategies across different areas of government. Many of these are mentioned in relevant parts of the draft Plan, but many are not and between them there are thousands of targets not mentioned in the 'measures of success', plus numerous programs and policies that need to continue to operate but do not fall under any of the major planning statements. Given that the document clearly states that 'the whole machinery of Government will be realigned to ensure that the focus is on achieving the priorities in the plan' (p11), and that 'Government activities that do not contribute to these priorities will be carefully scrutinised to determine whether there are opportunities to re-allocate resources', there exists a great danger of policy distortion and lost opportunities if a comprehensive set of measures is not included. Furthermore, it limits the possibility of investment in new policy priorities, including affordable housing (one of the Premier's key commitments on taking office). If the intention is to provide a small list of 'key' indicators, then it should not completely drive allocation of resources.

As a very simple example, what happens to the Rural Fire Service or Aged Care under this proposal? Both are critical services, with existing policies and resource allocations, that receive no mention in the draft Plan.

Given this commitment to aligning the State Budget with the State Plan, we are also greatly concerned at the lack of focus on and commitment to addressing disadvantage in the draft. UnitingCare NSW.ACT believes that tackling disadvantage should be at the heart of all government policy. The Plan should thus be driven by commitments to efforts to reduce disadvantage so that everyone in New South Wales enjoys a healthy, safe and prosperous life. We suggest this be done by re-framing the economic theme as 'Growing prosperity *for all*' (emphasis added), with specific measures and strategies relating to ensuring everyone is benefiting from increased prosperity, and by adding a priority focus on reducing disadvantage to the 'Improving Services' theme. This is spelt out in more detail later in this submission.

Lastly, in comparison to *Growing Victoria Together* we notice that while in some cases the NSW measures are preferable to the Victorian equivalents, a number of measures from Victoria have not been picked up here that track democratic participation and government accountability. We would welcome the inclusion of this priority item in the final Plan. We also note that the Victorian Government's annual reporting on their Plan is rich in detail (which is great for policy analysts) but missing a summary 'report card' giving clear and simple updates on progress to the public. We strongly recommend the NSW Government commit to providing this public summary. We are confident that the NGO sector will do it on your behalf if you don't.

## ***Theme 2: Respect and Responsibility***

UnitingCare NSW.ACT is very concerned at the framing of this theme. A modern justice system must address the causes of crime as well as crime itself. It should be concerned with the over-representation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds (especially Indigenous people) and with early intervention and prevention strategies that build up communities at risk.

In this light, we believe the Victorian approach ('Friendly, safe and confident communities') is significantly more desirable and places questions of law and order in their proper context –

as serving the goal of safe communities that people enjoy living in, rather than ends in themselves. Picking up some of the language already in the draft Plan, we recommend a new theme heading of 'Safe, vibrant and harmonious communities'.

Some of this thinking is already clearly visible in the draft Plan. We welcome the linking of overcoming distrust and fear in the community with crime. We also welcome the attention to early intervention and diversion programs, including the Court Liaison Service, the Drug Court, and Juvenile Justice Conferencing.

We also welcome the commitment to reducing recidivism, which is currently the highest in the nation. However, strategies to reduce recidivism through rehabilitation and post-release support programs for offenders are noticeable by their absence. Present rehabilitation services are woefully inadequate, and indeed non-existent for people in prison for less than six months. Prisons today serve more to *de*-habilitate offenders (hence the term 'universities of crime') – which is one of the key drivers of a high recidivism rate.

One of the problems with the theme at present is that 'harmony' is understood primarily in terms of cross-ethnic 'integration and understanding'. This is a goal we strongly support, but a wider sense of the term which includes notions of participation and strong community bonds would improve the Plan (and make more sense of the 'measure of success' already listed under this priority). This can then be linked to the measure of 'people visiting parks, public land, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities' (currently under 'Environment for Living') under this new, broader theme.

We also recommend adding measures from *Growing Victoria Together* concerning appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism, and ability to get help when you need it, in this theme. All of these factors influence the sense of local community attachment or alienation, and thus impact on the community positively (vibrant community) or negatively (via crime and social exclusion).

Regarding the priority of people feeling safe, we strongly recommend that the Government has an active role to play in reducing the gap between actual crime rates and perception of safety by implementing a law and order communications policy that refrains from sensationalising rhetoric. 'Tough on crime' rhetoric serves to inflame rather than rationalise public debate, and reinforces the sense that crime is running out of control.

### ***Theme 3: Improving Services***

We are aware that this section has received a significant amount of attention in the NCOSS submission, which we support. The following comments are to highlight a few specific concerns of ours in this area.

UnitingCare NSW.ACT welcomes the commitment to high-quality services, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, found in the text of this section. We strongly support the commitment to increasing the proportion of the State Budget spent on early intervention and prevention programs. However it is worth remembering that this is an output measure, not an outcome measure. Ideally, the measure would concern 'reducing disadvantage'.

We note that *Growing Victoria Together* contains a measure of success which says 'disadvantage in health, education and housing among communities will be reduced'. We would strongly support the inclusion of disadvantage as a separate focus area with a similar measure.

The measures of success in education have a strong equity focus, which we support. Our only suggestion would be to ensure that Aboriginal student results are reported separately in the progress reports, so that reducing the learning gap remains at the forefront of state planning.

We also support the commitment to health prevention and promotion efforts, including better primary care for chronic illnesses, to reduce reliance on acute care. However, the measures do not reflect issues of equity directly. In particular, we believe there should be a separate measure concerning Aboriginal health, such as 'reducing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people'.

Likewise, we welcome the discussion about mental health and the challenges the state faces in this area, but we are disappointed to see that the only 'measure of success' in this area concerns workforce participation. While this remains an important issue for people suffering from mental illness or disability, it has not been identified as the primary concern by any reports from consumer groups in recent years. From discussions with our mental health services, the best measure would be 'access to community mental health care' as this is the critical problem in the sector, from which other issues (including homelessness, hospitalisation and involvement in the criminal justice system) flow.

Because of the critical nature of the problem, and the vulnerability of the people involved, we also strongly recommend the Plan include a measure of homelessness in the state. If we want to demonstrate compassion to the most vulnerable, the homeless are certainly people for whom improved services are required. This is a question of basic human dignity for thousands of people.

#### ***Theme 4: Growing prosperity across NSW***

We support the general thrust of this theme, and in particular the commitment to growing regional and rural economies. We support the intention of the Government to pursue growth in high-wage, high-skilled jobs and take advantage of existing competitive advantages.

However, we believe there is a larger goal, which is to ensure that everyone in New South Wales shares this prosperity. As well as rural & regional communities, this Plan should be concerned with socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

We believe the Plan would be enhanced by re-framing the title of this theme as 'Growing prosperity for all'. The reference to 'for all' allows for focus on both rural & regional and disadvantaged communities. With this enlarged focus, additional measures of success would be reducing unemployment and underemployment, and the proportion of people living below the (Henderson) poverty line.

Whether or not the Government adopts this suggestion, we recommend that the measures of success concerning AQF qualification levels be increased to Certificate IV or perhaps Diploma. According to the AQF website, Certificate III jobs include animal attendant, baker, beauty therapist, homecare worker, mechanic, pastry cook, and plumber (we very much doubt budding mechanics or plumbers would find much work with just this qualification). We doubt these are the "more rewarding and higher skilled jobs" to which the draft Plan refers.

Using qualifications as a measure of success is also somewhat questionable, as it could be measuring high-skilled people in low-skilled jobs. We suggest a measure of rising median wages would reflect the intentions of the Plan more fully. These measures could also sit side by side, so that correlations (or lack thereof) could be tracked. We also note in this regard that there are no strategies relating to TAFE in this section, despite the interest in AQF

qualifications. We would also like to see more strategies on providing pathways to employment for vulnerable groups such as young people, early school leavers and people returning to the workforce.

### ***Theme 5: Environment for Living***

We welcome the commitment to sustainability on the draft Plan. However, we believe the draft does not adequately acknowledge the seriousness of the threat of ecological disasters such as salinity, the ill-health of the Murray-Darling river system, and in particular global warming. These, and other environmental threats such as Peak Oil and declining rainfall, require urgent and significant remedial measures on the part of the Government, business and the community. The simple fact is that Australians are living way above our environmental means. At some point the Government will need to explain this to the general public. The later this happens, the more restrictive the remedial policies will need to be.

We support the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions and achievement of the NRC targets, but suggest these be separated as they measure very distinct things. The greenhouse gas targets should also be spelled out, and it should be made clear that this is a measure of state-wide emissions, not simply those for which the Government is directly responsible. Reference to expanding and strengthening BASIX should also be listed as a key strategy in relation to this question. We would also like to see strategies for increasing use of accredited Green Power appear in the final Plan.

We suggest that reliability to electricity services is in fact a services question, rather than environmental question, and should thus move to the Improving Services section. We would also be comfortable with this measure being dropped altogether. Water reliability needs to be achieved in a way consistent with environmental sustainability, and this should be reflected in the Plan lest it be inferred that there is simply a problem of supply.

We welcome the commitment to improving the urban environment by improving the liveability of cities, including efforts to reduce travel distances and increasing use of rail for freight. Indeed, it may make more sense for the measures concerning public transport use (currently under Improving Services) to be placed here, as increased public transport use would certainly improve the liveability of our cities and towns.

However, we do not believe 'supply of land for housing increases' is a helpful measure, as this is not an end in itself. Indeed, increasing sprawl does not improve liveability at all, and it has impacts on much-needed agricultural land and open spaces in the western fringes of Sydney in particular. It is in fact a strategy for keeping housing affordable, not an outcome in its own right. It is also something for which the Government has existing planning arrangements in place covering the next 10 years. We believe this measure should be dropped from the final Plan.

The key issue to which this measure relates is housing affordability. Sydney is currently one of the most expensive cities in the world to live in, and people on low incomes find it especially hard to find affordable housing. This is a topic which the Premier nominated as one of his three priorities on taking office, but we are yet to see any efforts to address it. We recommend, in place of the land supply measure, a measure of 'housing stress' (the number of people on low incomes who spend more than 30% of their income on rent). An alternative might be to use the price-to-income index of housing affordability used by the OECD.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

1. Ensure the text of measures on the summary page matches the text in the body of the document
2. Ensure all measures are precise and actual indicators to be used are named on the summary page
3. Provide more detail on the relationship between the State Plan and other major strategic plans and general activities of the Government, particularly in terms of the meaning of the commitment to align resources to the priorities identified in the Plan
4. Commit to providing yearly reports on progress to Parliament, including a 1 or 2 page summary 'report card' for public consumption
5. Name overcoming disadvantage as one of the underlying priorities of the Plan itself
6. Rename the second theme as "Safe, vibrant and harmonious communities" and adjust the framing of this theme accordingly
7. Add measures of democratic participation and community harmony (such as found in *Growing Victoria Together*) into the final Plan to Theme 2
8. Move the measure concerning 'visitation of parks and cultural activities' (currently #29) into the renamed Theme 2
9. Add strategies concerning rehabilitation of offenders and reducing unnecessary fear of crime to Theme 2
10. Add a focus item on 'reducing entrenched disadvantage' in Theme 3 and list this as a measure of success (as per *Growing Victoria Together*)
11. Report separately on Aboriginal educational outcomes when reporting on the two education measures
12. Add a measure of equity in health between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to the health measures
13. Add a measure of 'access to community mental health care' to the section on compassion and support for the most vulnerable
14. Move the measure of 'reliability of electricity supply' (currently #23) to Theme 3
15. Add a measure of 'reduced rates of homelessness' to the section on compassion and support for the most vulnerable
16. Rename Theme 4 as "Growing prosperity for all" and name shared prosperity as one of the key aims of the Government
17. Add measures of unemployment and underemployment to Theme 4
18. Add a measure of the proportion of people living below the Poverty Line to Theme 4
19. Add a measure of 'rising median wages' to Theme 4
20. Adjust the measures of qualifications to track Certificate IV or Diploma-level qualifications
21. Add strategies around improving TAFE to Theme 4 in line with the commitment to a highly skilled workforce
22. Strengthen the introductory language of Theme 5 to acknowledge the very stark challenges facing the state from environmental crises
23. Re-word the measure of 'reliability of water supplies' to acknowledge the need to do so in a way that promotes ecological sustainability
24. Separate the measures concerning NRC targets and greenhouse gas emissions, and make clear that the latter is a state-wide measure
25. Remove the measure of 'supply of housing land increases' (currently #28)
26. Add a measure of housing stress to Theme 5
27. Add a measure of housing affordability to Theme 5
28. Add reference to expanding and strengthening BASIX and increasing uptake of accredited Green Power as key strategies in Theme 5