

The Brundtland Report and sustainable development in New Zealand

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Preface

In April 1987, after nearly three years of intensive research, public hearings and debate, the World Commission on Environment and Development issued the report *Our Common Future*. Commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report (after Chairperson Gro Harlem Brundtland), it focused attention on the need for urgent action to reverse the downward trend of global environmental degradation and increasing poverty. The primary recommendation of the report was for nations to adopt policies of “sustainable development”, and to develop a greater sense of multilateralism i.e. strengthen international relationships and develop a ‘world view’. Along with all other countries of the world New Zealand was asked to respond to the challenges issued in the Report, and to integrate sustainable development into its national goals.

The objective of this publication is to review critically the recommendations of the Brundtland Report, and to examine the issues raised for New Zealand by the recommendations and conclusions of the Report. The main focus is on understanding the implications of “sustainable development” in general terms, rather than considering each aspect of the Report in detail.

The structure of this publication is as follows. A brief review of the Brundtland Commission’s work and process is outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a critical assessment, drawing together a number of critiques and commentaries, and bringing out the strengths and weaknesses of the Report. In Chapter 3 the response to the Report in a number of countries is outlined and compared with the response in New Zealand. Some of the broad-ranging implications of sustainable development are then discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, I have tried to draw together the main features of the sustainable development debate and some specific implications for New Zealand.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 The World Commission on Environment and Development

In late 1983 the thirty-eighth session of the United Nations adopted a resolution that created, as an independent body, the World Commission on Environment and Development. The mission of the Commission was to formulate a “global agenda for change”; specifically it was to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development;

- to translate environmental concern into achieving common, and mutually supportive objectives;
- to consider how the international community can deal more effectively with environmental concerns; and
- to define the perceptions, goals and agenda for action needed to successfully protect and enhance the environment (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1985).

Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland, then leader of the Norwegian Labour Party, was asked to chair the Commission.¹ A further 22 Commissioners from 21 countries were appointed, at least half of whom came from developing countries. The Commissioners, each of whom served in a personal capacity and not as representatives of their governments, included prominent political figures and leaders in environment and development. A Secretariat was established in Geneva in 1984 and a substantial body of professional staff was engaged to assist the Commission in its work.

An early report from the Commission laid out the issues, strategy and workplan that were to be adopted during the two years of deliberations, with a final report scheduled for release in early 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1985). The

¹ During the course of the Commission’s work Chairperson Brundtland was elected Prime Minister of Norway.

Commission redefined their mandate, inviting suggestions, participation and support in order to:

1. re-examine the critical issues of environment and development and to formulate innovative, concrete and realistic action proposals to deal with them;
2. strengthen international co-operation on environment and development and to assess and propose new forms of co-operation that can break out of existing patterns and can influence policies and events in the direction of needed change; and
3. raise the level of understanding and commitment to action on the part of individuals, voluntary organisations, businesses, institutes and governments.

The strategy adopted by the Commission was notable for two significant departures from the conventional approach. First, the Commission critiqued the 'standard agenda' for tackling environmental problems, which in general focuses only on effects. An 'alternative agenda' was outlined, where the primary focus was to be on causes. Second, the Commission deliberately moved the debate beyond the normal realm of scientific and government agencies to include wide-ranging public input. During 1985-87, deliberative meetings, and/or public hearings were held in nine countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. During the public hearings hundreds of organisations and individuals gave testimony. The Commission also made site visits to specific areas of environmental concern.

The Commission's final report, entitled 'Our Common Future' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987),² was officially issued in London in April, 1987, and was later presented to a special plenary session of the General Assembly of the United Nations by Prime Minister Brundtland in October 1987. Between the time of its issuance and its presentation to the UN, the Report was also presented to, and its recommendations discussed with, the presidents, prime ministers, or ministers of more than 100 nations, as well as non-government organisations and the press.

1.2 The message of the Brundtland Report

In an urgent but carefully worded manner, the Commission highlights a litany of environmental catastrophes which threaten to engulf the global ecosystem. Desertification, climate change, ozone depletion, industrial pollution, soil erosion, species

² Hereafter referred to as the Brundtland Report.

extinction and the threat of nuclear destruction are all part of what the Commission calls the 'new realities':

“These new realities, from which there is no escape, must be recognised, and managed” (p.1).³

The Commission describe the present situation as one of 'interlocking crises', and returns consistently throughout the report to the impossibility of separating the myriad of environmental 'effects' from the development 'causes'. At the core of the Commission's analysis is the reality of a growing inequality between the developed and developing nations. They note for instance that the world's poorest nations have experienced reduced real incomes since the 1980s, that measured by absolute numbers there are more hungry people in the world today than ever before, that the industrial world dominates in the rule-making of some key international bodies, that the path of development embarked on by many developing countries (and supported by developed country's institutions) systematically destroys the environment, and that the industrial world has already used much of the world's ecological capital. In the Commission's view:

“this inequality is the planet's main 'environmental' problem, it is also its main 'development' problem” (pp.5-6).

The Commissioners ask how the continuation of present development trends can serve next century's world with twice as many people relying on the same environment.

The Brundtland Commission also specifically targets the issue of peace and security as being central to the concept of sustainable development. They point out that access to resources, and environmental stresses have become sources of conflict as the pressure on strategic resources continues to increase. Moreover, armed conflict makes huge claims on scarce material resources: 'they pre-empt human resources and wealth that could be used to combat the collapse of environmental support systems, the poverty, and the under-development that in combination contribute so much to contemporary political insecurity' (p.294). Meanwhile, the environmental destruction resulting from modern warfare sows the seeds for further instability and conflict.

But despite the gravity of these issues the Report is 'not a prediction of ever increasing environmental decay, poverty and hardship in an ever more polluted world among ever decreasing resources' (p.1). However, this reserved optimism for the future was

³ In this section all page references are to the Brundtland Report.

conditional on 'decisive political action now'. The primary message of the Brundtland Report is a call for urgent action:

"The time has come to break out of past patterns. Attempts to maintain social and ecological stability through old approaches to development and environmental protection will increase instability. Security must be sought through change" (p.22).

The nature of this action has two key components:

- Recognition and fostering of the 'common interest' amongst individuals and amongst nations. Chairperson Brundtland in the foreword to the Report stated that perhaps the most urgent task today is to persuade nations of the need to return to multilateralism; in other words to recognise that all people are sustained by the global ecosystem, and that environmental problems require an international approach to achieve the common good.
- The call for a new era of growth, particularly directed at developing countries in order to meet essential needs, based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base and ensure a more equitable distribution of resources.

These actions are integrated under a pathway termed 'sustainable development'. This is defined as being:

"Development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p.43).

In the Commission's view sustainable development contains two key concepts:

- the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs (p.43).

Indeed the Commission contends that sustainable development needs to be elevated to a global ethic.

The Commission does not regard sustainable development as a fixed state but rather a process of change. But the pursuit of sustainable development requires:

- a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making,

- an economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self-reliant and sustained basis,
- a social system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development,
- a production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development,
- a technological system that can search continuously for new solutions,
- an international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance, and
- an administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction (p.65).

More detailed descriptions of the nature of this action is outlined in the 'Tokyo Declaration', included as an Annex in the Brundtland Report (so called because the declaration was made at the conclusion of the final public hearing held in Tokyo in February 1987). The Tokyo Declaration is outlined in Appendix 1.

In essence, the Brundtland Report is a document outlining what needs to be done. The challenge contained in the Brundtland Report is to determine how it should be done, and to set about doing it.

CHAPTER 2

Assessing the Brundtland Report

The back cover notes of the Brundtland Report claim that 'this is the most important document of the decade on the future of the world'. Whether history will bear testament to the accuracy of this prediction is unknown, but in the almost four years since the Report was published the international impact has been undeniable. The Commission stressed urgency and action. Undoubtedly the Brundtland Report has been a catalyst and a focus for unprecedented worldwide concern about the environment.

Why has this been so? Does the Report give a message that is radically different to what has been said before? Does it present an undeniable truth? The answer to both of these questions is clearly 'no'. But what has set the Brundtland Report somewhat apart from previous analyses is a combination of factors and events that have given the Report a high profile and credibility.

2.1 A scientific or political report?

A major strength of the Brundtland Report is its presentation of the 'reality' of the global state of the environment and present development trends. Ekins (1989) considers that the Report "marshals the facts of global environmental decline in an absolutely clear-cut and definitive way ... there is no extravagant rhetoric" (p.62). Paehlke (1989) considered that report went "to the heart of central issues in several ways", focusing explicitly and directly on future energy supplies, agricultural and forestry practices, population control, and laying bare the links between environmental protection and the arms race. And Cronin (1989) praised the Brundtland Report for its "comprehensive integration of environment and development concerns and the sense of urgency it conveys about the state of the world environment" (p.25). The specific recommendations of the report concerning resources (pollution, energy, land etc.) have been widely accepted, at least in principle if not in practice.

Nevertheless, while the Commission's work was supported by a considerable scientific effort, Timberlake (1989) asserts that the report is "a political document, not a scientific one". This reflected many factors, but most notably the Commissioners themselves and the nature of the task they set. By and large the group was essentially from the "establishment", comprising senior politicians, academics and bureaucrats from a broad range of geographic, economic, social and political backgrounds. While in some respects the Report represented a significant departure from the standard agenda, it is also essentially a pragmatic document. The recommendations are based on "the realities of present institutions, on what can and must be accomplished today" (Brundtland Report, p.23). From the outset, the desire for political acceptability and influence was an important consideration (see p.xii).

Clearly, this has been one reason why the Report has been greeted with at least grudging acceptance within many government circles:

"When twenty two individuals from four corners of the globe from divergent political and economic systems can reach consensus on the outlook for environment and development well into the next century, it behooves the community of nations to sit up and take notice" (Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, quoted in Centre For Our Common Future (no date)).

Both Timberlake (1989) and Ekins (1989) contend that this is an aspect of particular significance. Timberlake notes that politicians get where they are by putting off making major changes to the system, because it was the system that got them there in the first place. The fact that a group from the "establishment" have looked in to the future and found, on current trends that "it just would not work" (Ekins, p.7) is important enough. But the challenge issued by the Commission, that of fundamentally altering structural and institutional behaviour is a significant departure, and indicative of how seriously the Commission regarded global environmental threats.

Part of the appeal of the Report in official circles has also been its emphasis on economic development. As one reviewer has noted:

"It is the first major international report on the global environment to deal with economic development as an essential ingredient for the salvation of the Earth's biological support systems. Because of this dimension, it is likely to achieve broader acceptance than previous warnings about the global environment" (quoted in Centre for Our Common Future, no date).

But political documents inevitably contain contradictions and points of disagreement. Chairperson Brundtland has described the Report as “a hard-won consensus” (Brundtland, 1987); but consensus documents almost by definition have weaknesses as well as strengths. The emphasis on economic growth has been perhaps the one major point of departure. This issue is discussed further in Section 2.3 and later in Chapter 4. But there have been other concerns as well.

Milbrath (1989) has attacked the anthropocentric orientation of the Report, first for the “vagueness” of the language on the question of population control, and second for the Commission’s unwillingness to face the need for limits to growth, which Milbrath argues “displays a clear bias in favour of humans over other species”. In his second observation Milbrath is undoubtedly correct. Deep ecologists for instance may find little comfort in the Brundtland Report. But the deep ecology perspective also lacks a strong ‘developing country’ understanding (see for instance the critique by Bookchin, 1989).

A more serious criticism comes from Simon (1989) who contends that the Brundtland Report suffers because it lacks a clear, theoretical base. The Commission would perhaps argue that such an analysis fell well beyond their mandate. Nevertheless the lack of an historical and political context for much of the Report means that the Commission’s desire to attack “causes”, not “effects” is often unfulfilled (see for instance Redclift (1987) for an analysis of sustainability which incorporates a strong historical perspective). Chapter 4 contains some further discussion on these points.

But many commentators have also been careful not to overstate the perceived weaknesses. As Holdgate (1987) has noted:

“The fact is that, in a volume produced by consensus among people from many nations and political systems, it is absurd to expect an instant resolution of all contemporary human dilemmas. Judged by the standards of the attainable. The Commission has done pretty well”.

2.2 The concept of “sustainable development”

The main theme and recommendation of the Report is that countries of the world need to integrate environment and economic factors; the Commission has termed this “sustainable development”. The concept of sustainability is not new. Indeed O’Riordan (1988) traces the concept back to early Greek times, while the principles have underlain development in many cultures in past times (e.g. see Redclift, 1987).

The Brundtland Commission however has elevated the concept to a political level, and into the currency of every-day language never previously achieved. Indeed the theme of sustainable development has been widely embraced by individuals, organisations and governments representing many different interests and viewpoints. Redclift and Pearce (1988) for instance consider that the concept of sustainable development has released in people a “deep reflection and energy”, and provided a degree of optimism about the way ahead. According to Daly (1990) one of the great contributions of the Brundtland Report has been the way sustainable development has been forced to the top of the agenda of the United Nations and multilateral development banks.

While the Commission provides firm recommendations for future action and direction, they were also careful to avoid becoming enmeshed in a debate over competing political ideologies.⁴ Indeed the Commission notes:

“no single blueprint of sustainability will be found, as economic and social systems and ecological conditions differ widely among countries. Each nation will have to work out its own concrete policy implications” (p.40).

Thus, while the message advocates a radical departure from accepted practice and institutional behaviour, the proposed agenda for change provides something for everyone—a platform for common interest.

While this is undoubtedly appealing it is also the Report’s greatest weakness. Cairncross (1989), for instance, regards sustainable development as “a magical phrase which appears to mean combining wealth with virtue” (p.40). O’Riordan (1989) contends that sustainability is essentially the language of mediation between ‘environmentalists’ and ‘developers’, but that underlying the concept is an “inherent ambiguity” (p.29). Clearly, people may choose to interpret sustainable development in a way that suits their particular needs (Cronin, 1989). The response of world leaders when the Report was released provides some evidence of this; compare for instance the statement of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe ...“The report is to us an urgent notice, based on the latest and best scientific evidence, that the time has come to take the decisions needed to secure the resources needed to sustain this and coming generations”, with the statement of President Ronald Reagan of the U.S.A. - “The Report’s emphasis on the leading role economic development and the private sector must play in addressing these problems is particularly significant” (Centre for Our Common Future, no date).

⁴ As is discussed in later sections of this report however the sustainable development concept is by no means politically neutral. The values underlying the concept have major political implications.

In other words “sustainable development” has been taken by some as a challenge to find new directions, yet to others an endorsement of “business as usual”. The later interpretation has in part been reinforced by one crucial aspect of the Brundtland Report - the insistence that rapid economic growth is an essential component of sustainable development. But it has been on the handling of the economic growth issue that the Report has also received its most criticism. This issue is discussed below.

2.3 The growth debate

One of the most controversial conclusions of the Commission was the call for a “new era of economic growth”. This conclusion has been widely attacked by those who see economic growth as the main cause of environmental degradation. Daly (1990) has regarded the Commission’s call for a rapid expansion in the world economy while at the same time respecting ecological limits as a “glaring contradiction”, while Rees (1990) has described it as “paradoxical at best”. Not surprisingly non-governmental organisation (NGO) environmental groups have also taken sharp issue with this conclusion. For instance Starke (1990) reported on the Brundtland follow-up meeting for NGOs held in Tunisia in December 1988 where many speakers regarded parts of the document as “profoundly wrong” (p.83).

The call for economic growth was squarely directed at the need for developing countries to break out of the downward spiral of poverty/environmental decline. But the Commission also regarded continued strong economic growth within developed countries as a necessary condition for a new era of growth:

“... developing countries are part of an interdependent world economy; their prospects also depend on the levels and patterns of growth in industrialised nations. The medium term prospects for industrial countries are for growth of 3-4%, the minimum that international finance institutions consider necessary if those countries are going to play a part in expanding the world economy” (p.51).

Despite the quite strong qualifications attached to the call for growth (that the quality of growth would have to “change radically” to reduce energy, resource requirements and pollution) other criticisms have been directed at this recommendation. For instance Ekins (1987) writes:

“rather than question this ethic of expansionism, the Commission builds its entire edifice of sustainability ... on the frail and recent evidence of less intensive resource use by industrial countries since the oil shocks of the 1970s, and on the rapid

dissemination in capital-poor developing countries of expensive and complex modern technologies”.

Timberlake (1989) asserts that the Commission’s claim that we can have economic growth without damaging the environment “is a sheer statement of opinion”, based on a political imperative rather than scientific fact. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Milbrath (1989), who contends that the Commission’s faith in science and technology to energise this new era of growth constitutes “a strong element of wishful thinking” (p.323). But Timberlake also comments that the call for growth that would not degrade the environment is also part of the challenge set by the Commission; it is “setting a task - or even an agenda - for science” (p.119). It might be added that it is part of the political agenda as well.

There are perhaps two key issues in the growth debate. First, few people have questioned that economic growth is a necessary condition for raising living standards for the world’s poor in developing countries. The issue is whether this emphasis on “growth” in developing countries will simply reinforce past development patterns, and therefore deflect attention away from a more needs-based concept of development that would emphasize self-reliance, local initiatives, appropriate technology etc. For instance the sustainable development approach argued by Barbier (1987) directly targets increased food, education, health-care, sanitation and water supply etc. at a local level as the means to improve the standard of living of the poor. As Ekins (1989) points out, this is not a no-growth policy but it is significantly different in terms of conceptual and practical orientation. Economic growth would then reflect the progress of needs-based development, rather than be seen as the driving force.

The second issue is whether meeting the needs of the world’s poor has to be linked to continued strong economic growth in developed countries, especially given the past record of resource depletion and environmental impact of this development. But there is also the issue of the exploitative nature of the relationship between many developed and developing countries. The effects of exploitation have been well recognised by the Commission, but there is a failure to question seriously whether this is in fact an integral part of the development process. This process has been well recognised by earlier development critics such as Gunnar Myrdal who termed it “the development of underdevelopment”, the self-reinforcing and cumulative tendencies toward strength at the centre to which surplus is siphoned, and weakness in the periphery from which it is extracted (Heilbroner, 1988, p.55).

For its part the Brundtland Commission takes a much more conciliatory tone towards the existence of power and privilege than do some earlier UN reports investigating the

development process (e.g. see the Cocoyoc Declaration of 1974; Dasmann, 1988). The Commission notes for instance that “it is not that there is one set of villains and another set of victims” (p.47). Throughout the Report, the politics of mediation and consensus building is to the fore. And to some extent the economic growth debate needs to be seen in this light. The pity though, as Robertson (1989) has pointed out, is that the Brundtland Report’s contribution to understanding (on the question of growth and the economic system) “is consequently much more limited than it might otherwise have been” (p.3).

2.4 The “process” of the report

The process adopted by the Commission was of fundamental significance. The Commissioners made site visits, and “bore witness” to areas in the world afflicted by environmental catastrophe. They listened to “the people”, to the values and concerns articulated by ‘ordinary’ people at the public hearings held around the world. Indeed, Timberlake (1989) notes that these views were given much credence, and that questions of values were of most concern to the Commission:

“what resources, what livelihoods, had value and how these should be preserved and enhanced” (p.117).

These values were most graphically illustrated by the inclusion in the Report of numerous quotes from people making submissions to the Commission. These quotations reflected many concerns including a lack of power and input to decision-making processes from ordinary people, the reinforcement of humanitarian values, upholding the rights of minority peoples, and concern for the state of environment that will be bequeathed to future generations.

Values though do not provide absolute truths. Different viewpoints and attitudes are a fact of life. As Redclift (1987) has noted, “one person’s world of resource depletion is another person’s world of resource abundance” (p.202). But it is through the “process” of the Report that the Commission have specifically focused on this issue. Many commentators have overlooked this aspect, and the significance of the process in bringing about the necessary movement for change. As an integral part of its mandate and agenda, the Commission adopted a quite deliberate strategy of “raising the level of understanding and commitment to action”. It was a process based on wide-ranging public discussion, on site visits, and on grassroots involvement. The process, and the

nature of the conclusions reached in the Report are inextricably linked. In the foreword to the Report Chairperson Brundtland stated:

“the process that produced this unanimous report proves that it is possible to join forces, to identify common goals, and to agree on common actions ... the changes in attitudes, in social values, and in aspirations that the report urges will depend on vast campaigns of education, debate, and public participation” (p.xiv).

Arguably, this process in the long term may be more important than the content of the Report. The Commission particularly acknowledged the “indispensable roles” played by citizens groups, NGOs, educational institutions and the scientific community in the creation of public awareness and political change in the past, and identified an even more crucial role for them in the future. In encouraging an active follow-up and participation the Commission has also invited analysis, critique and re-refinement of the Report’s message. It is significant that much of the follow-up to the Report has essentially concentrated on the “process” issues - information flow, facilitating grassroots involvement etc. (in particular through the activities of the Centre for Our Common Future). Therefore, one of the important implications of the Brundtland Report for individual countries is the way in which the process of consultation and participation has been recognised as an essential part of the policy response. This is discussed further in Chapter 3, and in latter parts of this publication.

2.5 Conclusions

The Brundtland Commission has provided an international focus in the global struggle against environmental decline and poverty. The process adopted by the Commission, the final report and follow-up activities have catalysed a wide range of analyses, reviews and activity. In many respects the Report has departed significantly from some previous political reports, most particularly in its emphasis on economic growth, its conciliatory stance, and in its emphasis on the “process”. The message has been positive, guardedly optimistic and pragmatic, and has been a direct challenge to all citizens of the world. But also, acceptance of the Report has undoubtedly been aided by its timing. Its release coincided with alarming new evidence on damage to the ozone layer from CFCs, and increasing accumulation of greenhouse gases. In addition there has been growing awareness during the 1980s of the development/environmental disasters befalling nations in Africa and elsewhere. These factors, as much as anything have helped to galvanise a desire to take positive action and to lend support to concepts put forward by the Commission.

The process of drawing together 22 potentially diverse opinions from within the Commission into a unified document in itself represents a significant achievement. In the foreword to the Report, Chairperson Brundtland outlined some of the pressures this created and the importance of communication, tolerance of viewpoints, and shared perceptions in enabling a unanimous report to be produced. However, as Daly (1990) has noted, to achieve this remarkable consensus the Commission had to be “less than rigorous in avoiding self-contradiction” (p.1).

While many of the recommendations of the Report have been widely endorsed and supported, there is clearly a need for follow-up analysis and initiatives. Political reports based on consensus are not necessarily the best guide for determining right or wrong directions. Both Daly (1990) and Ekins (1989) point to the need for others⁵ to take up the challenge of giving the concept of sustainable development a logically consistent basis. In particular this means coming to terms with the problematic nature of further rapid economic growth, the economic and political consequences of a conserving economy, the needs of the world’s poor, and the reality of global ecological limits.

⁵ In Daly’s (1990) view these “others” should be “unencumbered by the political necessity of holding together contradictory factions” (p.2).

CHAPTER 3

The response to the Brundtland Report

3.1 Introduction

Three broad organisational groupings have responded to the Brundtland Report. First, within the United Nations System the Report has had significant impact as agencies have begun to redirect their activities towards meeting the priorities embraced by the sustainable development concept. Second, officially or unofficially most governments have taken notice of the Brundtland Report, and while only 22 governments and the European Community have officially responded to the Report, many more governments have undertaken policy initiatives (Centre for Our Common Future, 1990a). Third, the Report has been a catalyst for action for a wide range of NGOs.

This chapter provides a brief overview on the way in which the recommendations of the Brundtland Report have been taken up and developed into programmes of action. It concentrates first on the activities of the Centre for Our Common Future and then the action of selected governments. The information has been gathered from a range of reports and information bulletins, rather than from first hand experience, so some qualification needs to be added. Actual progress can sometimes bear little relationship to stated intentions, so some caution is recommended in interpreting these intentions too literally. However, the different approaches adopted in various countries provide a useful basis for comparison at this early stage.

3.2 The Centre for Our Common Future

The primary message of the Brundtland Report was a call for action. Through the open process adopted by the Commission in preparing its Report, an international constituency was being mobilised to press for, and initiate change. Therefore, a significant outcome

of the follow-up to the Report was the establishment in April 1988 of a Swiss charitable foundation the Centre for Our Common Future, to act as a focal point for follow-up initiatives. The agenda of the Centre is straightforward: to promote the recommendations and the vision of the Brundtland Report.

Through its association with “working partners” (environment, development, media, trade union, youth, scientific, academic and industrial organisations) the Centre has been active in laying the foundations for the 1990 regional conferences on the ‘Brundtland follow-up’. In May 1990, to coincide with the Bergen conference on sustainable development the Centre published the book *Signs of Hope* (Starke, 1990), as a follow-up document to the Brundtland Report. The book provides a summary of activities of governments and NGOs in the three years since the Report was released. It also reports on the tasks ahead, or the “unfinished agenda”.

Currently the main role of the Centre is in laying the foundations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) scheduled to take place in Brazil in June 1992. For Brazil, the Centre is acting as the focal point for the involvement of the independent sector in the official process. It has been instrumental in securing wide-ranging independent sector involvement, and will act as facilitator for a parallel event being staged by the independent sector (Centre for Our Common Future, 1990b).

3.3 Canada

Canada played a unique role in the process undertaken by the Commission during 1986. It was one of the nine countries visited by the Commission, but the Commission spent longer in Canada (10 days) and held more hearings (in six cities) than in any other country. The Commission’s deliberations and outcomes had great influence on the country. The visit resulted in the establishment of a Canadian version of the Commission, the National Task Force on Environment and Economy, a team comprising 17 business leaders, environment ministers and environmentalists. In late 1987 the Task Force signed a document calling on Canada to embrace the concept of sustainable development, and to develop national and regional strategies to make it work.

One of the recommendations of the Task Force was the creation of “roundtables” on environment and economy. The National Roundtable (NRTEE) was created in

March 1989 comprising 24 'opinion leaders' from a range of backgrounds. Provincial roundtables have also been established in many of the country's provinces and territories to formulate action plans for sustainable development. One early task of the NRTEE has been to contribute to the development of a national strategy for the environment, giving particular emphasis to incorporate the principles of sustainable development.

Numerous reports on the environment and sustainable development have come out of Canada in the last three years. Most have articulated principles and strategy rather than reporting specific actions or results (e.g. see Keating, 1989). However, the responses have not only emanated from federal or provincial government. An interesting report has come from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which lays out an environmental strategy for business (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 1989). Another interesting initiative has been the establishment of an Environment and Economy Task Force of the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI). The BCNI is an organisation comprising of chief executives from leading Canadian businesses (the equivalent of the Business Roundtable in New Zealand). The objectives of the Task Force are to "focus a commitment among Canadian business leaders for improving environmental conditions and to provide recommendations for developing and promoting environmentally sound economic policies and practices" (Environment Canada, 1990a). However, according to Gardener and Roseland (1989) the sustainable development concept has been accepted fairly uncritically by some sectors. Members of the National Task Force apparently linked sustainable development to the notion of "limitless growth" (*Ibid.* p.29), so it is perhaps little wonder that the concept has found great favour with Canadian business.

Another interesting initiative has been the establishment of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), to be situated in Winnipeg. The IISD has been set up as an independent institution, with the purpose of promoting and integrating the principles and practices of sustainable development. One of its aims is to continually expand knowledge about sustainable development.

At a political level much of the environmental activity of the previous three years came together as Canada's Green Plan, launched on 11 December 1990. The Green Plan represents a "comprehensive, \$3-billion, five-year environmental action plan for Canada" (Environment Canada, 1990b). The Plan sets timetables and standards for a range of actions including; a 50% reduction in waste generation by the year 2000, setting aside 12% of Canada as protected space, and stabilizing emissions of greenhouse gases at 1990 levels by the year 2000. In addition it outlines an intention to promote

better environmental decision-making through building new partnerships, instituting an annual State of the Environment Policy Statement, and through public awareness and participation programmes.

In summary, the Canadian government appears to have given some emphasis to developing grassroots support for the concept of sustainable development, or, as Starke (1990) describes it, involving 'all stake-holders'. Wide-ranging activity has been initiated, particularly in the preparation of reports, plans and strategies. Canadian business also seem to have assumed the responsibility of adopting "sustainable development" approaches, although it is clear that the concept is being interpreted in different ways. The translation of this activity into results and achievements is yet to be seen.

3.4 Norway

As could be expected, given Prime Minister Brundtland's pivotal role in the Commission, Norway has taken an active lead in following up the Brundtland Report.

The first step taken was recognising the need for wide dissemination of information (Brundtland, 1987). Government and private organisations joined together in a broad campaign called "The Common Campaign for the World's Environment and Development". Views of trade unions, industry, farmers, municipal authorities, private organisations etc. were sought in order to promote common interest across traditional sectoral divides.

The Norwegian Government's official response endorsed the views of the Commission and gave commitment to promoting sustainable development (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1988). Numerous specific objectives and policy directives were outlined, including the offer to host a conference on sustainability for representatives from ECE countries in Bergen during 1990.

During 1988 and 1989 a Government Parliamentary Report (White Paper) was prepared on environment and development and released in April 1989 (Ministry of Environment, 1989). This report specifically addressed in more detail the implications for Norway of the Brundtland Report recommendations. Some problem areas were noted (particularly the costs of acting unilaterally), and longer term objectives were outlined. A significant initiative was a proposal to allocate 0.1% of GNP to an international climate fund under

the auspices of the United Nations, provided that support was received from other industrialised countries. The fund would be used to support environmental efforts of developing countries and international co-operative efforts on behalf of the environment, as well as the establishment of an international environmental court.

The Norwegian Government's own goal in relation to climate change is to stabilise carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000 at the latest, and reduce emissions from there on. A related goal is the levelling off of total energy consumption by the end of the century, with a number of measures indicated to reduce energy demand.

One further aspect of Norway's follow-up has been the initiation of the SIMEN⁶ project in early 1988. This research programme was undertaken with the aim of evaluating the relationships between environmental objectives and industrial growth objectives (Ministry of Environment, 1989, pp.73-74). It involved modelling and analysing various development paths. A particular focus was to analyse whether it is possible to achieve environmental goals while at the same time sustaining economic growth. An interesting conclusion was that the methods available for analysing the social and economic effects of environmental policies were clearly insufficient for undertaking these types of studies.

Incorporation of environmental concerns into economic signals is being actively pursued. A number of green taxes have already been introduced and more are planned in the 1991 budget (The Economist, 17 March 1990).

However, like many countries, questions of national interest loom large in relation to global environmental issues. Norway is the second largest oil producer in OECD-Europe, and revenue from oil exports is a major earner of overseas funds. Norway is grappling with, on the one hand, the need to promote responsible energy strategies to reduce environmental impact while, on the other hand, maintaining revenue from oil. It is also one of the few remaining countries in the world to be actively involved in whaling (at present for 'scientific' reasons, but during 1990 Norway lobbied for restarting commercial whaling). Such a stance seems paradoxical given the country's other green credentials.

To summarise, environmental awareness in Norway has traditionally been high relative to most other countries. Their response to the Brundtland Report continues that tradition, with Norway clearly seeing itself in a leadership role. Specific environmental

⁶ Studies of Industry, Environment, and Energy.

objectives have been set and policies are being pursued in order to achieve those objectives. The importance of oil exports in Norway's economy means perhaps a greater hurdle in the transition to "sustainability" than for many other countries. Norway's progress should be followed closely.

3.5 Australia

The Australian Commission for the Future (CFF) (part of the Federal Government's Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce) have taken up the theme of sustainable development. CFF developed a considerable public awareness campaign through their Greenhouse '88 conferences, and have followed that up by establishing the Australian Greenhouse Information Service, the theme of which is Action for Sustainable Development.

In February 1990, CFF published a report outlining issues and opportunities for sustainable development in Australia. This 32 page document has since been provided as an addendum to recent sales of the Brundtland Report in Australia.

At the same time a "Sustainable Futures" programme was launched, taking up the broad directions of the Brundtland Report and attempting to develop and apply them to the Australian scene. The first part of that programme has involved setting up multi-sectoral Roundtables whose aim is "to find innovative solutions to conflicts between environment and development" (Centre for Our Common Future, 1990a, p.WP5). The first four Roundtables will focus on green industry, innovation, mining, and energy. The Roundtables will bring together key industry, trade union, government and conservation leaders, and will also include fund managers and other investment analysts. The Roundtables will also aim to link a substantial research effort with the ongoing process of mobilising industry, government, trade unions and conservation interests.

In June 1989 the Australian Government established the Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) whose specific task it is to help resolve conflicts over natural resource use in Australia. One of the RAC's objectives is to promote resource use decisions that:

“optimise the net benefits to the community from the nation’s resources, having regard to efficiency of resource use, environmental considerations, ecological integrity and sustainability, the sustainability of any development, and an equitable distribution of the return on resources” (Banks and Cuthbertson, 1989, p.7).

In July 1989 Prime Minister Bob Hawke issued a major statement on the environment (subsequently published in booklet form, *Our country, Our future*; see Hawke, 1989). This outlined a number of specific environmental initiatives, particularly a major package aimed at attacking the problem of soil degradation, and a major tree planting programme.

In addition, several state governments have initiated policy responses addressing sustainability issues, and have led the way with specific actions and initiatives.

3.6 The Netherlands

At a government level, the Brundtland Report has probably elicited its strongest response from The Netherlands. A national environmental survey was initiated in 1987 (Langeweg, 1989) to provide a foundation for a National Environmental Policy Plan. This extensive background document focused on the present and future impact of environmental problems from a base year of 1985 through to the year 2010. The environmental impacts of existing trends in emissions were analysed, and emission reduction levels for the year 2010 were prescribed based on the best scientific information. The reduction in emission levels proposed in many cases is quite drastic.

The report is notable in at least two respects: first its scientific and technical orientation (social issues are only marginally addressed); and second, for the wide-ranging environmental data base that it has been able to draw on, presumably a result of an extensive ongoing data gathering and monitoring commitment.

The National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP) ‘To Choose or to Lose’ was released in May 1989. It uses the concept of sustainable development as the premise for environmental management, and builds on the recommendations of the Brundtland Report. The policy plan notes (p.7) that the Brundtland Commission had added new dimensions into existing ideas, such as concern for future generations, the global aspect

of environmental issues, and the mutual dependence of environmental quality and socio-economic development. The NEPP is a detailed strategy and as such sets clear and bold objectives for the reduction of emissions and for improvement in environmental quality. The overall goal is to “solve or gain control of environmental problems within the duration of one generation” (p.7).

The original intention was to update the NEPP every five years, but already the NEPP has been updated and strengthened since the 1989 general election, which saw environmental issues at the forefront.

3.7 New Zealand

The New Zealand Government’s official response to the Brundtland Report was by way of an Interim Report to the 43rd General Assembly of the United Nations in October 1988 (Anon, 1988). The document consisted of a step-by-step response to 12 areas of concern highlighted by the Commission, an outline of the position of the New Zealand government, some specific background about New Zealand’s position with respect to various sustainability issues, and an outline of steps taken to meet the Commission’s concern. The report was compiled by an “Officials Committee” convened by the Secretary for the Environment and comprising representatives from various government departments. The Committee tended to find broad agreement with much of the thrust of the Brundtland Report, and indicated that N.Z. was following the Report’s recommendations in many areas of concern. However, the preliminary nature of the interim response was acknowledged and it was stated that:

“a programme is being prepared for further development of New Zealand’s policy response, including the opportunity input by non-government organisations and individuals” (*Ibid.* p.i).

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) has largely taken responsibility for following up the Brundtland Report. This has taken the form of advice on policy implementation, and policy input to the Resource Management Law Reform (RMLR) process (Ministry for the Environment, 1989).

The integration of existing environmental laws through the RMLR process has been the major thrust of environmental policy since 1988. One visible sign of the impact of the

Brundtland Report in New Zealand has been the use of the Commission's definition of "sustainable development" to also define "sustainable management" of resources, the principle that underlies the proposed Resource Management Act.⁷ The proposed Resource Management Act clearly encompasses some of the concerns expressed in the Brundtland Report.

In the Interim Response it was stated that the Ministry for the Environment proposed that:

"a public discussion programme be initiated by Government in 1989 aimed at wide publicity for the Commission's report and to ensure a substantial level of public awareness and participation. Public evaluation of sustainable development needs to be a well informed process of open debate on possible options" (p.20).

It was further stated that the Government would welcome this debate as part of the process of formulating a response to the Commission's report. However, the follow-up to the Brundtland Report as outlined above has not happened in any formalised sense.

Also proposed in 1988 was the issuance of a New Zealand Environmental Policy document in late 1989. It was proposed that the Environmental Policy would provide the "big picture" to environmental problems in New Zealand, and set out the government's environmental objectives and preferred approach for solving problems, including guidelines for regulatory agencies and an environmental monitoring strategy (see Preface written by the Secretary for the Environment; in Cronin, 1988). Again though this proposal did not materialise.

During 1988 and 1989 a series of ad-hoc responses to sustainability occurred. In early 1988 an inter-departmental working group on sustainability was formed and reported to the RMLR Core Group (Gibson *et al.*, 1988). A report on ecological principles of sustainability which incorporated some of the findings of the Brundtland Commission was published by the MfE in mid 1988 (Cronin, 1988). Some further investigations were then carried out for the MfE on the concept of sustainability (Baines *et al.*, 1988; Baines, 1989a, 1989b).

⁷ See Section 4.1 for further discussion.

In March 1989, a one day seminar entitled “Global environmental issues and sustainability” was organised by the MfE in Wellington, but to a fairly restricted range of participants (90% of those attending being government officials or environmental activists).

Since then only limited publicity of the Brundtland Report’s findings have been apparent (e.g. see Blakeley, 1990).

What emerges quite clearly is that while there has been a debate in New Zealand on the Brundtland Report and the issue of sustainable development, it has been a debate that has been largely confined to the Wellington bureaucracy. Outside of a relatively small group of people the Brundtland Report has received little publicity or debate.

But what perhaps also stymied the wider public debate was the bitter Departmental clashes over the sustainability concept.

The inter-departmental working group mentioned above essentially split into two factions representing “ecological” and “economic” approaches, and their report to the RMLR Core Group presented two visions of sustainability.⁸ Subsequently, Fletcher (1989) reported that the MfE’s moves to get sustainable development on the policy agenda have been undermined by strong opposition from the Treasury and the Ministry of Commerce (see also Palmer, 1990a, 1990b). Given that the Brundtland Commission consistently sought to find common ground on this issue, the New Zealand outcome has been somewhat ironic.

3.8 Conclusions

The four overseas countries discussed in this chapter have responded to the Brundtland Report in different and mostly positive ways. Their responses provide a useful focus for New Zealand, because in general New Zealand is often compared (and compares itself) with countries which have set reasonably high environmental standards. Norway, the Netherlands and Canada have to some extent set the pace internationally, while Australia is of particular interest because of its close ties with New Zealand. A prominent feature of most of these countries has been the commitment to promote public debate and

⁸ In fact the economic (“welfare maximising”) perspective suggested that it was inappropriate for sustainability to be included as an objective of resource management statutes.

discussion. The Report also appears to have been the catalyst for a number of specific actions. But it is also clear that sustainable development has been interpreted in different ways within different countries, and real progress has been hard to gauge.

By comparison the official response to the Brundtland Report in New Zealand has been muted. Follow-up activities which were promised have not occurred and much of the debate has been confined to a fairly small circle of officials. Yet, New Zealand's response to several of the contemporary global environmental issues has certainly not been lax. On the question of reducing greenhouse emissions for instance, New Zealand's policy is considerably more stringent than that of either Norway or Canada and is one of the most stringent in the world. Also, the RMLR process of the last two and one half years has focused considerable attention on the "sustainable management" of resources and the environment, and has addressed some of the concerns raised by the Brundtland Report.

Further, progress has been made in incorporating Maori perspectives into environmental and social policy. This has brought new values and approaches to many of the issues and has provided a new dimension to the thinking on sustainability in New Zealand (e.g. see Wright, 1988; Baines *et al.*, 1988; Snively *et al.*, 1990).

But the problem seems to be that the broader questions raised by the concept of sustainable development have fallen into a policy no-mans-land. Sustainable development does not have a clear advocate either in government or in the NGO movement. Even the response by NGOs in New Zealand to the Brundtland Report has been low-key, with the Commission's emphasis on growth not being favourably received by many in the NGO movement. But also, the full sustainable development message has cut across traditional NGO lines of interest. Environmental groups in New Zealand have until recently had a strongly preservationist focus for instance.

So far sustainability has in general had a fairly narrow focus, particularly in relation to the overall theme of the Brundtland Report. The lack of wide-ranging debate and rigorous analysis also raises questions about the understanding and interpretation of the concept of sustainable development. Questions of understanding, interpretation and responses therefore form the main thrust of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The implications of sustainable development

Underlying the thrust of the Brundtland Report is the contention that we need to develop “new ways of thinking” about environment and development, and that sustainable development needs to be elevated to a “global ethic”. This chapter expands on this theme.

Sustainable development is regarded here as the “big picture”. Parts of that picture are already being actively pursued or are in place in New Zealand (e.g. the various environmental policy initiatives being pursued by the MfE, and some economic and institutional changes in the last few years), and these will not be reviewed again here. Rather, the nature of the “big picture” is examined, and some of the missing parts are analysed and discussed. In particular, this chapter seeks to identify what underlies the concept of sustainable development and its political implications, revisits the growth debate, addresses the fundamental theme of participation and awareness raising, and looks at institutional implications of sustainability, particularly the role of the MfE. With four years having elapsed since the release of the Brundtland Report, this chapter then, to an extent, moves “beyond Brundtland” to also incorporate some of the thinking and activity that has developed around the theme of sustainability during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

4.1 Towards a common understanding

4.1.1 Evolution of the concept of sustainable development

Sustainable development is an evolving concept. It can best be regarded as the coming together (not always consistently) of a number of concerns regarding development and the environment that began gathering momentum during the 1960s.⁹ Two perspectives

⁹ The origins of this perspective can be traced back much further of course: to the writings and activism of early conservationists, and to the cultural heritage of many indigenous peoples dating back many centuries.

in particular have been the driving force; both emerging through critiques and the need to address the failure of conventional approaches.

1. The gathering critique of the conventional approach to third world development, which has gained momentum through the increasingly obvious failure of such development to improve the welfare of people to whom it was directed.
2. The western “environmentalist” perspective which has largely focused on the environmentally destructive consequences of industrialisation and western lifestyles.

Over the last two decades these two perspectives have slowly and tortuously come together as the commonality of issues have become obvious. Several international forums have provided a focus for these issues.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 is widely credited as being the first forum to give the concept of “ecologically sustainable development” an international political focus (Caldwell, 1984; Dasmann, 1988). The Cocoyoc Declaration adopted by the 1974 UNEP/UNCTAD symposium was rather more outspoken in its condemnation of the conventional development process, but did not particularly integrate the growing environmental problems in developed countries. Many writers have drawn attention to the report by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation in 1975 entitled “What Now: Another Development” as being a decisive step forward in the integration of development and ecological concerns (Ekins, 1986). A new paradigm of development labelled “Another Development” was coined, most of the basic principles of which can now be found under the broad umbrella of “sustainability”. But at the time, “Another Development” did not filter significantly into mainstream thinking.

The World Conservation Strategy, published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 1980 (IUCN, 1980), developed quite strong linkages between environment and development concerns during the preparatory meetings, but the final report was relatively bland (O’Riordan, 1988). Nevertheless, it represented a further step towards an integration of environmental and development concerns.

By the mid-1980s an emerging consensus was developing around aspects of the sustainable development concept. The environmental perspective has essentially focused on what has been called physical sustainability¹⁰ of ecosystems. The essence of physical sustainability is that:

¹⁰ Also sometimes referred to as ecological sustainability (e.g. Robinson *et al.*, 1990), or sustainable utilisation (O’Riordan, 1988).

1. resource harvest rates should be no higher than managed or natural regeneration rates
2. waste disposal rates should not exceed the rate of (natural or managed) assimilation by the counterpart ecosystems (from Pearce, 1988).

The ecological concept of carrying capacity was an earlier expression of physical sustainability principles.¹¹ However, in addition, most contemporary discussion on physical sustainability has also been concerned with the rate at which high quality non-renewable resources are being depleted, and the need to maintain the integrity of natural ecosystems (i.e. conservation). Much of this concern emanates from an ethical framework which sees present generations as being responsible for preserving the resource base for the future generations. A more eco-centred view has also emphasised the rights of other species.

At the same time a major revision in development thinking was occurring, spurred by the failure of conventional approaches to development in third world countries (Barbier, 1987). Contemporary thinking has evolved to what O'Riordan (1988) describes as a "crucial triad" of development:

1. the necessity for meeting the basic needs of the poor;
2. that resource use must be firmly grounded in the principles of sustainable utilisation;
3. the concept of "eco-development", a location-specific approach concentrating on cultural, administrative and aspirational requirements of communities.

Many of the basic concepts therefore were already well formed by the mid-1980s when the Brundtland Commission process was underway. However, the Commission highlighted a number of critical linkages, in particular bringing together a global perspective which focused on the interdependencies between developed and developing nations. In the forward to the Report Chairperson Brundtland noted that:

"(the) links between poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation formed a major theme in our analysis and recommendations" (p.xii).

¹¹ Much of the writing on environmental concerns during the 1970s was couched in ecological terms such as 'carrying capacity' (e.g. see Ophuls, 1977; and for a review see Cronin, 1988).

Central to this analysis is the concept of equity.¹² The Commission argued that physical sustainability cannot be secured unless policies specifically address issues such as changes to access to resources and the distribution of costs and benefits:

“even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern which must logically be extended to equity within each generation” (p.43).

Therefore, the concern for equity is a concern for fair distribution both between and within generations, and between and within nation states. Responsibility for creating more equitable relations of course falls most heavily on the wealthy and powerful in both developed and developing countries. But the Commission has pointed out that the argument goes beyond purely philanthropic reasons. The global environmental commons does not respect national boundaries; all people are sustained by the same biosphere, and all people will suffer if the global commons are degraded.

It places the sustainable development debate clearly in the realm of being a “people” problem, rather than just being a problem with the “environment”. It lends support to Murray Bookchin’s (1980) long-held analysis that the ecological crisis is not so much a question of mankind doing battle with nature, as mankind doing battle with itself.

The sustainable development perspective then can be seen to contain a number of distinct features:

- it is an ethical concept with the notion of equity (both between generations and within generations) being central;
- it recognises that development must be bounded by ecological constraints;
- it treats the environment as an integral part of the development process;
- it has a focus as a “people” problem, not just a problem with “the environment”;
- it recognises a number of critical linkages between distributional issues and environmental quality; and
- it is akin to development which promotes the “common interest”.

But, as was mentioned earlier, our understanding of the concept is still evolving.

There are still weaknesses in this understanding, as various writers have pointed out (see Chapter 2). One of the difficulties is that because sustainable development has been

¹² Equity is that aspect of social well-being that deals with the distribution of costs and benefits in society. It is generally understood to mean fairness or justice (Sharplin, 1987).

largely issue driven, analysis of the problems is rather more advanced than analysis of the solutions. Part of the difficulty lies with comprehending the nature and extent of the changes that are required to reverse unsustainable practices and promote sustainable outcomes. What is really driving the system in unsustainable directions? The Brundtland Report is notable for moving beyond simply 'first-order' issues such as inadequate laws and regulations, inefficient technologies and so on to focus more on systemic 'second-order' issues such as basic human rights, equity and participation. But how far into second-order issues do we need to go? Take for example, the Brundtland Commission's central theme of equity. What are the specific inequities in the current political and economic system that need to be eliminated? Any specific move to reduce inequity in the economic system for instance would be profound, because it can be argued that the economic system institutionalises iniquitous arrangements as part of its normal functioning. How much equity is required to ensure ecologically sustainable development?

Identifying the critical factors that drive the system towards unsustainable outcomes therefore is an essential part of the sustainable development debate. Unfortunately much of the analysis so far stops short of addressing some of the hard questions that logically follow from the central themes underlying the evolving sustainable development concept.

It is essential that the sustainable development agenda is not limited by avoiding the "too hard" questions. Perhaps the most important arena for more searching examination then is in the theory and practice of economics.

4.1.2 Economics and sustainable development

A central theme of the Brundtland Report is the need to make environmental and economic goals "mutually reinforcing". This has focused debate again on the central role that the theory and practice of economics has played in the general progression towards non-sustainable outcomes. At present a broad spectrum of economic reform is being debated around the theme of sustainable development.

At one end there is the minimalist approach, relying on the role of the "green consumer" in the marketplace. The argument in effect is that "aware" consumers will demand (and achieve) an environmentally friendly economy by exercising their freedom of choice in the marketplace.

Reform of conventional economic practices has been promoted by a number of economists. Barbier (1987) has outlined specific reforms in four areas; 'cost-benefit

research' that would contribute towards sustainable economic development (in developing countries). Barbier, in association with other authors extended this analysis in an influential book that argued the case for an essentially market approach, but one manipulated by methodologies and interventions that account for environmental and resource externalities (Pearce *et al.*, 1989). A major thrust of the argument of Pearce *et al.* is the use of prices to reflect the true social costs of resource exploitation and use. While the Brundtland Report was noncommittal about the means for incorporating environmental concerns into economics, follow-up activities to the Report have reinforced the economic reform approach with an emphasis on market mechanisms (see United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1990; Ministry of Environment, 1990).

Towards the other end of the spectrum are people such as Herman Daly and James Robertson, calling for more fundamental change.¹³ Daly and Cobb (1989) have argued for a paradigm shift in the thought and practice of economics. Robertson (1989) has made a blunt assessment:

“Conventional economics is based on primitive conceptual assumptions. It embodies questionable value judgements and incorrect understanding of the facts, for example about human nature and the natural world ... In short, it suffers from factual error, philosophical misconception, and historical obsolescence. The 21st Century economy needs a stronger conceptual basis than this” (p.20).

Questions about the relevance of current economic theory are also coming from other quarters. Drucker (1990) describes economics as being at a crossroads, arguing that the main economic events of the last 15 years have been unexplained by economic theory; that they have been outgrown by reality.

The economic debate can perhaps be boiled down to two main areas of question:

1. A debate about value, and in particular the way the economic system fails to reflect (and in many cases actively works against) the perceived social and environmental value held by many individuals and communities.

¹³ The various positions adopted are not seen as being mutually exclusive; rather they reflect the extent of the reform of economic practice that the proponents regard as necessary. For example, Pearce *et al.* (1990) discuss the role for green consumerism within the wider context, while Robertson (1989) sees green consumerism, and a revised basis for taxation as an important part of the process of change.

2. A debate about power, recognising that the economic system is also a system of power, that this reinforces iniquitous arrangements between people and thus provides the pre-conditions for unsustainable development.

The economic debate is central to the debate on sustainable development. One thing is certain. The economic debate will intensify. What is most important though is that sustainable development considerations are not just relegated to matters of green consumerism and a few green taxes. The biggest intellectual challenge in the sustainable development debate during the 1990s will be the development of new economic thinking.

4.1.3 The sustainability debate in New Zealand

In New Zealand the principles of sustainability have been aired since the mid 1970s. The draft New Zealand Conservation Strategy, written in response to the World Conservation Strategy drew together a number of these concerns, and gave sustainability central prominence (Nature Conservation Council, 1981). More recently a number of reports have also focused on the concept (Baines *et al.*, 1988; Baines, 1989a). These reports though have largely been concerned with the concept of physical sustainability and first order questions (although in many cases recognising an integral socio-economic dimension).

The Resource Management Bill has provided the most recent public focus on sustainability. Since the proposed Bill was first mooted, the concept of sustainability has been the foundation principle underpinning the proposed law. From early in the RMLR process this concept apparently met with widespread public support (Ministry for the Environment, 1988). As mentioned previously the “sustainable management” of resources was defined based on the Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development. Yet debate around the sustainability concept has been intense to the present day.

In August 1990 Salmon (1990) suggested that the proposed definition was unworkable in law:

“Superficially it is very appealing to list all the good things in life, define them as being sustainable management of resources, and then say that the over-riding purpose of the Bill is to bring all of them about at once. In reality this formula is just a political deception: it is not workable, cannot deliver the goods, and serves only to condemn all parties to on-going litigation, delay and cost” (Salmon, 1990).

The “good things in life” that Salmon refers to are literally that; a mix of ecological, social and economic considerations including intrinsic values of ecosystems, present social and economic needs of people, and the needs of future generations.

The Bill was then reported back from the Select Committee with the sustainable management definition altered to read ... “without unduly compromising the ability of future generations ...”. But as the Action on Resource Management coalition pointed out, inclusion of the single word “unduly” had effectively opened the way for unsustainable management of resources (ARM, 1990).

More recently the Review Group on the Resource Management Bill (Randerson *et al.*, 1990) has drawn attention to the fact that “sustainable development” (as espoused by the Brundtland Commission) is a much broader concept than “sustainable management” of resources, as used in the Resource Management Bill. Consequently, the Review Group has suggested dropping reference to the Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development (as it formerly applied to sustainable management).¹⁴

The Resource Management Bill’s rather shaky progress has exposed the difficulty of creating law on, as yet, loosely understood concepts. Rather than shed light, the RMLR process has created confusion over some aspects of the notion of sustainable development. Instead of furthering our understanding of the inter-connectedness of environmental, economic and social factors, the sustainability debate has focused instead on definitions and legal interpretations. One of the problems has been that in the desire to make the Bill enabling, no priority has been put on the range of factors that make up the “principles” of sustainable management in the Bill. Yet if sustainability means anything it means that “at a minimum, sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils and the living beings” (Brundtland Report, pp.44-45). In relation to the Resource Management Bill, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (1990) also considered that maintenance of life-supporting capacity was an “absolute ‘bottom line’, but sustainable management can and should go further”.

Despite these reservations the institutionalisation of sustainability into law potentially is a powerful mechanism for change, especially when combined with the public participation provisions of the Resource Management Bill. But in order to support this the sustainable

¹⁴ The proposed Clause 4(a) now reads “to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources by managing their use, development or protection in a way, or at a rate which provides for the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of people and communities while safeguarding, to the extent reasonable foreseeable, the ability of future generations to meet their needs in relation to natural and physical resources” (Randerson *et al.*, 1990, p.48).

development debate must be ongoing. On many issues for instance there is no clear delineation between sustainable and non-sustainable practices. What does “not endangering natural systems” actually mean in practice? Underlying the debate about sustainable development is also a debate about values, perceptions, beliefs and philosophy which manifests itself through fundamentally different views of the nature of the “problem”. The positions adopted say much about people’s regard for other people and nature, their attitude to risk, their belief or scepticism in science, their socio-economic position etc.

So far, many of the ‘second order’ questions that bear on the sustainable development debate have not been addressed in this context in New Zealand. Some of these issues were raised and addressed by the Royal Commission on Social Policy. Some of the issues have also been raised during the ongoing debate on economic direction in the country over the last five years. But a broad-ranging and integrated approach around the theme of sustainable development has so far not been seen. This remains a significant challenge.

A necessary and important part of this challenge is to focus on what can be described as the political and organisational dimension of sustainable development. Some of the thinking in this direction is reviewed in the next section.

4.2 The political dimension

“In the final analysis, sustainable development must rest on political will”
(Brundtland Report, p.9).

What are the politics of sustainable development? While the Commission carefully worded its report to give an essentially non-ideological stance, its vision of sustainable development contains major political implications. In the last 20 years in many Western countries the environment has become an important political issue. In that time the “green” agenda has broadened to encompass not only environmental concerns, but questions of ownership and control of resources, the role of the individual and the state, systems of governance etc.

It is instructive to recall that the Brundtland Commission never underestimated the degree of change that it regarded as being necessary to move towards sustainable development. As it noted:

“We became convinced that major changes were needed, both in attitudes and in the way our societies are organised ... we do not pretend that the process is easy or straightforward. Painful choices have to be made” (p.xii, p.9).

Politically, apparently paradoxical elements emerge in the new sustainable development agenda. On the one hand there is a need to strengthen the global institutions through which nations can address environmental protocols. This calls for strong and positive action by governments of nation states. On the other hand sustainable development is fundamentally based on decentralisation of economic and decision-making power and effective participation by all citizens.¹⁵

In fact there is no contradiction - it is the logical outcome of applying true principles of democracy to the new reality of the one-world, global economy.

4.2.1 Commitment to global institutions

The overhaul and strengthening of global institutions is just part of a more broad-scale need for international co-operation identified by the Brundtland Commission. There are (at least) four sets of international institutions that fall under the spotlight.

1. The so-called Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank and IMF, which dictate the conditions for much of the resource and money flows into and out of the developing countries;
2. The GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) under which the rules of world trade are negotiated;
3. The emerging global environmental agreements and protocols, such as MARPOL (Marine Pollution), the Montreal Protocol on protection of the ozone layer, and recent climate change conventions;
4. Transnational corporations, whose business operations are global in nature, and transcend national sovereignty (based on Robertson, 1989).

¹⁵ This has been an interesting evolutionary trend, since during the 1970s prominent environmental analyses were argued around the need for strong, authoritarian, centralised control in order to preserve the environment and relieve resource scarcity (e.g. see Ophuls, 1977). But the sustainable development perspective has been influenced by human rights movements (feminist movement, indigenous peoples), third world development perspectives, and by the realisation that big governments are as much a part of the problem as they are a solution.

In 1989 New Zealand proposed a new organ of international governance under the United Nations system. The proposal was for a body to take binding decisions (and the power to act) on global environmental issues (Palmer, 1990a). In the light of the United Nation's new found togetherness on the issue of Kuwait, the prospects for an environmental protection agency with genuine powers to act are intriguing. However, what is quite clear from the events to date concerning progress on the Montreal Protocol and Climate Change convention, is that the success of such agreements will depend on there being a substantial transfer of resources from developed to developing countries. It simply reinforces the views expressed by the Brundtland Commission and others, that if the shift to sustainable development is to be achieved, it must be acceptable to the poor. Amongst others, Robertson (1989) has argued that strengthening of institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and GATT is just not enough. Nothing short of a systematic rethink of their function and an overhaul of their purpose is required.

Attention to distributional issues will necessarily precede (or run parallel to) progress on international environmental agreements. Ahead lies a major political task in the developed countries to accept responsibility for a greater share of the sacrifices (Bowers, 1990). As the IIED (1990) has laid out in blunt terms, the 'North' must now pay for using the environment so profligately. The South meanwhile must address questions of open governance and management.

4.2.2 Decentralisation and effective participation

The second consistent thread to the politics of sustainable development is decentralisation. The Brundtland Commission noted that the integration of economic and ecological goals is:

“best secured by decentralising the management of resources upon which local communities depend, and giving these communities an effective say over the use of these resources” (p.63).

What is interesting about the decentralisation debate is that writers from a range of backgrounds and perspectives are coming to the same conclusion. From a purely practical point of view, Robertson (1983) has argued that decentralisation is occurring as a necessity because the limits of centralised state control have been reached (and surpassed) in many countries. From a “persons in community” perspective (Daly and Cobb, 1989), decentralisation and participation are logical outcomes. It is thus an integral aspect of the “new economics” thinking that has come together over recent years (e.g. see Ekins, 1986; Robertson, 1989). At an operational level the IIED (1990) point to the success of participatory and community-based development projects in the Third

World. Meanwhile political analysts (Dryzek, 1987; Paehlke, 1989) concerned for environmental outcomes have also made the case for decentralisation and community-based approaches.

The argument of Dryzek is particularly interesting since it provides a new and complementary line of analysis to other writers. Some analysts have suggested that sustainable development can be met by a number of different strategies. This implies that ecologically rational decisions can be achieved independently from the social choice mechanisms employed by these different strategies. Dryzek, though, contends that the nature of social choice mechanisms¹⁶ in place will largely determine the kind of world that ensues. Dryzek has assessed the range of social choice mechanisms currently dominant in western society against criteria for “ecological rationality”, which relates closely to the pre-conditions necessary for ecological sustainability.¹⁷ He found that none of the social choice mechanisms produced outcomes that met minimum standards of ecological rationality; that all these mechanisms fall victim, to varying degrees, to the tendency to displace rather than resolve ecological problems.

Dryzek’s (1987) pessimism about the capacity of current social choice mechanisms to achieve ecologically rational outcomes led to an analysis of ‘radical decentralisation’ in conjunction with the institutionalisation of new ethics and norms of behaviour. His conclusion was that this offered the most promise if it set up pre-conditions for more substantial institutional innovation.

But decentralisation and participation raise a host of other issues that need to be addressed such as empowerment skills, leadership, responsibilities etc. One of the important questions that also needs to be addressed in this context is that of scale - what is the appropriate size of organisations to carry out most effectively a certain task?

4.2.3 A fundamental shift of mind?

Business organisations are a useful place to look for possible working examples because they operate as “economies within the economy” and, in a sense, “communities within communities”. The types of business we should look for however are not necessarily those that have become prominently “green” in response to recent consumer demands. Rather, the way ahead is being forged by businesses that are actively translating the

¹⁶ Examples include the market, administered systems, legal mechanisms, moral persuasion etc.

¹⁷ These criteria covered negative feedback between ecosystems and social choice mechanisms, coordination within and across different collective actions, flexibility, and resilience to stress.

values that underlie the sustainable development philosophy into business practice. Kiefer and Senge (1982) have described these as “metanoic organisations”, from a Greek word meaning a fundamental shift of mind. According to the authors, what differentiates metanoic organisations from the dominant corporate culture is their “unique sense of corporate responsibility for the larger social system within which the individual operates” (p.110).

Metanoic organisations share a number of essential characteristics and basic beliefs. First, there is a fundamental belief in people, in their basic worth and in the unique contribution that each individual has to make. Second, they consistently challenge the dominant societal belief that complex problems require large, institutional solutions: most metanoic organisations for instance are highly decentralised, breaking totally with traditional, hierarchical structures. They are market-driven companies and they are innovative. This translates through to several characteristics; a much diminished need for a corporate bureaucracy, systematic incorporation of employee share-holding and profit-sharing, and new concepts of leadership based on sustaining vision and alignment, rather than exercising control (see also De Pree, 1989). A further characteristic has been the awareness and responsibility for the wider community in which these organisations operate. The corporate responsibility programmes of metanoic organisations tend to address the long-term well-being of communities and regions in which they operate (Kiefer and Senge, 1982).

The most prominent company in the metanoic mould that has dedicated itself to environmental excellence is Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M). This company has institutionalised a waste reduction ethic through the process of management and staff participation. A good deal of the responsibility rests on individual employees to identify actual or potential pollution problems, and incentive structures to reward accordingly (Elkington, 1987).

It is examples such as these, from within the sub-economy of organisations, that provide valuable insights into the socio-political and organisational nature of the sustainable development pathway. The fact that these ideas are not abstractions or conceptual models is fundamentally important. Rather, they come from real organisations, succeeding in the real world. And they are organisations that constantly challenge the status quo. The Chairman of one of the United States most respected companies is not normally the type of person one would expect to hear questioning and criticising the capitalist system. But Max De Pree from Herman Miller Ltd believes that one of the greatest problems with the capitalist system is that it has been primarily an exclusive system - “it has been built around contractual relationships, and it has excluded too many people from both its process and a generally equitable distribution of results” (De

Pree, 1989, p.56). The challenge ahead, according to De Pree, is to make it an inclusive system - "the aim is to embody the concept of persons, for a substantial concept of persons must underlie an inclusive system" (*Ibid.* p.57).

The tying together of these threads: invoking an economic system of inclusion based around decentralised and participatory control, development of a conservation ethic, and the commitment to global institutions, represents the political agenda for sustainable development in the future.

4.3 Revisiting the growth debate

The "new ways of thinking" are never more necessary than when it comes to addressing the implications for the economy of sustainable development. Can the shift towards a sustainable society be achieved by turning growth green, as popular opinion would have it, or does it require something rather more fundamental in the way economic activity is organised? Bowers (1990) for instance considers that moving to a sustainable growth path will entail a substantial shift of resources from consumption to investment (in areas such as resource conservation, clean production processes etc.). But it was on the Brundtland Commission's call for a new era of economic growth that the most persistent criticism has come, in particular because the call has become isolated from many of the (quite far-reaching) qualifications that the Commission attached to future growth.

In New Zealand the major thrust of economic policy is towards growth. Three issues are providing the driving force:

- the level of external debt,
- record and increasing levels of unemployment,
- New Zealand's falling ranking in the GNP/capita stakes.

On the surface it cannot be denied that New Zealand's economic situation presents a compelling case for rapid economic growth. The call for growth cuts across political beliefs and has come from people and organisations supporting a wide range of economic and social objectives. From the "left" Shirley *et al.* (1990) have argued for rapid economic growth (in addition to other policies) to provide jobs and reduce unemployment. From the "right" it is also being argued that economic growth is an essential requirement for environmental protection (amongst other things). For instance, it is being argued that only through a growing economy that creates sufficient wealth can environmental protection be assured (see Kerr, 1990). And McDonald (1990) has argued

that environmental protection that stands in the way of growth will be counterproductive to the environment in the future:

“... where protection of resources is given undue weight in environmental policies, at the expense of economic growth, the consequences are likely to be adverse to the environment in future, through subsequent changes in policy as the community finally switches to seek material or other gains, even at the expense of the environment” (p.23).

While McDonald has used the popular notion of inter-generational equity to advance his support of economic growth, it is still essentially grounded in the standard argument for economic growth: that it reduces distributional conflicts. As Bowers (1990) has described it “if growth is sufficiently fast then even with widening differentials of income and wealth everybody can be made better-off in material terms” (p.8).

But the problem with “growth is the answer” is that it conceals the true nature of the problem. As Robertson (1989) points out, growth technically means an increase in the monetary transactions in the economy, and this may be good or bad “depending on who is paying whom how much to do what”. In other words, growth may be the answer, but what is the question?

The questions are many, but essentially they address specific needs such as reversing the trend to increasing and chronic unemployment levels, the large external deficit, and the growing reality of ecological constraints. The question is not just about the need for growth *per se*. Growth may help unemployment, but if it does it will have to create more jobs than are being lost to labour-saving technology, and to the shift of businesses offshore to low labour cost countries. Growth may relieve resource scarcity, for a while, but increasingly the world is having to face up to a situation where resources need to be conserved, not exploited and thrown away. Growth may help the country's indebtedness, but it will have to produce a net surplus over increased imports and further borrowing, which, on past evidence will be necessary to finance that growth. Further, the income gap has been widening in New Zealand over the last several years (Snively *et al.*, 1990). On current trends and expectations, income and wealth distribution will widen even more in the future. Growth can never be the long-term solution to this situation.

In short, growth may be part of the answer, but the main arguments being put forward for growth are within a narrow framework which excludes a wider perspective on the problems.

4.3.1 Export-led growth and international competitiveness

New Zealand has always been a trading nation, relying on exports of primary produce to purchase imports of raw materials, fuels and manufactured products. This is one of the “old realities” of New Zealand and is a characteristic more akin to that of a developing country rather than the developed country status that New Zealand has attained.

The current reality is that New Zealand has suffered a consistent decline in the terms of trade since the 1960s, suffers reduced export earnings from its primary sector because of restrictive trade policies and subsidised production in other developed countries (particularly those of the EC), and now operates an open economy that is largely unprotected from competing imports.

To add to this is the severe overseas debt, currently totalling some \$50 billion and incurring in interest alone an annual drain of over \$4 billion on the economy. The debt issue again is akin to that of many developing nations.

The response has been to encourage an export-led strategy, based on the achievement of international competitiveness. But Rosenberg (1986) has argued that these policies are an aspect of “the fallacy of composition”, where it is assumed that what is good for the individual must also be valid for all individuals. Rosenberg notes that it may be possible for one country to solve its problems by exporting more.

“But if all countries - or even a large number of countries - start an export campaign trying to export to the same markets with essentially the same products and using the same tools of currency devaluation, internal market squeeze and reduction of their internal costs to the level of their lowest competitor, their campaign must end in failure” (p.100).

On the other hand the recently popularised Porter Strategy (Porter 1990a, 1990b) focuses on how countries can gain and retain competitive advantage, most particularly through innovation and technology. But does the formula for success rely on other countries being unsuccessful? Porter denies that it does, pointing out that companies gain competitive advantage in particular product “clusters”, and that all countries are not successful in everything.

But many questions remain unanswered. As Daly and Cobb (1989) point out, production and trade is largely determined by the flows and control of international capital. International capital seeks out absolute advantage, which often means transferring production to low labour cost countries. Does the endless quest for advantage inevitably

set up win-lose situations? This argument is particularly relevant in the context of the global sustainable development debate.

Competition is one of the key planks of government economic policy (Kidd, 1991). But writers focusing on the new realities are suggesting that we need to move beyond the concept of competition. Robertson (1989) contends that a key area of debate and analysis is to understand when competition is appropriate, and when co-operation is appropriate. Drucker (1990) argues that competitive trade has actually been replaced by adversarial trade, and that this is becoming destructive to many industries in many countries. In Drucker's view this needs to be transcended by new policies based on reciprocity. In a similar vein, Henderson (1990) argues that new visions of world trade must be based on three strategies: competition (over a range of goods); cooperation, when the commons requires win-win rules, and, creativity i.e. rethinking the game itself.

This is an area that requires considerable analysis and integration with global environmental realities.

4.3.2 Work and employment

A second issue that bears on the economic growth question is employment. From the perspective of environmental sustainability there are two main reasons why the linkage to employment is important:

- employment is a major political imperative for economic growth, which traditionally has meant greater resource and energy throughput, and hence greater pressure on the environment;
- that the instrumental nature of much employment has disconnected people from a sense of personal responsibility from the outcome of their work in terms of its impact on the environment (Robertson, 1986).

New Zealand's high and increasing unemployment rate has been variously portrayed as either the inevitable result of following free market policies where full employment *per se* ceases to be a prime objective (Shirley *et al.*, 1990), or the unfortunate short term consequence of the necessary restructuring of an uncompetitive economy (Trotter, 1989).

Whatever one's view it is absolutely necessary to understand the nature of the new realities. Historically, the concept of "employment" became the dominant form of work during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and was firmly cemented in place by the factory system of the industrial revolution (Robertson, 1986). Given that the developed world is now moving to a post-industrial era, it is concomitant that the form of work

shaped by this era must also be in the process of change. Drucker (1990) observes that few events have as much impact on civilization as a change in the basic principle for organising work. The trend in employment away from secondary industries into tertiary industries has been recognised (Department of Statistics, 1988). But the rise of what Drucker calls the knowledge worker is also changing the nature of employment and work in irreversible ways. It is necessary to recognise this fact. And what also needs to be appreciated is that “employment” as the major recognised form of work is in decline, notwithstanding the current fall-off because of the depressed condition of the economy.

Up until now the environmental perspective has tried to emphasise the potential job gains by adoption of ‘conservation’ strategies e.g. through recycling programmes, energy conservation etc. These are important but the debate needs to go beyond conventional ways of thinking. Similarly, Paehlke (1989) has argued that a necessary part of the evolving environmentalist agenda must focus on work-time reductions:

“Without work time reductions ... the very technologies that provide this opportunity may enhance many contemporary threats to the environment: increasing productivity without reducing work time will lead not only to high unemployment but also the environmental dangers inherent in sharply increased industrial output, which usually increases materials and energy demand even if the means of production are efficient and clean” (p.256).

However, work time reductions, as a sole strategy, misses several vital linkages. The increased productivity that Paehlke refers to is being achieved not only at the expense of jobs, but also employee’s wages because under the globalisation of trade conditions wage rates are moving downwards towards those of low-wage countries. The jobs being lost are from sectors in the economy that are least likely to be attractive to a work-time reduction strategy. Worktime reduction therefore has to incorporate concern for equity and distributional matters.

Robertson (1985) has been at the forefront of those calling for a major rethink of the interaction between work and the economic system. He argues that the fundamental questions are about how to liberate people from their dependence on employment, and how to enable them to secure a livelihood while working for themselves and one another (Robertson, 1989 p.139). A recent study sponsored by the Planning Council has focused on community responses to work and employment, and has exposed a number of problems and potential opportunities (Boswell *et al.*, 1990). Work and employment is a key area that must take more prominence in the sustainable development debate, because the way work is organised has such a profound effect on human satisfaction, economic life, and ultimately the environment.

4.3.3 *The growth race*

A third issue is the pre-occupation with growth, and the general assumption that sustained growth is a pre-condition for improvements in welfare and quality of life. The use of GNP (an indicator of no real meaning, to quote Ekins (1986)) as a measure of economic and social progress has been heavily criticised by other writers, and their arguments will not be repeated here (see Ekins, 1986; Wright, 1989; Daly and Cobb, 1989).

But an even more fundamental question concerns the understanding and perception of growth - what is growth? A part of the sustainable development concept put forward by the Brundtland Commission was that economic growth must change radically in terms of quality. Herman Daly (1990) has provided a useful distinction between growth and development, emphasising that growth is a quantitative increase in physical scale while development refers to a qualitative improvement:

“An economy can grow without developing, or develop without growing, or do both or neither. Since the human economy is a subsystem of a finite global ecosystem which does not grow, even though it does develop, it is clear that growth of the economy cannot be sustainable over long periods of time” (Daly, 1990).

Development then might encompass more equitable distribution of costs and benefits of resource use, but quite clearly, development in a non-growing economy implies major changes in the way economic activity is organised. And what is the long period of time Daly refers to. When are the limits to growth reached? In economic terms it is when the marginal costs of extra growth exceed the benefits. The difficulty of course is that the present prices of goods and services do not internalise costs which fall outside of current economic conventions. Until they do, or until there are more comprehensive rules to bind economic activity to operate within ecological constraints, the sustainability of future growth remains unclear.

Even some of the promising growth opportunities may not prove to be sustainable. As an example, tourism is largely considered an environmentally friendly industry and one that benefits the country greatly. But there are significant environmental implications in future growth plans. First, there is the Catch-22 nature of the factor advantages of tourism in New Zealand (the clean, green environment and wide open spaces that clearly become less clean and green and less wide open the more tourists there are). Second, there are significant requirements for energy. For instance one-third of the foreign exchange earnings associated with tourism is accounted for by international air travel, which is highly energy and capital intensive and which entails a high import component.

And of the remaining foreign exchange earnings that are spent in New Zealand, a further 35% is spent on transport, again with similar implications for energy, capital and imports (Air New Zealand, 1990). The doubling of tourist numbers to two million by the year 2000 (as some industry sources have considered to be 'achievable') would increase energy demand for international transport by some 70%,¹⁸ and presumably energy use for internal transport would increase by a similar amount. In addition, to service this growth the sector will have a very large demand for capital. An estimated \$3.25 billion will be required by the end of the decade for new plant, equipment and facilities, over half of which will be needed for additional air transport capacity (*Ibid.*, 1990), and this of course has significant foreign exchange implications. So to what extent would such a rapid growth in tourism numbers be sustainable? Contrary to popular belief, tourism is not necessarily an "environmentally friendly" sector. Tourism industry growth plans will have to face up to the realities of environmental constraints such as CO₂ emission targets.¹⁹

But a further issue that needs some analysis is how well the drive for growth corresponds with the aspirations of New Zealanders. The recent "10 by 2010" Report from the New Zealand Trade Development Board (1990), urged New Zealand to embark on a hyper-expansionist programme to lift the country into the "Top 10" by the year 2010.²⁰ Similarly the Government's economic goal is for a "fast-growing, dynamic economy" (Kidd, 1991). Yet the recent New Zealand Values Today report (Gold and Webster, 1990), which surveyed New Zealander's attitudes, showed that a clear majority did not rank "raising living standards" as a major social goal - rather the main priorities were to reduce unemployment, and what can be called "security" issues (reducing crime, maintaining law and order). So the key question really becomes how purposeful will future growth be in accomplishing these major social goals? And how can it occur while respecting ecological limits?

These arguments are not put up to deny the need for growth. Given New Zealand's economic situation further growth would seem necessary in order to aid the transition to more sustainable development. But it needs to be purposeful. And it needs to respect ecological limits. The arguments made here are intended to question some of the assumptions surrounding the growth ethic, and to start grounding the debate within the concepts of sustainable development.

¹⁸ This assumes that there is also a 20% improvement in the energy intensiveness of air transport per capita - a somewhat optimistic assumption perhaps if, as seems likely, the additional tourists originate from more distant countries.

¹⁹ Current Government policy is for a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2000.

²⁰ This ranking was measured by GDP per capita.

4.4 Focusing on the “process”: awareness and participation

4.4.1 *The process of change*

The Brundtland Commission called for a “vast campaign of education, debate and public participation” in order to change attitudes, social values and aspirations. It is no coincidence that awareness raising, public debate and participation have been key features of the follow-up activities to the Report. The Centre for Our Common Future was set up in recognition of the prime need for the message of sustainable development to be disseminated and acted on. The Brundtland follow-up conference held in Bergen in May 1990 featured “awareness-raising and public participation” as one of the five main themes, and some useful ideas are contained within the preparatory workshop report (Anon, 1989). And of course the process of the Report itself was an integral part of the Brundtland Report message.

It is now history that the programme of follow-up to the Brundtland Report, as recommended by the MfE in the Officials Committee Report, did not get off the ground. But, four years further down the track, there is time to reflect on recent experiences and to ask what such a campaign would entail. Who should be doing the educating and how should it be carried out? How are attitudes, social values and aspirations effectively changed?

There are two important agents of change - NGO groups and the Government. In the forward to the Report Chairperson Brundtland noted that environmental, scientific and educational groups have played “indispensable roles in the creation of public awareness and political change in the past”, and that in the future they will play a “crucial part in putting the world onto sustainable development paths” (p.xiv).

This acknowledges the fact that environmental awareness the world over has been largely driven by the concerns of NGO groups, scientific bodies and the general public. The degree of success in providing environmental protection within various countries has been related as much as anything to the ability for environmental groups and concerned citizens to operate effectively. The essential elements of this participation include access to information, the maintenance of democratic processes, and the ability to participate. The political process has followed, rather than led environmental concerns.

The important responsibilities of government in this process therefore include ensuring freedom of information, encouraging open and participatory forms of involvement, facilitating necessary cross-linkages, resourcing investigations, as well as being responsive to community needs.

4.4.2 *A pro-active approach - multi-sectoral roundtables?*

It is in Canada where the most interesting development has occurred, with the formation of the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) and provincial roundtables. According to the Chairman of the NRTEE, the fundamental purpose is to “entrench sustainable development into the national psyche” (NRTEE, 1990a). Underlying this purpose is the view (echoing the Brundtland Commission) that the changes promoted need to occur democratically and flow from a broad public consensus. The NRTEE has identified three basic areas where they need to establish influence:

- developing a new awareness of reality (with the NRTEE adding to the public understanding of the vulnerability of Canada’s and the global environment);
- forging new alliances, with the NRTEE promoting a global approach to allow previously incompatible goals to be met;
- facilitating new institutional processes, aimed at providing a forum for intersectoral exchanges of ideas and solutions for sustainable development issues.

Further information on the Roundtable programme is outlined in Appendix 2.

Superficially the concept of the Roundtable seems admirable. However, the Canadian experience to date indicates only slow progress, and the effectiveness of its efforts awaits to be seen. But given that the NRTEE has only been operational since 1989, it is probably too early yet to tell what impact the group has had. But the concept should be investigated for New Zealand. Some of the questions which would need to be addressed here include:

- How would members be selected? In Canada NRTEE members have been appointed by the Prime Minister, and essentially represent opinion leaders from various sectors of Canadian society. Yet political appointments raise the question of how well the NRTEE can be the “microcosm of Canadian society”, which it strives to be. It also raises questions about the effect of a change of government. At the provincial level this issue has already arisen, with the future of one provincial Roundtable apparently being in doubt (G. Gallon, pers. comm., Environmental Consultant, Toronto). A public selection process would seem to be essential, while at the same time retaining membership for political figures. A key part of the membership of the NRTEE is the presence of three federal ministers (representing the finance, environment, and commerce portfolios), and the linkage this provides to government departments (*Ibid.*).

- Is there a contradiction between being an agent of change, while at the same time being a microcosm of Canadian society? The history of effective change is that it is generally instigated by the actions of committed minorities. So far in Canada the commitment to a common vision of sustainable development within some of the roundtables has apparently been hard to achieve. The Ontario Roundtable, for instance, disagreed fundamentally about the definition of sustainable development. Now, rather than try to define the concept for the citizens of Ontario, the Roundtable has initiated a public debate process to develop a public consensus on the issues (G. Gallon, pers. comm).

The Roundtable process would not displace the need for continued strong NGO activity. Neither would it displace the need for continued analytical and empirical investigations concerning the concept and operational principles of sustainable development. But the process does deserve attention because it takes as its cue the need for “new ways of thinking”, and it cuts across conventional lines of organisation and authority. It is not a policy agency, concerned just with the administrative state. And it is not just a grouping of sectional interests promoting the private good. Rather it acts as an active agent of change, and attempts to adopt an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, approach.

But Roundtables are not the only innovative approach. Another approach, that of study groups, was initiated by the Swedish government back in 1974 to debate the issues relating to nuclear power for instance (see Orr, 1979).

4.4.3 Attitudes of New Zealanders

In New Zealand the need for new approaches to awareness raising, decision making and consensus building is becoming increasingly apparent. The recent New Zealand Values Today (Gold and Webster, 1990) report has highlighted a number of concerns that directly bear on the issue of sustainable development. Three examples stand out.

First, the survey looked at inter-personal trust and noted that overseas work had shown the importance of this ingredient in sustaining stable democratic forms. The results from New Zealand, with only one-third of people believing others can be trusted, compares unfavourably with other western countries. The authors conclude that:

“the level of distrust and sectional division is already ridiculously high for a society in which people are highly satisfied and seem capable of adopting reforms. However, (this shows) how far down the road of political cynicism we have gone” (p.56).

The second point follows from the first. The survey found participation in politics to be low, and the desire for “more say” also to be a relatively low social goal. However, stronger government involvement in the economy was clearly favoured, particularly to counter what was seen as too much power vested in big business (and unions), and an unacceptable difference in wealth between rich and poor. The authors concluded that:

“New Zealanders lack confidence in the ability of the political system to meet popular demands and to promote the common good. Large majorities believe the political authorities are not responsive to their views on public policy” (p.xv).

The third point relates directly to environmental policies. An overwhelming majority of New Zealanders (85%) strongly agreed that environmental protection is an “urgent and immediate problem” (*Ibid.* p.44). Environmental protection though ranked only fourth in social goals, behind unemployment, law and order, and fighting crime. So, when it comes to trade-offs between the environment and, say, jobs, how will the environment fare? It simply reinforces the earlier arguments that the question of work and employment is a major sustainable development issue, not only because of the potential trade-offs with the environment, but for reasons of justice and equity as well.

Clearly, new approaches and new visions are required. The old approaches have disenfranchised people, engendered apathy in the political process and have introduced a large element of mistrust amongst sections of the population. They stand as potentially significant barriers to the necessary changes that the new realities require.

Right now there is an immediate focus for awareness-raising and public involvement for sustainable development - the UNCED in Brazil in 1992 and the nature of the New Zealand input to this process. This provides an ideal opportunity to develop a broader understanding of the Brundtland Report and sustainable development, and to set in place an on-going process that builds understanding and commitment to sustainable change.

4.5 Sustainable development and the Ministry for the Environment

The Brundtland Report emphasised the importance of institutional change:

“Sustainability requires the enforcement of wider responsibilities for the impacts of policy decisions. Those making such policy decisions must be responsible for the impacts of those decisions upon the environmental resource capital of their nations. They must focus on the sources of environmental damage rather than the symptoms. The ability to anticipate and prevent environmental damage will

require that the ecological dimensions of policy be considered at the same time as the economic, trade, energy, agricultural and other dimensions. They must be considered on the same agendas and in the same national and international institutions” (p.365).

The considerable re-organisation of environmental responsibilities in government departments in New Zealand occurred during the mid 1980s and preceded the release of the Brundtland Report. This involved giving a specific advocacy role to the Department of Conservation, establishment of the Ministry for the Environment (to have a neutral role), as well as creating the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (to act as an environmental ombudsman). In responding to the Brundtland Report the Officials Committee stated that this re-organisation essentially fulfilled the objective outlined by the Commission (Anon, 1988). But does it? The coincidence of timing between the two events has meant that this issue has not been properly scrutinised with respect to the full implications of sustainable development.

The MfE has taken responsibility for co-ordinating follow-up to the Brundtland Report and for promoting sustainable development. But how satisfactory is this? Sustainable development is a matter of inter-sectoral concern. In relation to the systems and structures that we put in place to achieve environmental objectives, the MfE themselves state that we should always be asking “why should it be done this way?” (Ministry for the Environment, 1988, p.13). It is appropriate to take up that suggestion here.

In the past it has been stated that the main role of MfE is that of a policy advisor to Government and achieving “balance between development and conservation” (Blakeley, 1987). They do not have an advocacy role, rather it is one of “declared neutrality” where the Ministry is regarded as the “Ministry in the middle” between competing interest groups. One of the roles of the Ministry is to ensure that the system should “not be biased against any particular values” (*Ibid.* p.34). They also have a responsibility to report on the environmental consequences of major policy proposals from other departments.

Yet to implement a successful transition to sustainable development the Brundtland Commission consider that a “massive shift in societal objectives” is needed (p.363). They speak of a “radical change” necessary in the quality of industrial development. The low-energy path advocated will require “profound structural changes in socio-economic and institutional arrangements” (p.201). If this is what the transition to sustainable development requires it begs the question as to whether such changes are consistent with the notion of “balance”. As Wright (1988) has pointed out, “balance” is a loaded word:

“how do we know when we are balanced? In some issues there may be no room for balance” (p.5).

A further concern is the question of equity and sustainable development. This was a key theme emphasised by the Brundtland Commission - both within the current generation and between current and future generations. But in a discussion document on equity in resource allocation Sharplin (1987) concludes that the MfE does not have a major responsibility for deciding what is equitable.

The point surely is that our present “balance” of policy emphasis is leading us in unsustainable directions. Under conventional ways of thinking then sustainable development becomes an “unbalanced” concept. And since it is a normative concept it implies an active bias towards particular values (such as equity). In essence sustainable development and the MfE’s declared position seem incompatible.

If indeed the Ministry is to assume the role of the promoters of sustainability, then the idea of balance needs to be abandoned. There is some evidence that this notion has been quietly shelved since it has been conspicuously absent from the last two Corporate Plans. However, the perception still exists so perhaps it needs to be officially laid to rest once and for all.

Recently the MfE has affirmed a broad-based role:

“People, their communities, their buildings and their cultural beliefs, as well as natural elements like water, soil, air, plants and animals fall within the broad scope of the environment as defined by the Environment Act 1986” (Ministry for the Environment, 1990).

The document goes on to say that the Ministry, being established by the same Act, has “crucial responsibilities for the development of policies which take account of the present and future quality of life for all New Zealanders”. But the fact is that the Ministry does not have the resources available to address adequately the environment in totality as implied above. The reality is that its personnel are employed essentially to address issues of physical sustainability and environmental quality, and it would require a significantly revised institutional structure to deal adequately with the full dimensions of sustainable development.

However, in the same document the Ministry has recognised this and provided some useful suggestions for institutional restructuring, with the aim of improving overall policy integration between government departments. Its concern is that policy advice must

contain elements of economic, social, environmental and foreign policy in an integrated way. While it is not stated explicitly, the proposals are suggestive of a “trioka” of elite policy ministries; a Ministry of Economic Policy split off from the Treasury, a Ministry of Social Policy incorporating policy advice currently put forward by Health, Education, Woman’s Affairs, Manatu Maori, and Social Welfare, and the Ministry for the Environment (presumably largely untouched from present but with a proactive role). A necessary aspect of this restructuring would be to integrate such policy formulation under a coherent long-term strategic framework. The document noted that the establishment of the Department of the Prime Minister has already created the institutional framework for long-term strategic thinking and policy advice (p.26).

While it is certainly true that if you “change the way decisions are made, you change the decisions that are made”, one possible problem with the proposed “trioka” structure is that past clashes of culture and worldviews between government departments may simply be carried through into a new institutional setting. Perceptions that dominate today may still dominate in the future, and little real change may occur. Also there is the danger that vital strategic planning and decision-making procedures will simply be vested with a new institution of executive power. What role would there be for public participation in such a structure for instance? While the MfE has a consistent and commendable history of involving the public in environmental policy formation, a new Ministry of Economic Policy would not be born from such a background.

But in particular what needs to be addressed is how the coherent longer-term strategy is developed; how are the necessary new ways of thinking to be fostered and translated into institutional behaviour? What is to ensure that sustainable development becomes the over-riding principle of this strategy, and that the sustainable development concept itself has a consistency and coherency necessary for translation into practical policy. What institution will champion the radical concepts underlying sustainable development?

The Roundtable concept discussed in the previous section may offer promise as an institutional mechanism that could provide a sustainable development perspective and coherency in this strategy.

But it is important also that the MfE re-examines its own position in relation to the full concepts of sustainable development. How can the gaps in our understanding of sustainable development be best addressed? In particular, how can ‘second order’ questions such as economic system reform, equity, and work be best addressed within a consistent environmental framework? And how can the necessary innovative investigations be supported and undertaken to help clarify the new sustainable development agenda?

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

The Brundtland Report stands as an important document in the long continuum of evolving debate on the global environmental crisis. The Brundtland Commission has given sustainable development a new momentum. Nevertheless, the nature of the Report's political compromises needs to be recognised. It should not be regarded as a bible, as an unchallengeable article of truth. Its value lies in its ability to initiate change, and to act as a catalyst for reflection, analysis and action. Its strength lies in outlining what needs to be done, rather than how it is to be done. The question of how, is essentially the challenge of the Report.

The Brundtland Report is, after all, just a collection of words. The real test of its enduring qualities will be in the way that people have been empowered, and in the collective will of people to be guided by a sustainable development ethic.

Sustainable development is not "business as usual" with some concessions to the environment. The full implications of sustainable development are profound, requiring systematic change in the way society organises itself, and requiring the development of a conserving ethic. Although the sustainable development concept is firmly grounded in an ecological perspective, it is the social and political implications which increasingly are being seen as the major challenges. Concern for the future and for the welfare of future generations is not just a concern for their environmental inheritance. Future generations will also inherit a social capital, which will largely dictate the quality of that environmental inheritance.

Although many of the details need to be analysed and debated, there is an emerging consensus on the direction of needed change. The features are:

- an overhaul and commitment to global institutions concerned with environment and development;
- the need to establish equity as the basis for relations between individuals, communities and nations;

- greater decentralisation of effective decision-making, and the practice of the politics of inclusion;
- institutionalisation of an environmental (conserving) ethic;
- the need to reform the practice of economics so that it reinforces social and environmental objectives, not opposes them;
- the need to rethink and redefine the nature of work and its interaction with the economy.

One of the most important messages of the Brundtland Report lies in the “process” of the Report. It was an open process of discussion and debate centred around awareness raising and participation. It was based on a concept of grassroots involvement and inclusion. And it was constantly trying to break down the barriers between sectional interests and to develop a “new consensus”. In short, the Brundtland Commission recognised that “ends” are inextricably associated with “means”.

Within the New Zealand context four points stand out for immediate consideration and action.

1. The Brundtland Report and the concept of sustainable development has not had the exposure in New Zealand that it has deserved or had been promised. The process of public debate and consensus building needs to be restarted in 1991, initially to focus on the 1992 UNCED conference in Brazil, but with a longer term perspective as well.
2. The full consideration of sustainable development has fallen into a policy no-mans-land. Sustainable development cuts across conventional sectoral interests. At an institutional level sustainable development lacks an advocate (or advocates) that can bring greater coherency in to the debate. There is a need for clear advocacy to be established at all levels - inside and outside of government. The formation of a “roundtable” may be one way of initiating advocacy for sustainable development. New ways of encouraging awareness and participation are a priority.
3. Sustainable development needs a much broader approach and more critical analysis for New Zealand than has occurred so far. In particular, analysis of the issues of New Zealand’s overseas debt, and the crisis of unemployment need to be integrated with the present and future environmental realities. But not only do we need new answers to old questions: it is important also that we address whether we are asking the right questions.

4. Action towards sustainable development needs to proceed on a broad front. Responsibility does not fall on any one group of people. The Brundtland Commission addressed their Report to “all peoples of the world”. As the Commission noted, countries must “mobilise the constituency for change ... the time has come to break out of past patterns ... security must be sought through change”.

But sustainability is an increasingly used and abused term. It has become a current “buzzword”, meaning almost, all things to all people. This lack of rigour in its application poses a real danger. As O’Riordan (1988) has concluded:

“The real threat is that the concept becomes widely misunderstood, it is confined to the flow rates of depletion and replenishment, it remains regarded essentially as a scientific and managerial device, and it has no role either in institutional reform, mobilisation of new power relationships, or in the extension of a more pragmatic eco-morality” (p.49).

If sustainable development is to have real meaning and to become the ethic guiding effective change, then rigorous and consistent analyses and operational principles need to be developed. Without this the sustainable development debate may end up as a debilitating exercise, that does nothing more than confirm entrenched positions. The issue of sustainable development is far too important for that.

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Appendix 1

The Tokyo Declaration

“As we come in Tokyo to the end of our task, we remain convinced that it is possible to build a future that is prosperous, just, and secure.

But realising this possibility depends on all countries adopting the objective of sustainable development as the overriding goal and test of national policy and international co-operation. Such development can be defined simply as an approach to progress which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A successful transition to a sustainable development through the year 2000 and beyond requires a massive shift in societal objectives. It also requires the concerted and vigorous pursuit of a number of strategic imperatives.

The World Commission on Environment and Development now calls upon all the nations of the World, both jointly and individually, to integrate sustainable development into their goals and to adopt the following principles to guide their policy actions.

1. *Revive growth*

Poverty is a major source of environmental degradation which not only affects a large number of people in developing countries but also undermines the sustainable development of the entire community of nations - both developing and industrialised. Economic growth must be stimulated, particularly in developing countries, while enhancing the environmental resource base. The industrialised countries can, and must contribute to reviving world economic growth. There must be urgent international action to resolve the debt crisis; a substantial increase in the flows of development finance; and stabilisation of the foreign exchange earnings of low-income commodity exporters.

2. *Change the quality of growth*

Revived growth must be of a new kind in which sustainability, equity, social justice, and security are firmly embedded as major social goals. A safe, environmentally sound energy pathway is an indispensable component of this. Education, communication, and international co-operation can all help to achieve these goals. Development planners should take account in their reckoning of national wealth not only of standard economic indicators, but also of the state of the stock of natural resources. Better income distribution, reduced vulnerability to natural disasters and technological risks, improved health, preservation of cultural heritage - all contribute to raising the quality of that growth.

3. *Conserve and enhance the resource base*

Sustainability requires the conservation of environmental resources such as clean air, water, forests, and soils; maintaining genetic diversity; and using energy, water and raw materials efficiently. Improvements in the efficiency of production must be accelerated to reduce per capita consumption of natural resources and encourage a shift to non-polluting products and technologies. All countries are called upon to prevent environmental pollution by rigorously enforcing environmental regulations, promoting low-waste technologies, and anticipating the impact of new products, technologies and wastes.

4. *Ensure a sustainable level of population*

Population policies should be formulated and integrated with other economic and social development programmes - education, health care, and the expansion of the livelihood base of the poor. Increased access to family planning services is itself a form of social development that allows couples, and women in particular, the right to self-determination.

5. *Re-orient technology and manage risk*

Technology creates risks, but it offers the means to manage them. The capacity for technological innovation needs to be greatly enhanced in developing countries. The orientation of technology development in all countries must also be changed to pay greater regard to environmental factors. National and international

institutional mechanisms are needed to assess potential impacts of new technologies before they are widely used. Similar arrangements are required for major interventions in natural systems, such as river diversion or forest clearance. Liability for damage from unintended consequences must be strengthened and enforced. Greater public participation and free access to relevant information should be promoted in decision-making processes touching on environment and development issues.

6. *Integrate environment and economics in decision-making*

Environmental and economic goals can and must be made mutually reinforcing. Sustainability requires the enforcement of wider responsibilities for the impacts of policy decisions. Those making such policy decisions must be responsible for the impact of those decisions upon the environmental resource capital of their nations. They must focus on the sources of environmental damage rather than the symptoms. The ability to anticipate and prevent environmental damage will require that the ecological dimensions of policy be considered at the same time as the economic, trade, energy, agricultural, and other dimensions. They must be considered on the same agendas and in the same national and international institutions.

7. *Reform international economic relations*

Long-term sustainable growth will require far-reaching changes to produce trade, capital, and technology flows that are more equitable and better synchronised to environmental imperatives. Fundamental improvements in market access, technology transfer, and international finance are necessary to help developing countries widen their opportunities by diversifying their economic and trade bases and building their self-reliance.

8. *Strengthen international co-operation*

The introduction of an environmental dimension injects an additional element of urgency and mutual self-interest, since failure to address the interaction between resource degradation and rising poverty will spill over and become a global ecological problem. Higher priorities must be assigned to environmental monitoring, assessment, research and development, and resource management in

all fields of international development. This requires a high level of commitment by all countries to the satisfactory working of multilateral institutions; to the making and observance of international rules in fields such as trade and investment; and to constructive dialogue on the many issues where national interests do not immediately coincide but require negotiation to be reconciled. It requires recognition of the essential importance of international peace and security. New dimensions of multilateralism are essential to sustainable human progress.”

(pp.363-366, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Appendix 2

Canada's Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy

1. *Background*

The National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) was appointed by the Prime Minister of Canada with the purpose of:

“providing leadership in the new way we must think about the relationship between the environment and the economy, and the new way we must act” - Prime Minister Mulroney.

The mission of the NRTEE has been described as follows:

1. Advise the federal government (and other decision makers) on the most effective ways of integrating sustainable development practices into both its current operations and its long term planning;
2. promote sustainable development planning in Canada, and inform and educate Canadians about sustainable development;
3. encourage, initiate and be a catalyst for sustainable development action;
4. provide an independent national forum for Canadians to work co-operatively in developing and advancing principles of sustainable development in Canada and internationally (from an information brochure supplied by the NRTEE).

While the NRTEE was created by, and reports to, the Prime Minister of Canada, it is an “independent forum free to consider a wide variety of issues and influence the public in a proactive manner” (NRTEE, 1990a, p.8). Indeed, the NRTEE has the broad goals of “overcoming traditional resistances and establishing a new basis for sustainable development initiatives”, and looking at ways “to entrench sustainable development in Canada’s national psyche” (NRTEE, 1990a, 1990b).

2. *Initial tasks*

One of the first tasks the NRTEE set itself was to establish a common understanding of sustainable development. This understanding has been described thus:

“The natural world and its component life forms and the ability of that world to regenerate itself through its own evolution has basic value. Within and among human societies, fairness, equality, diversity and self-reliance are pervasive characteristics of development that is sustainable” (NRTEE, 1990, p.7).

The concept of a sustainable society is one therefore that is “sustainable in environmental, economic and socio-political terms”.

The NRTEE has developed a set of 10 working objectives for sustainable development in order to serve as a guide to “all Canadians working towards the goal of a sustainable society”.²¹

- **Stewardship**
Preserve the capacity for biosphere evolution
- **Shared responsibility**
All sectors must work towards this common purpose
- **Prevention and Resilience**
Try to anticipate and prevent future problems. Strive to increase social, economic and environmental resilience in the face of change
- **Conservation**
Maintain and enhance essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support processes
- **Energy and Resource Management**
Reduce energy and resource content of growth, wise and efficient use of non-renewables, harvest renewables sustainably
- **Waste Management**
Waste reduction priority, then reuse, recycle and recover

²¹ The NRTEE has also invited public comment on these objectives, and has indicated that it would reconsider them following submissions.

- **Rehabilitation and Reclamation**
Rehabilitate and reclaim damaged environments
- **Scientific and Technological Innovation**
Support education and R&D of technologies, goods and services essential to maintain environmental quality, social and cultural values and economic growth
- **International Responsibility**
Think globally, act locally
- **Global Development**
Sustainable development principles to underpin development assistance

3. *NRTEE Structure*

The NRTEE has been set up to influence decision making and to bring about change. It has no legislative authority to set government policy or enforce compliance with laws or regulations. Rather it exists to act as a catalyst for action, to stimulate the search for solutions, and to build the broad consensus for change. Accordingly, its influence is deemed to rest on its credibility (of both the individuals and the collective), its independence from vested interests, and its access to the views of key sectors of society.

Representation on the NRTEE is supposed to broadly reflect Canadian society, with the present 24 members representing government, industry, ecology groups, unions, universities, and indigenous peoples. A part of the membership is the presence of three federal ministers (representing finance, environment and commerce portfolios). The complete membership meets four times a year in various regions of the country. However, the goals are mainly pursued through five working committees that have been set up to focus on what the NRTEE has considered to be the key aspects its mandate. These committees, and the current focus of activities, are outlined below:

Socio-Economic Impacts

Evaluate and report on the effects on the environment and the economy of current government policies and indicators in areas including fiscal policy, taxation, royalties, subsidies and regulations.

Decision-making processes

Evaluate and report on decision making processes in the public and private sectors and make recommendations on how they might be changed to better reflect the principles of sustainable development.

Waste reduction

Promote sustainable development practices in the field of waste management with an initial focus on residential and commercial waste management.

Foreign Policy

Focus on policies relating to external trade, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements, aid and other foreign policies in order to encourage and support sustainable development internationally.

Education and communications

Develop means to communicate principles of sustainable development to all levels of society in order to stimulate changes in individual and societal values, goals and behaviours.

4. *Priorities for 1990/91*

- assist to develop and implement a curriculum on sustainable development for grades 1-12 across Canada.
- develop social marketing techniques to raise public awareness of sustainable development and generate commitments to action
- promote the roundtable process internationally
- establish key measures and indicators for sustainable development in the production and use of energy
- review and improve incentives that reward sustainable development practices
- prepare written case studies on successful sustainable development practices
- encourage the development of a national recycling programme
- encourage industry to take responsibility for the entire life cycle of their products
- examine the safest and most effective means of disposing of hazardous waste
- review current federal and provincial government practices and policies to encourage greater waste reduction efforts.

5. *Perceptions of the challenges ahead*

In its Annual Report (NRTEE, 1990a) the NRTEE outlined four areas of concern where sustainable development initiatives appeared to be falling short. First, it expressed concern that “a perceived lack of momentum could encourage the general public to abandon the yet poorly understood concept of sustainable development”. It noted little

In its Annual Report (NRTEE, 1990a) the NRTEE outlined four areas of concern where sustainable development initiatives appeared to be falling short. First, it expressed concern that “a perceived lack of momentum could encourage the general public to abandon the yet poorly understood concept of sustainable development”. It noted little change in the insular government and business decision-making processes, and the inertia of the continuing adversarial approaches to issues. The whole concept and process of sustainable development needed “more momentum”.

Second, there was a need for more “enlightened decisions” from both government and business that were consistent with sustainable development concepts.

Third, it was recommended that sustainable development must become a central principle in new environmental legislation across Canada, at both a provincial and federal level.

And finally, education on sustainable development principles and practice needed to be assigned a much higher priority.

