



# Green is only way for state to grow

Sustainability should be Queensland's goal, but the challenge is to cut carbon emissions while our economy relies so heavily on fossil fuels, writes John Cole

## GROWTH

## FUTURE FIX

**N**EXT week, 2000 people living somewhere else in Australia, or the world, will make Queensland their home.

They will be the first of another three million people who will join us over the next 20 years. Most of them will want to settle in the southeast corner of Queensland, which is already caught in a "growth emergency".

A massive \$134 billion public investment program is upgrading just about everything transport, health, education and training, energy, water, community facilities.

In the coal and gas districts of regional Queensland, a similar picture is emerging of a rush to riches with associated

growth and infrastructure pains and shortfalls.

At such a dynamic time, with so much in the project pipeline, we can usefully ask: "What needs to be done for Queensland to develop sustainably?"

The idea of a "sustainable Queensland" means making sure that the things that really matter continue indefinitely.

For most Queenslanders, a sustainability shopping list would include having good jobs, a clean environment, nice quality of life, and reasons to be hopeful for their children's future.

Pitched as a policy agenda, that list could include improving the productivity of our farming communities, preventing urban sprawl, protecting our waterways and the Great

Barrier Reef, encouraging green industry and reducing spiralling amounts of consumer waste, and respecting the rights of indigenous communities to their sustainable development.

On everyone's list there should be a compelling call to take climate change seriously and reduce the carbon intensity of our economy and lifestyle.

There is good reason to do so. Of the many places on Earth to be affected negatively by climate change, Queensland presents among the highest on the risk profile for drought, summer heat stress, severe storms and coastal inundation impacts. Climate change also threatens the Greater Barrier Reef and much of our native flora and fauna.

It follows that Queensland cannot be sustainable environmentally while our economy increasingly concentrates on the extraction and production of fossil fuels that cause global warming and climate change.

Of special relevance to Queensland at the recent Copenhagen Climate Summit was the commitment given by two of our big energy markets, China and India, to significantly reduce the carbon intensity of their economies by 2020.

With more than \$120 billion in oil and gas projects slated for development, over the coming decade Queensland will find itself in the schizoid position of markedly boosting its greenhouse impact while working to move away from fossil fuels.



That is the toughest sustainability challenge for Queensland, because our greatest source of economic strength in the short to intermediate term is the root of our longer term vulnerability economic, social and environmental.

Addressing this dilemma, though, could feature in achieving a cornerstone of a sustainable Queensland a diversified and decentralised economy.

We will need to source at least 20 per cent of our energy from renewable sources by 2020 and the strength of Queensland's energy utilities as well as existing subsidies should be directed to making it happen.

Queensland is the state with sunshine everywhere, hot rocks for geothermal out west, biomass along the coast

and lots of wind.

The building of a transmission line from Mount Isa to Townsville could be the start of a rush of up to \$9 billion in clean-tech investment.

The second cornerstone of Queensland's sustainable development must be to take climate change seriously and to get real about reducing our carbon footprint one of the largest per capita in the world.

By losing their right to vegetation clearing, Queensland's farmers are the only group to have made an impact on carbon emissions.

The rest of us have squandered those savings in suburban McMansions - airconditioned electricity guzzlers that too often serve as the modern Queensland home.

Thankfully, the Queensland Government has taken

important steps towards making housing growth pay its way through efficiency and smaller footprints by upgrading building and development codes. But with another 750,000 homes to be built over the coming decades, it is imperative more is done to drive consumer efficiency by charging the true cost of utilities.

To avoid the "socialisation" of wasteful inefficiency, a sustainable utilities system should be paid for by customers, not taxpayers.

Fixing our carbon footprint also means tackling the disgrace of waste minimisation in Queensland, with less than a quarter of our waste being recycled. Waste volumes have spiralled by 40 per cent over the past five years because Queensland has not joined the other eastern

states and imposed a waste levy to encourage waste minimisation and recycling.

Governance for sustainable development requires more than government.

More than anything else, it needs a well-informed, engaged and constructive people accepting of the obligations of citizenship and willing to innovate to solve the defining issues of our future.

**Professor John Cole is Director, Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development at the University of Southern Queensland**

**TOMORROW**  
**NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

