

# living. sustainable choices

A report on  
sustainable  
consumption and  
production



Government of South Australia  
Premier's Round Table  
on Sustainability

[www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au](http://www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au)

# Overview

## sustainable consumption and production

**Sustainability, in the contemporary sense, is about managing our economic, social and environmental resources in a way that provides for our current needs, without compromising the needs of future generations. In addition, it is about promoting personal well-being, and resilient communities with an ability to adapt to change.**



This report is inspired by the groundswell of people interested in well-being and wanting to live more sustainably.

But what does 'living more sustainably' require in practice?

In practice, it requires us to make more sustainable choices in our own lives – and that requires society to be organised in ways that enable us to make those choices. If we wish to live sustainably, it is important that we have an understanding of sustainable consumption and production.

*Sustainable consumption* is about *what* we consume, *why* we consume, and the ramifications of a consumer society.

*Sustainable production* focuses on what goods and services are available, and how they are produced.

While it is possible to debate which of these comes first in a linear sense (i.e. whether consumption drives production or vice versa), it is probably more useful to see the relationship between sustainable

consumption and production as a web of interactions. It is clear that we need the right production structures in place to allow sustainable choices to be made – but it is also true that the demand for more sustainable goods and services influences production.

A sustainable South Australia will be based on a shared understanding of the changes that are needed to make our consumption and production more sustainable, and the commitment and capacity to act on that understanding.

This report contains recommendations for Government and is also intended to help others think about sustainable living.

Where more detailed content is available on the Sustainable Living Choices website the text has been highlighted in blue. The website is [www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au](http://www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au)



## TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE LIVING CHOICES:

# *lifestyle of choice* FORUM

On 28 March 2007 the Premier's Round Table on Sustainability hosted *Lifestyle of Choice: a Forum on Sustainable Living*.

The purpose of the forum was to bring together a range of people with interest and expertise in behaviour change and sustainable living practices to explore the theme of sustainable living - what it means and how to enable sustainable choices. Concepts of sustainable living were explored and practical ideas canvassed. (see back page)

# MEASURING OUR LIFESTYLE

One way of considering the sustainability of our current lifestyles is through the **ecological footprint** measure.

South Australia's ecological footprint is 7.0 global hectares (gha) per person. While this is slightly lower than the national average of 7.7 gha per person, as calculated in 2004<sup>1</sup>, it is far higher than the footprint of most other developed nations in the world.

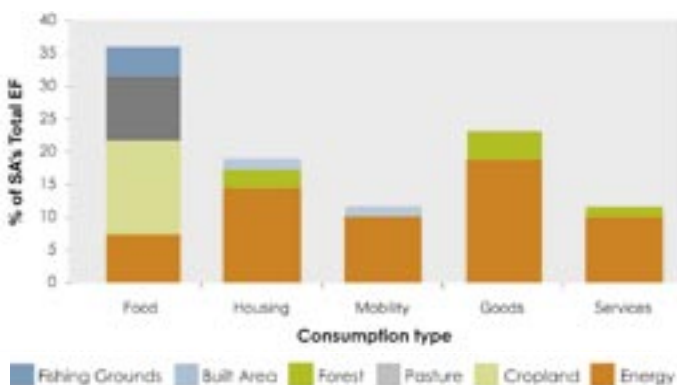
By consumption type, food (36%) is the largest contributor to the average South Australian ecological footprint, followed by goods (23%), housing (18%), services (12%) and mobility (11%).

However, it is also interesting to break down our ecological footprint by land type. When this is done, the impact of our consumption – particularly our energy consumption - becomes clear.

Almost everything we consume involves the use of energy during its production. For example, producing the food we consume requires the use of energy for agricultural machinery, transportation and processing.

Looked at this way, the emission of greenhouse gases during the production of everything we consume represents 58% of our footprint.

Breakdown of South Australia's ecological footprint by consumption category and land type



The need to reduce our ecological footprint is recognised in the updated version of *South Australia's Strategic Plan*, which sets the target 'to reduce South Australia's ecological footprint by 30% by 2050'. The ecological footprint requires us to consider the sustainable use of renewable resources. Improving efficiency while continuing to increase total resource use will not achieve sustainability goals.

It provides us with the means to set meaningful targets, measure our progress, and reflect on our production and consumption over time. To reduce our ecological footprint we need to address our production and consumption practices and behaviours.

<sup>1</sup>A more recent (2006) calculation of Australia's ecological footprint is available, but South Australia's ecological footprint is yet to be updated.



# principles for success

**Enabling our community to act sustainably is a major undertaking. However, there is evidence on which to build a strategy to achieve this. Behaviour change programs, here and overseas, reveal a number of successful guiding principles.<sup>2</sup>**

- **Community engagement.** Communities should be engaged in the planning, design and implementation of behaviour change strategies and community initiatives. Groups and networks are powerful learning environments. Ongoing feedback to the community will build credibility and commitment.
- **Adaptation and resilience.** All aspects of a behaviour change strategy should be driven by ongoing learning and adaptation. All programs should incorporate research and evaluation to ensure the process of building a flexible and resilient, sustainable South Australia.
- **Complementary strategies.** Programs working simultaneously at individual, community and society-wide levels reinforce each other and give better results. Supportive social and institutional settings help shape people's understanding of what is possible. The aim is population-wide change, so Government and business should model and support new social norms.
- **We all are different.** Different people in different circumstances are motivated to change by different things. Multiple approaches are needed for promoting sustainable choices – there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- **Change is long term.** One-off campaigns do not work. Change needs to be developed, reinforced and supported over a long period.
- **Build capacity.** More knowledge or changed attitudes will not necessarily bring about change. Communities and individuals need skills and support to develop, implement and sustain new approaches to consumption and production.

<sup>2</sup> A variety of [behaviour change reports](http://www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au) are available at [www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au](http://www.sustainableliving.sa.gov.au)

# the way forward

**There is considerable scope for Government to contribute to sustainable consumption and production through the support of innovative sustainable living programs and policies that engage and inspire business and the community.**

We all need to take action if we are to make the transition to a sustainable society. However, it is particularly important that Government play a leadership role in this area.

Leadership is a powerful motivator for change and Government's own actions send a strong message.

To promote sustainable living across Government, business and the community, connections need to be established across policy agendas.

A collaborative approach will maximise efforts and ensure a consistent, co-ordinated approach.

# recommendations

There is an opportunity – and a need – for the Government to show leadership in the sustainable consumption and production area.

The Round Table urges the Government to:

- 1 focus on behaviour change as a way of fostering sustainable choices in the community
- 2 lead by example through sustainable procurement
- 3 provide an ongoing forum to facilitate interaction between the sustainable consumption and sustainable production sectors.

## 1 Focus on behaviour change as a way of fostering sustainable choices in the community

The participants in the Lifestyle of Choice forum recognised that behaviour change is crucial to the up-take of sustainable consumption practices and choices.

Working with principles that enable behaviour change, Government, business and communities can help to make sustainable choices easy.

However, there is a need for additional community engagement and education with respect to sustainable living choices, and more detailed research is required.

**The Round Table recommends that the Government establish a dedicated research institute for behaviour change that incorporates principles of sustainability in providing advice and guidance on behaviour change strategies, and aims to foster sustainable choices in the community.**

## 2 Lead by example through sustainable procurement

The Government has the opportunity show leadership in sustainable consumption. As a significant consumer in the South Australian market, adopting sustainability principles as a guide for procurement will send a clear message to the market and the community on sustainable production and consumption.

**The Round Table recommends that the Government develop and apply comprehensive sustainability criteria to the procurement of its goods and services.**

## 3 Provide an ongoing forum to facilitate interaction between the sustainable consumption and sustainable production sectors

The Lifestyle of Choice forum brought together people with both production and consumption expertise. This proved to be a useful exercise in exchanging views on consumption and production issues.

A formalised engagement mechanism would provide an opportunity to promote dialogue between producers and consumers on sustainability issues. Understanding the issues through discussion generates a space to create sustainable living options.

**The Round Table recommends that the Government establish an ongoing forum that brings together representatives of both sustainable consumption and sustainable production interests, to explore and enable sustainable living options.**



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# PRACTICAL IDEAS EMERGING FROM THE *LIFESTYLE OF CHOICE* FORUM

The forum came up with many practical ideas for encouraging sustainability. The themes of the day focused on *energy use in the home, transport choices, and food production and consumption.*

Bringing together the principles of sustainability with behaviour change mechanisms, the forum participants were asked to consider innovative ways of inspiring the uptake of sustainable living choices.

There were many good ideas and enthusiastic responses on the day. Here are some of the suggestions.

## Energy in the home

- The Premier's Sustainable Leader's Climate Challenge - public figures reduce their ecological footprint to '*one planet living*'. Promotion through main-stream media.
- Empower community groups, schools and businesses to create 'low carbon communities.' Ideas include a community carbon 'cap' and credits scheme which finances retrofitting of community buildings.
- Regulate for sustainable house design with mandatory disclosure of energy ratings when houses are sold.
- Provide incentives for building sustainable homes.
- Encourage purchase of energy efficient appliances and renewable technologies.

## Transport choices

- Strategic urban planning to make services such as shops, schools, health and government services etc, accessible by foot and cycle at local and district level, rather than travelling to regional shopping centres by car.
- Support denser urban development to reduce transport.
- Broadband video communications initiative - to reduce the need for travel to meetings.
- Create '*Greenways*' – corridors for non-motorised transport that also support local biodiversity.

## Food

- Support local farmers markets, food forests and co-ops and community gardens.
- Labelling for fresh food to encourage local, fresh, in season, organic produce.
- Star energy rating demonstrating the carbon impact of food

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