

29 March 2018

Committee Secretariat
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This submission will consider the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in relation to the following Terms of Reference:

- (a) the understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community;
- (d) how can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society; and
- (h) examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDGs from which Australia could learn.

About IAP2

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is a global member organisation with the largest Affiliate operating in Australasia. The IAP2 mission is to advance the practice of community and stakeholder engagement through education, advocacy and building partnerships.

IAP2 is partnering with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) to contribute to UNESCAP's work towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its framework of Sustainable Goals (SDG) in building more inclusive and engaging societies.

As part of the partnership with UNESCAP, IAP2 was encouraged and appointed as the Global Organising Partner for the Non-Government Organisations *Major Group (a recognised United Nations entity). The NGO Major Group Organising Partner role has a number of responsibilities including identification of and reaching out to new member organizations within global and regional networks, and ensuring appropriate engagement at both the global and regional levels (for further information see appendix 1).

**Agenda 21, adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992, formalized nine sectors of society as the main channels through which broad participation would be facilitated in UN activities related to sustainable development. These are officially called "Major Groups"*

IAP2's 5,000+ members across Australia represent the breadth and depth of civil society; all tiers of government, small and large business across a range of sectors; tertiary institutions, and independent professional engagement specialists and trainers.

It should be noted that the terms public participation and community and/or stakeholder engagement are interchangeable throughout this submission.

(a) the understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community

The SDGs do not appear to be widely known and understood by the general community. However, no doubt activities currently are occurring that are contributing to working towards the 2030 Agenda. Consistent collection and collation of this data is required so it may be presented and reported to inform all stakeholders on progress.

Community and stakeholder engagement is a critical requirement in working towards the achievement the SDGs. Opportunities to contribute and share activities could be enhanced, allowing both government and non-government agencies to showcase the work they are doing.

As the principles upon which to define quality throughout the process of community and stakeholder engagement, IAP2 has developed the Core Values. These Core Values are commonly accepted as informing best practice engagement and can be viewed in appendix 2.

Recommendation:

These Core Values are a useful resource to assist in communicating and engaging the Australian public in relation to the SDGs.

Continued efforts are needed to build an enabling environment, building critical and strategic momentum to maximise the contribution of all stakeholders. Strengthening the institutional mechanisms for engagement will ensure transparency and inclusivity providing an opportunity for all voices to be heard, leaving no-one behind.

(d) how can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society;

The 2030 Agenda calls for the meaningful and active participation of people and stakeholders at all stages, from SDG integration into national strategies, to implementation, and national monitoring and review; and highlights the importance of participatory approaches for sustainable development.

Stakeholder engagement is central to effective implementation for the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Connecting and integrating diverse perspectives through effective stakeholder engagement is the foundation of policies and plans that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. Structured, well-planned and meaningful engagement creates opportunities for social transformation - promoting understanding, developing ownership, and facilitating the emergence of well-aligned partnerships. Effectively engaging those who are affected by a decision is a cornerstone of accountable governance, minimising the risk of failure that can often result from strategies crafted in isolation.

It is important to have in place a proactive and strategic communication strategy that relies on multiple communication channels and is tailored to multiple stakeholders.

The involvement of all stakeholders is recognised by the 2030 Agenda as a basic principle for implementation and a critical element needed to work towards the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Stakeholder engagement is a planned process that involves all stakeholders in problem-solving or decision-making and uses their input to make better decisions.

Strengthening capacity and mechanisms for engagement will ensure transparency and inclusivity.

Recommendation:

IAP2 has three recommendations to increase engagement around the SDGs.

1. **Call to action:** for government, businesses and the public to support a focus on stakeholder engagement is needed to work towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
2. **Legislative change:** that engagement is embedded in legislation requiring ‘how communities and stakeholders are to be included in government decision making processes’. This should also include the appointment of an Advisory Board to inform and guide the Minister.
3. **Support for an International Year of Engagement:** IAP2 seeks the Australian government’s support for this initiative. We have established an email address - SDG_ENGAGE@iap2.org.au for organisations to pledge support for an International Year of Engagement. All organisations will be acknowledged and presented in a proposal document to the United Nations as supporting a focus on engagement.

IAP2 is gathering global momentum to dedicate a whole year as a focus on engagement. This will highlight the importance of hearing from all voices ensuring no-one is left behind.

A year focusing on engagement could promote action to:

- build awareness and focus attention on other aspects of an enabling environment – for e.g. legislation, institutional mandates, education
- build capacity of engagement practice at regional and national levels
- raise awareness of the SDGs and opportunities for contribution/participation

(h) Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDGs from which Australia could learn.

IAP2 is partnering with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) to build an Assessment and Planning Tool for Engagement (Tool). The partnership includes contributing to UNESCAP’s work towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its framework of SDGs in building more inclusive and engaging societies.

This Tool will provide a suite of on-line resources, including tools and templates for assessing and planning engagement. It will contribute to organisations and countries that are working towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals; assess their capacity in community engagement; and will provide a replicable process for use by other organizations and countries.

The Tool will be developed and refined with the guidance of experienced IAP2 practitioners. They are currently working with pilot countries (Sri Lanka, Laos PDF, Kiribati – and potentially Vietnam) and supporting these countries as they prepare to deliver their Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports to the High Level Political Forum this year.

Once the Tool is complete it will be published on-line and be made freely available as a resource to contribute to strengthening engagement practice around the world.

The development of the Tool is drawing on a range of IAP2 best-practice resources, including:

- **Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** designed to respond to requirements for evidence of effective community and stakeholder engagement.
- **IAP2 Code of Ethics:** a set of principles which guide the practitioners in their practice of enhancing the integrity of the public participation process.
- **IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum:** supports groups define the public's role in any public participation process

Further information on the Quality Assurance Standard Community and Stakeholder Engagement, the IAP2 Code of Ethics and the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum can be found in Appendix 2.

Additional Information

In countries like **Finland**, implementation is based on a multi-stakeholder approach, including through the National Commission on Sustainable Development and the Development Policy Committee. In **Norway**, the indigenous peoples' assembly--the Sami Parliament--is involved through dialogue with the line ministries and formal consultation mechanisms. In the **Philippines**, CSOs participated in the process of developing the national SDG indicators in two workshops held with government agencies. In **South Korea**, contents related to SDGs have been included in textbooks for primary and secondary school students.

Recommendation:

The Quality Assurance Standard Community and Stakeholder Engagement and the IAP2 Code of Ethics, together with the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum are useful resources to design an engagement strategy to improve Australia's performance around communities understanding and involvement in the SDGs.

Additionally, there are a number of professional engagement specialists listed on the website:

<https://www.iap2.org.au/Membership/Consultancy-Register>

In closing

IAP2 Australasia would be available to work with the Federal government to design an engagement strategy to improve Australia's performance around communities understanding and involvement in the SDGs.

APPENDIX 1: Global Organising Partners for the Non-Government Organisations Major Group (a recognised United Nations entity)

Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) have a high level of engagement with intergovernmental processes at the UN level. The coordination of their input to intergovernmental processes on sustainable development has been led by UNDESA/Division for Sustainable Development (DSD). Member States ultimately decide upon the modalities of participation of MGoS. Thus, the engagement and participation of MGoS in intergovernmental processes related to sustainable development varies, depending on the particular sustainable development topic under discussion.

In the 2030 Agenda, MGoS are mentioned in §84 and §89. In particular, paragraph §84, in the context of the High Level Political Forum reviews clearly mentions that such reviews “shall **provide a platform for partnerships**, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders”. In paragraph §89, in the effort to **empower** them even more, the declaration then calls on Major Groups and other Stakeholders “*to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda*”.

Each Major Group organizes autonomously according to its membership profile and areas of focus. To facilitate communication and streamline its outreach, the UN Division for Sustainable Development consults with key actors from MGoS as well as relevant UN system entities to solicit recommendations of **Organizing Partners**, or focal points who volunteer the time and resources of their organizations to collaborate with the intergovernmental process on behalf of their constituencies.

Organizing Partners typically:

1. **represent long-standing and credible networks from each sector,**
2. **are committed to maintaining transparent and inclusive working methods,**
3. **possess the requisite institutional and legal personality to engage with the UN at a high level,**
4. **facilitate outreach,** and
5. **assist the Secretariat in generating and guiding the engagement of MGoS with specific political processes** (often done in close collaboration with other entities of the UN development system).

APPENDIX 2: IAP2 best practice resources for engagement

It should be noted that the terms public participation and community and/or stakeholder engagement are interchangeable in the context of these best practice resources.

Core values

As the principles upon which to define quality throughout the process of community and stakeholder engagement, IAP2 has developed the Core Values. The Core Values are commonly accepted as informing best practice engagement. The Core Values define the expectations and aspirations of the public participation process. Practitioners should adhere to these values for community engagement to be effective and of the highest quality. The extent to which the Core Values can be adhered to is impacted by the level of influence.

- Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the participation of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement

To ensure the quality of stakeholder engagement as the International Standard for Public Participation practice, IAP2 endorsed the Quality Assurance Standard in 2015. The Quality Assurance Standard has been designed to respond to requirements for evidence that effective community and stakeholder engagement has been delivered and in particular that it accords with the professional communities' perspective of quality.

The development and adoption of the Standard by professionals operating in this field, provides confidence and certainty for both practitioners and clients of community and stakeholder engagement practice.

The specific objectives of the Quality Assurance Standard are:

- To better assure the quality of engagement and engagement audit services
- To improve confidence and certainty in the process of community and stakeholder engagement both for users and clients of the engagement practice
- To regulate practitioner activity by standardising the process of community and stakeholder engagement
- To "authorise" practitioners to undertake community and stakeholder engagement in accordance with the agreed standard process.
- To support career, education and practice pathways so that professionalisation in community and stakeholder engagement can be encouraged.
- To validate engagement activity by defining and measuring (rating) a quality public participation process.

Code of Ethics

The IAP2 Code of Ethics as is a set of principles which guide the practitioners in their practice of enhancing the integrity of the public participation process.

As Public Participation practitioners, they hold themselves accountable to these principles and strive to hold all participants to the same standards.

1. Purpose: to support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.
2. Role of Practitioner: will enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.
3. Trust: will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.
4. Defining the Public's Role: we will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.
5. Openness: will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.
6. Access to the Process: we will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
7. Respect for Communities: we will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interest or that appear to 'divide and conquer'.
8. Advocacy: we will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party or project outcome.
9. Commitments: we will ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.
10. Support of the Practice: we will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.


IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Supports groups to define the public's role in any public participation process.

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM



The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.