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The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development*

Executive Summary

- The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) takes place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. It marks a ten year review of actions agreed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and will assess the level of progress on the implementation of "Agenda 21".
- The NZ delegation will be led by Environment Minister Marian Hobbs until September 2 when Prime Minister Helen Clark will take over as delegation leader for the high level segment involving government leaders.
- The first use of the term "sustainable development" was in 1980, when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) focused attention on maintaining the physical integrity of the environment.
- The Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as an approach to development that "meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".
- To be meaningful, however, sustainable development has to take account of ecological realities and resource sharing imperatives by creating institutional agencies and mechanisms at both the national and international levels.
- The WSSD Secretariat has identified critical areas where the carrying capacity of the planet is being, or will soon be, exceeded.
- While the 20 percent of people in the richest countries account for 86 percent of all private consumption, the poorest 20 percent account for only 1.3 percent of private consumption.
- A third of the draft Plan of Implementation to be adopted at the WSSD is in disagreement.
- The [Parliamentarians Forum August 29-30](#) (organised by Parliamentarians for Global Action), offers parliamentary and legislative leaders opportunities to discuss sustainable development efforts in their countries.
- The issues facing New Zealand include the increasing trends in the consumption of energy, natural resources, and the production of waste; pressures on water quality from intensive agriculture; urban air quality, biodiversity losses, and oceans management.
- The New Zealand government has published a "[Country Profile](#)", which details what has been done in New Zealand to help achieve sustainable development across social, economic, and environmental sectors.
- From a regional perspective the key sustainable development issues are: ocean/fisheries management, climate change (especially for Pacific Island nations), poverty eradication, and trade liberalisation.

Introduction

[The World Summit on Sustainable Development \(WSSD\)](#) takes place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. More than 65,000 people from over 180 countries are attending the summit to discuss efforts to achieve simultaneous economic, environmental, and social progress. The primary aim of the 2002 WSSD is to assess the level of progress on implementation of "Agenda 21," the primary outcome of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

New Zealand aims at the WSSD are to build on the sustainable development elements of three recently-negotiated global agreements: the Millennium Declaration, which outlines global social development targets for the next 10-15 years; the WTO Doha Development Agenda, which confirms the role of market access and trade policy in achieving sustainable development; and the Monterrey Consensus, which sets out practical approaches to finance and technology transfers to developing countries, and secures new pledges of funds.

New Zealand's 29 member [delegation](#) to the WSSD includes officials and representatives of most of the 'major groups' identified in Agenda 21 (women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, NGOs, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the science and technology community and farmers). The delegation also includes National Party MP Dr Nick Smith.

The delegation will be led by Environment Minister Marian Hobbs until September 2 when Prime Minister Helen Clark will take over as delegation leader for the high level segment involving government leaders. New Zealand expects to submit a "leaders statement" outlining some of the key challenges and opportunities facing this country.

This Background Note outlines the evolution of the term sustainable development, the key environmental issues facing the global community, the issues facing the New Zealand and Pacific region, and the initiatives New Zealand has taken in addressing sustainable development.

1972 – ecological awareness

The WSSD is the third international conference to address sustainable development – a concept that has evolved over the past 30 years. The first world conference on the environment, the 1972 [United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm](#), established the environment as an issue on the international political agenda. The conference did not use the term "sustainable development," but it did prompt the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the adoption by many countries of domestic environmental regulations.

The term sustainable development was first adopted in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy (WCS), a strategy aimed at maintaining the physical integrity of the environment.¹ Increasingly, however, it was recognised that the environmental costs and benefits of development were not being distributed evenly among the nations of the world. The WCS strategy paid little attention to the way in which development was mostly benefiting the current generation in the industrialised nations, while imposing costs on those in the developing world and on the future generations of all nations.

These social dimensions were recognised as a second essential component of sustainable development in the Brundtland report of the 1987 World

¹ Elements critical to environmental integrity include consumption of resources at or below replacement levels, and the maintenance of genetic, biological, and ecosystem diversity (biodiversity) necessary for ecosystem resilience (the ability of a system to maintain productivity in spite of a major disturbance).

1987 – social dimensions of sustainable development

Commission on Environment and Development. The Brundtland Report gave us the now familiar definition of sustainable development – an approach to development that “meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.² To be sustainable, development has to consider the fair distribution of natural resources between today’s generation and those of the future, or *inter*-generational equity. But, because ensuring the integrity of the global environment requires global co-operation, sustainable development also has to be about *intra*-generational equity. This requires meeting the needs of the present through the fair distribution of resources by addressing the imbalances in resource use and resource impacts among the different nations of the world.

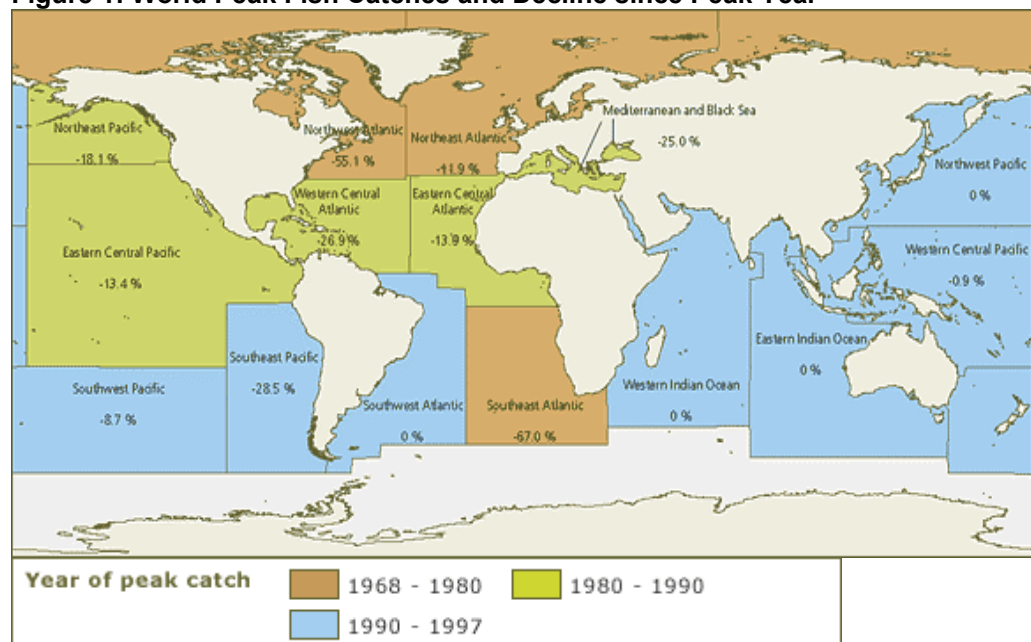
1992 – the institutional dimension

The third essential component of sustainable development is an institutional framework – the organisations, agencies, and policies that are required to translate ecological realities and resource sharing into actual mechanisms and actions that are adopted by national governments. This institutional dimension was a feature of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ([UNCED](#)) – the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The conference established new institutions (the Commission on Sustainable Development), new mechanisms (the Global Environmental Facility), new treaties (the Convention on Climate Change and the Biodiversity Treaty), and a comprehensive action plan (Agenda 21) for global environmental protection.

2002 WSSD aims

The aims of the 2002 WSSD recognise the importance of the components of sustainable development in its theme of “people, planet and prosperity”. The summit will focus on environmental conservation, social development, poverty eradication, and press for specific targets and timetables to achieve these. In the 10 years since Rio, progress on sustainable development along these three dimensions has been mixed.

Figure 1: World Peak Fish Catches and Decline since Peak Year



Source: World Resources Institute

http://earthtrends.wri.org/maps_spatial/maps_detail.cfm?theme=1

² World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Our Common Future*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2002). *Global Challenge Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development*, available at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/criticaltrends_1408.pdf

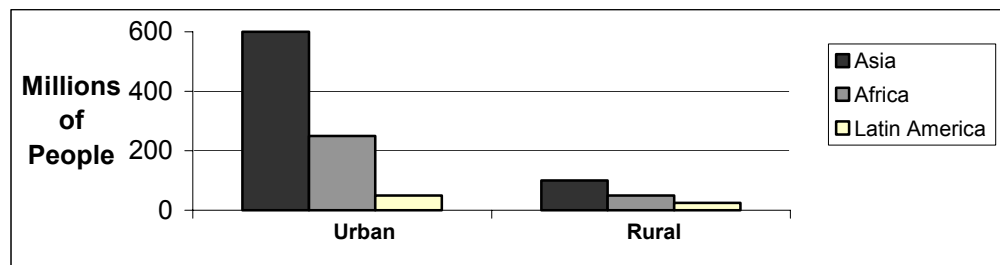
Key ecological issues

From the ecological viewpoint of sustainable development, the WSSD Secretariat has identified critical areas where the carrying capacity of the planet (the maximum population size the environment can support on a continuing basis) is being, or will soon be, exceeded. For example, UN statistics show that fish consumption is occurring above replacement levels. The total marine catch has remained static since 1990, underlying the fact that more than 70 per cent of the world's commercially important fish stocks are either over-exploited, depleted, or close to the maximum sustainable level of exploitation (see Figure 1).³

Water

While resources such as fisheries may be amenable to substitution (alternative food sources, aquaculture), a resource such as water is not. By 2025, about half of the world's projected population – some 3.5 billion people – will live in areas facing water shortages severely limiting their chances for development. Currently over one billion people in developing countries (mostly in rural Africa and Asia) do not have access to safe drinking water, and 2.5 billion lack adequate sanitation facilities (see Figure 2).⁴

Figure 2: The Number of People without Safe Drinking Water



Source: United Nations (2002)

Key social issues

Sustainable development, in terms of inter- and intra-generational equity is also on the WSSD agenda. The last decade has seen enormous economic growth, but not for all. Total consumption and the pressure it exerts on natural resources and the environment depends in part on population, but even more on affluence and technology. For example, although only 20 percent of the global population live in the richest countries, they account for 86 percent of all private consumption. The poorest 20 percent account for only 1.3 percent of private consumption. Moreover, citizens in more than 80 countries have lower per capita income than they did ten years ago, and nearly three billion people (almost half the world) live on less than two dollars a day.⁵ According to U.N. statistics, rich countries paid out more than \$350 billion to their own farmers in subsidies last year, dwarfing the \$54 billion they paid out in developmental aid. "The average cow in the United States is supported by three times the resources as the average poor person in Africa," according to a World Bank spokesman quoted in [United Press International](#).

Global economic apartheid not sustainable

South African President Thabo Mbeki described these economic disparities to the WSSD's opening plenary session as "[global apartheid](#)" – the gulf between a rich minority of prosperous consumers and the mass of suffering poor. "A global human society based on poverty for many and prosperity for a few, characterised by islands of wealth, surrounded by a sea of poverty, is unsustainable."⁶

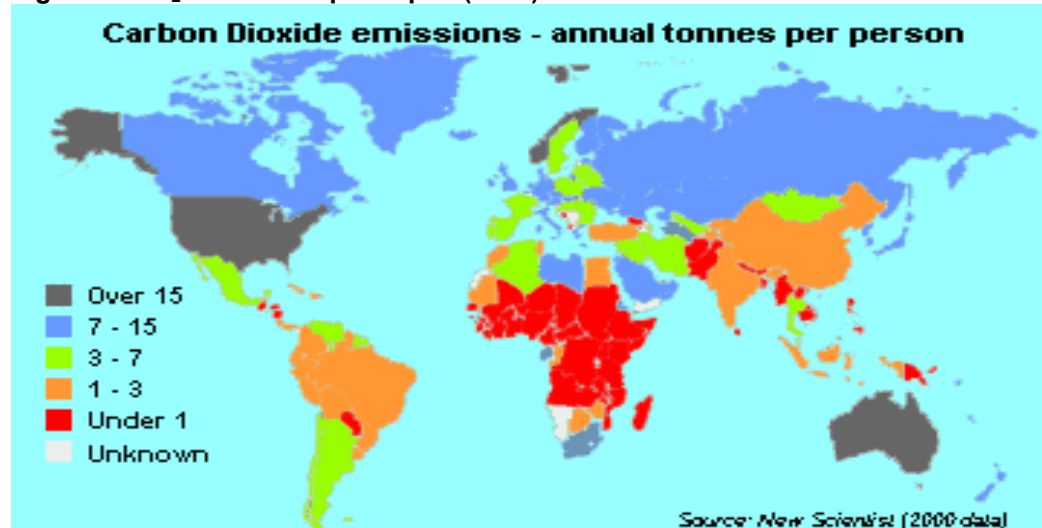
⁴ WSSD (2002). *A Framework for Action on Water and Sanitation*, available at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/wehab_papers/wehab_water_sanitation.pdf

⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2002). *Global Challenge Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development*, available at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/criticaltrends_1408.pdf

⁶ Mbeki, Thabo (2002) <http://www.un.org/events/wssd/summaries/envdevj2.htm>

One example of the unequal use of resources is the per capita emissions of carbon dioxide, which is one of the greenhouse gases (GHG) responsible for the enhanced greenhouse effect.⁷ Figure 3 shows that industrialised nations are currently using far more of the planet's atmospheric resources (the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb CO₂) than developing nations on a per capita basis. The fact that it is the industrialised nations that have contributed most to the historical burden of GHG emissions is reflected by the Kyoto Protocol entering into force once 55 nations, including those representing 55 percent of developed nations' 1990 emissions, have ratified it.

Figure 3: CO₂ Emissions per capita (2000)



Source: National Energy Foundation, <http://www.natenergy.org.uk/convert.htm>

Of course, it is precisely the industrialised nations' level of economic development (that includes the civil defence and insurance infrastructure) that affords them the luxury of choosing to adapt to climate change rather than reduce their GHG emissions.

Increasingly, however, this choice may be unsustainable – insurance payments for damage from floods and storms increased from about \$2 billion annually in the 1980s to \$30 billion annually in the early 1990s. This increase undermines the rationale for those countries refusing to ratify the Kyoto protocol on the grounds that the costs outweigh the benefits, since it assumes that the costs of not signing are known, manageable, and static.

Key institutional issues

The third, and perhaps the most important pillar is the institutional framework necessary to achieve sustainable development. [Four preparatory meetings](#) have been held over the past two years to prepare for the Johannesburg Summit, which envisages three outcomes: a [plan of implementation](#) intended to identify and overcome barriers to Agenda 21 and making new goals and initiatives; a [political declaration](#) that is likely to contain concrete commitments, targets and timetables on key issues and goals; and [partnerships](#) between governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations.

Forums

A number of forums have been organised to support these outcomes: a [Global Peoples Forum](#) for non-governmental organizations; a [Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development](#); a [Business Forum](#);

⁷ The *natural* greenhouse effect existed long before humans walked the earth. It is the result of an ecological process that sees specific (natural) concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that retain warmth from incoming solar radiation. The *enhanced* greenhouse effect is the 30 percent increase in the concentration of these gases above 18th century levels, as the result of human activity. Global average surface temperatures have increased by about 0.6°C since 1900 – the fastest rate of increase in the last 10,000 years.

and a [Parliamentarians Forum August 29-30](#) affording parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss sustainable development efforts in their countries.

However, about a third of the draft Plan of Implementation is in disagreement. Among the key areas of contention are:

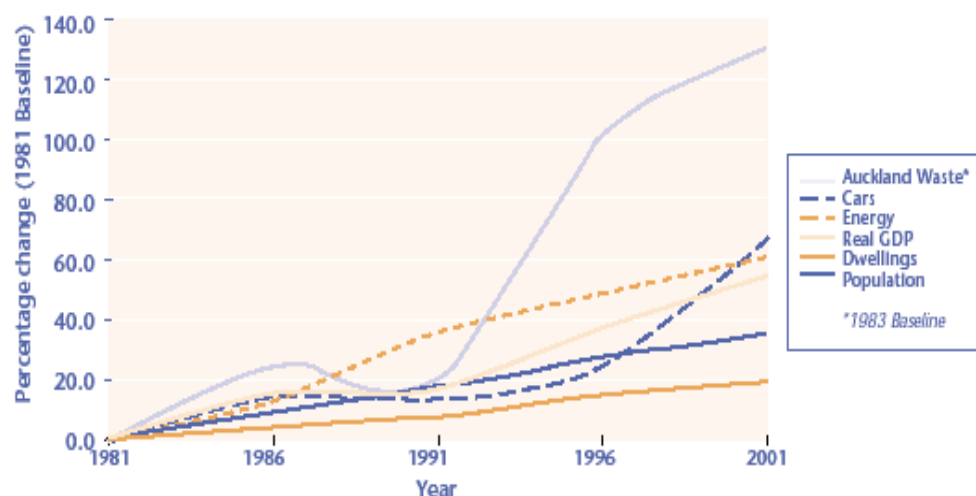
- issues related to finance and trade, as set out in the ‘development’ round of trade negotiations at the [Doha meeting of the WTO](#);
- issues related to the established principle of “common, but differentiated responsibilities,” which suggests that all nations must contribute to sustainable development, but that those nations who have contributed the most to global problems, and that have the greatest wherewithal, should play a lead role;
- issues related to good governance and human rights;
- efforts by the United States to maintain weak language on reproductive health care;
- the definition of specific goals and timetables for specific targets.

As a result, difficult discussions and contentious sessions are expected at the WSSD. Most importantly, developing countries want to focus negotiations and outcomes on the development agenda – ensuring that all nations benefit from globalisation and economic progress – while others in the environmental arena fear poverty and trade agreements will obscure environmental issues.

Nevertheless, the UN Secretary-General, the Summit Secretariat, many NGOs and governments are in near agreement that Johannesburg could be a success if it fosters progress on the so-called “[WEHAB](#)” agenda – water/sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and food security, and biodiversity.

From a New Zealand perspective the key sustainable development [issues](#) include: the increasing trends in the consumption of energy, natural resources, and the production of waste; pressures on water quality from intensive agriculture; urban air quality, biodiversity losses, oceans management, and biosecurity issues. For example, Figure 4 shows that since 1981 New Zealanders have made few gains in terms of resource use efficiencies. Increases in Auckland waste, cars, and consumer energy use (21 percent between 1990 and 2000) have generally outstripped the growth in real GDP over the last twenty years.⁸

Figure 4: Percentage Change in National Parameters 1981 -2001



Source: PCE (2002). *Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development for New Zealand*

⁸ Statistics New Zealand (2002). *Monitoring Progress Towards a Sustainable New Zealand*.

According to the [Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment](#) (PCE), part of the problem has been the slow strategic advancement of sustainable development by central government when compared with the actions taken by many other OECD countries. It was not until August 2001, nine years after the Rio Earth Summit, that the Government announced its intention to produce a national strategy on sustainable development.⁹ While a number of local authorities, [business organisations](#), and community groups have advanced their own initiatives, the complex inter-dependence of policies impacting on sustainable development requires co-ordination by central government.

Key impediments to such co-ordination cited by the PCE include a lack of: monitoring; research; sustainable development indicators; and a statement on the state of natural capital or resources as part of a system of national accounts. Without such information it is difficult to evaluate progress toward sustainable development.

Nevertheless, New Zealand has pursued sustainable development since 1992 through several mechanisms. It passed the Resource Management Act; became a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1993; became a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol in 1998; completed the Ambient Air Quality Guidelines in 1994; passed the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act in 2000; and established a National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy in 2001.

More recently, in preparation for the summit, New Zealand has published a "[Country Profile](#)", which details what has been done in New Zealand to help achieve sustainable development across social, economic, and environmental sectors.

Pacific regional issues

As already indicated, the biological sustainability of most commercial fish species is threatened by both increases in consumption demand and excessive harvesting capacity. Because fisheries in key exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the Atlantic (such as Morocco, Argentina, and Canada) have already collapsed or are depleted, global fishing fleets are increasingly seeking access to fishing areas in the EEZs of New Zealand and the Pacific Island countries (PICs). These new entrants will be competing with the fishing fleets already present in the area (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the US). The combination of increasing demand and limited surveillance capability in some of the largest EEZs in the world may see the viability of the region's fish resources threatened. The External Assessments Bureau judges that "unregulated or illegal fishing will increase in areas of concern to New Zealand. Evasion methods are likely to become more deliberate and refined as these pressures grow."¹⁰

Apart from ocean and fisheries management, key sustainable development issues in the Pacific include climate change, poverty eradication, and trade liberalisation. PIC ecosystems are delicately balanced, vulnerable to "natural" or climate change-induced disasters (cyclones, floods, drought). Some Pacific atoll nations, such as Tuvalu, are threatened by rising sea levels. At the same time, population growth in PICs is leading to increased urbanisation and its accompanying problems of unemployment, increasing crime rates, and pressure on services.

⁹ PCE (2002). *Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development for New Zealand*, Available at http://www.pce.govt.nz/reports/allreports/1_877274_03_8.pdf

¹⁰ External Assessments Bureau (2000). *Strategic Assessment*, available at http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/strategic_assessment_2001/strategic_assessment_2000.pdf

Suggestions
for further
reading /
links

The Official WSSD website

<http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>

The Stakeholders Forum

<http://www.earthsummit2002.org/>

Overview of issues and global trends

http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/media_info/pressreleases_factsheets/1308_critical_trends_report.pdf

Parliamentarians for Global Action

<http://www.pgaction.org/wssd/summit.html>

Towards Sustainable Development in New Zealand

<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/env/default.html>

Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development for New Zealand

http://www.pce.govt.nz/reports/allreports/1_877274_03_8.pdf

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd>

Ministry for the Environment

http://www.mfe.govt.nz/new/sustainable_development_summit.htm

The Worldwatch Institute

<http://www.worldwatch.org/worldsummit/briefs/-5>

New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development

<http://www.nzbcscd.org.nz/>

John Wilson, Research Analyst

Parliamentary Library

For more information, contact John at ext. 9358

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