

AUSTRALIA

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CSD) National Focal Points on Improving Future Reporting to the CSD Australian Comments

Summary

National reporting to the CSD has produced information of variable quality at considerable resource cost. It has not achieved its potential to provide policy feedback and encourage learning from experience. Possible improvements include emphasis on reporting against goals and targets, more use of indicators and annual updating of the national report website.

Australian experience on lessons learned

The national reporting process has the potential to provide key information to decision makers and the public on progress towards sustainable development and constraints. This can provide an important input to policy development, and enable widespread learning from experience. The reporting process has not fully lived up to its potential. Although it has provided comprehensive reporting and a large mass of information have been accumulated, the process has several weaknesses.

Weaknesses:

- Long, duplicative resource intensive – each year the reporting questionnaires have been quite long and there has sometimes been extensive duplication between thematic reports (e.g. climate change, air and transport). Preparation of annual reports to the CSD has been a resource intensive exercise. It is therefore not surprising that countries with fewer resources have not been able to complete their reports.
- Timeliness – the phased reporting process leads to much of the national information on the CSD website becoming out of date
- Data – the quantity and quality of information supplied by countries is variable. This partly reflects data shortfalls in all countries.
- Comprehensiveness – reporting has been on an issue-by-issue basis. The links between the issues in Agenda 21 have not been investigated systematically.
- Usefulness – opportunities for learning are not being maximized and best practice is not systematically distilled from the reports.

Ways to improve reporting:

- Targets and indicators: More emphasis on reviewing progress against international and national goals and target and less on proves details would improve the contribution of reporting to policy development. In this context, reporting could be streamlined and more use could be made of indicators.

- **Annual updates:** A switch to annual updating of the national reports on the CSD website would reduce the reporting burden and improve the timeliness of publicly available information
- User input: Surveys of website use, and consultation with website users could improve the value of the site to users
- Best practice: It would also be useful if the CSD could collate examples of best practice, and draw out key features and reasons for success.