



ANNA DIXON CONSULTING

Measuring What Matters, Social Policy Division

Treasury

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Submission: Measuring What Matters

Anna Dixon Consulting welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on Measuring What Matters, Australia's first national framework on wellbeing.

Established in 2016, Anna Dixon Consulting is made up of a team of professionals based across Western Australia's South West and Perth regions. We have a strong understanding of the Western Australian context and a genuine commitment to supporting sustainable regional economic development.

Our team has worked extensively in, and with, government organisations and we're trusted to provide insightful research and advice to guide critical decision-making. Our work with the business sector allows us to bring these insights back to government decision-makers to help them better understand the needs of Western Australian businesses and communities. Our comments are based on our work across regional Western Australia and the comments are based around the set questions in the consultation feedback form.

Our Comments

Importance of themes

We felt the overarching themes (prosperous, inclusive, sustainable, cohesive and healthy) covered all areas and we see potential for further amalgamation. We agree that wellbeing is holistic and that the themes need to be viewed as interconnected, as opposed to discrete or ranked in priority. For this reason, we did not agree with the approach in the consultation to rank the themes by importance.

Most important issues for future wellbeing

We see a need to elevate inequality and the natural environment and wellbeing.

Measuring and addressing inequality (and therefore opportunity) is linked to the themes of 'prosperous' and 'inclusive'. Importantly, Measuring What Matters is an opportunity to increase the take up of measures which effectively account for disparity within communities, not just between communities. This work presents an opportunity to address this topic in a more targeted way.

Secondly, there is growing evidence of the dependence of our economy on the natural environment. Nowhere is this more apparent than in regional areas, where food production, renewable energy and tourism are just some of the sectors which rely on natural capital. Regional areas are also disproportionately impacted (and projected to continue to be) by adverse environmental events and trends, such as drought, extreme heat, reducing overall rainfall, increased intensity of rainfall events, to name a few. This is also an area lacking the most in the uptake of measures at present.

Descriptions

Under 'sustainable' the current description is "a healthy natural environment for current and future generations, protected from the damage being caused by climate change". We believe that the focus on climate change is too narrow. The natural environment faces many additional threats, including loss of biodiversity and unsustainable resource extraction. While the processes that lead to biodiversity loss may also contribute to climate change, and climate change can impact on biodiversity, it is much broader. There are learnings from the United Nations and countries such as the United Kingdom (The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review).

Indicators and existing data sources

Potential measures already in use in relation to the environment include protected areas, biodiversity hotspots, areas of significance, waste generation, pollution monitoring and excess deaths from pollution. There are learnings from the United Nations and countries such as the United Kingdom (The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review). In addition, measures related to soil health, salinity and green canopy could be considered. Measuring What Matters should also look for alignment and inspiration from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the GRI Reporting Standards.

We have also found overall or average statistics, such as crime statistics, may have less relevance in regional areas, and are a missed opportunity to highlight social issues such as family and domestic violence. We have seen regional communities which are easily overlooked due to a low overall crime rate but have disproportionate rates of family assault or threatening behaviour. In terms of measuring safety, the new ISO Standard on CTED may offer some useful ideas.

Other existing measures which may be useful, and which we have used in an adapted OECD framework, are local government election participation rates as one measure of local civic engagement.

Rates of volunteering have been used as a pseudo indicator of wellbeing and social cohesion. While there is no doubt there can be positive effects from volunteering, we would argue that in regional areas volunteers are often performing multiple roles and fulfilling essential services which could instead be stable employment, providing far greater economic benefit. There are no measures for volunteer burnout, but there is the potential for a measure that covers formal service coverage in a regional community and could therefore shine a light on underserved communities that are forced to rely on volunteers.

Additional information

To date, we have used an adapted OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress to develop socioeconomic profiles in a regional Western Australian setting on projects such as economic development strategies and drought resilience. Through this work we have found many measures lacked relevance at a localised level and feel this will be a particular challenge in the many small regional towns and local governments in the Western Australian Wheatbelt region. Measures need to be ground tested for relevance in a regional setting and able to be scaled to work at finer scales.

We see measures of inequality such as wealth disparity and income disparity will be particularly important in all WA regions, and we would like to see a focus on measuring and highlighting entrenched disadvantage.

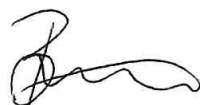
Contact

Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute and we look forward to seeing the Statement on Measuring What Matters.

Yours sincerely



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