

Second national workshop on

# What sustainable development goals should Australia aim for?

19–20 May 2014, Melbourne, Australia

## Workshop Summary

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## Workshop background and aims

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The UN is currently negotiating a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will take over from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2016. Unlike the MDGs, which only applied to developing countries, the SDGs are intended to be universal and apply to all countries, including Australia. This raises key questions for government, business and the community in Australia: What sort of Australia do we want in 2030? What Sustainable Development Goals should Australia aim for?

The *Second national workshop on what sustainable development goals should Australia aim for* took place as part of the three-year project “Sustainable Development Goals ⇔ Sustainable Development Solutions”, which aims to support Australian leadership in the global negotiations for the development of the SDGs. The aim of the workshop was to develop a set of sustainable development goals and targets for Australia that address Australia’s sustainable development challenges and take into account trade-offs and synergies between the goals.

The starting point for the workshop was a set of ten discussion papers on the key sustainable development challenges facing Australia and potential sustainable development goals and targets that could address them. The challenges covered were (1) food security and agriculture, (2) climate change and energy security, (3) sustainable water, (4) health, (5) social inclusion and gender issues, (6) education, (7) sustainable economy, (8) biodiversity and ecosystem services, (9) governance, and (10) cities. The discussion papers and the proposed goals were prepared in response to recommendations from the *First national workshop on what sustainable development goals should Australia aim for*, which took place in May 2013.

Through a discussion-based program (Annex 1), the workshop got the almost 100 participants (Annex 2) from a wide range of sectors to comprehensively examine the proposed goals and targets for Australia and suggest changes and additions that were needed. In particular, the participants were asked to:

1. Identify any major themes or key issues that were missing or not articulated well in the proposed goals and targets for Australia.
2. Identify synergies and trade-offs among the individual themes and suggest targets and indicators that could address these interactions.
3. Suggest ways to engage various stakeholder groups in Australia on the importance of the SDGs and implementing them.

## Key workshop outcomes

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### Sustainable development goals and targets for Australia

The workshop provided specific and useful input on the proposed sustainable development goals and targets for Australia. The proposed goals and targets for Australia were updated to reflect this input and have been published as a separate report<sup>1</sup> that also includes the background discussion papers and other related information.

The workshop also brought up more general points about the proposed goals and targets for Australia, as outlined below:

#### Why consider SDGs specifically for Australia

Although the SDGs will be “universal” (though how this will be achieved is yet to be determined), there are several reasons why it is useful to consider the relevance of the SDGs to Australia, as this project and workshop are doing:

- It is currently the only opportunity to provide direct input to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who are involved in negotiating Australia’s position on the SDGs in the UN.
- It is also an opportunity to provide Australian input into international groups developing SDGs proposals, including the UN Open Working on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- If the UN process produces a coherent set of SDGs that are applicable to all countries, then it will be critical for Australia to consider how to apply each SDG to Australia, and these discussions will provide a starting point.
- Regardless of the SDGs, it is still in Australia’s self-interest to examine the major challenges it faces as reported in the National Sustainability Council’s *Sustainable Australia Report 2013* and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)’s *Measures of Australia’s Progress 2013* and envision what it would mean for Australia to have a sustainable future.

Australia, through this project, is the first country (and particularly the first developed country) to consider in detail in a public process the implications of the SDGs to it. It is somewhat surprising given that most governments are involved in the OWG process. There has been considerable interest from other countries, particularly those involved in the SDSN, to replicate this process.

#### Overarching goal and indicators

It would be beneficial to have an overarching goal that would articulate the overall vision or ultimate end of what the SDGs are trying to achieve. This overarching goal will help give the public a sense of the purpose of the SDGs and where we are trying to head and why, and help in formulating the actual SDGs as subgoals that contribute to an overall purpose. “Sustainable human wellbeing” is one suggestion, but further thought needs to go into this.

In addition it would be beneficial to develop appropriate system-wide indicators on how we are going in reaching the overall goal. Currently GDP acts as the de-facto indicator, but has many drawbacks for this purpose. New wellbeing indicators like the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), the Human Development Index (HDI), and Better Life Index go some way towards this, but don’t capture all the relevant elements and the balance between them. We need to develop an overall model of how the different types of capital assets (human, built, natural, social, etc.) contribute directly and indirectly to overall goal of human wellbeing.

Prof Bob Costanza at ANU will be developing the concept of the overarching goal and indicator further, and has provided some initial thoughts which are included as Annex 3.

#### Sustainable consumption and production

A goal or targets relating to sustainable consumption and production needs to be added to the proposed goals and targets for Australia. These would cover the extractive industries, sustainable use and reuse of

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<sup>1</sup> Watson R, Thwaites J, Griggs D, Kestin T & McGrath K (2014) *Sustainable development goals and targets for Australia: An interim proposal*. MSI Report 14/3, Monash Sustainability Institute, Melbourne, Australia.

natural resources, and low-pollution manufacturing processes. This will be addressed in the next stages of the project.

### **Indigenous issues**

Indigenous issues need to be addressed more comprehensively within the proposed goals and targets for Australia. One important perspective, which is addressed to some extent, is of Indigenous disadvantage and its consequences. However another important perspective is of Indigenous land management, as Indigenous people own about a third of Australia's land (and have a close connection to much of the rest).

### **Governance**

Many at the workshop considered governance in all its forms as a cross-cutting issue with the highest priority, which should be considered as a "super-goal" or elevated in the numbering of the goals (the proposed goals are in no particular order; governance is addressed in goal 9). However, it was also observed that governance is a very contentious issue at UN OWG discussions.

### **Comprehensiveness vs simplicity in the SDGs**

A key aim of the workshop has been to ensure that the proposed goals and targets for Australia address all the key sustainable development issues affecting Australia and all the important first-order linkages between the goals. Addressing interlinkages was seen as particularly crucial (and is mandated in the Rio+20 outcome document), as lack of integration was a key problem with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

However the workshop identified the need to balance this comprehensive and nuanced approach with ensuring the goals are simple and compelling (like the MDGs) and therefore resonate with the public and policy makers and drive action. This is a real challenge that requires carefully choosing and wording the goals.

### **Australia in the global context**

Further consideration is needed in the proposed goals and targets for Australia on how Australia is interacting with the region and the world – both how Australia is affected by external factors, and on Australia's role in contributing to global sustainable development. What does Australia need to have in a global framework, and what can be discussed domestically?

### **Indicators**

The initial proposal for sustainable development goals and targets considered at the workshop also included proposed key performance indicators (KPIs) and policy responses as ways to measure progress towards the proposed goals and targets. As there was insufficient time to consider this very important component of the SDGs in any detail, the project will continue working on it over the coming year in consultation with key stakeholder groups like the ABS.

### **Implementation**

The workshop did not discuss means of implementation of the SDGs, either for Australia or globally. However this is a critical issue. In the global context it includes such contentious issues as free trade, technology transfer, financing and debt, capacity building, and strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development. At a national level it includes how to integrate the SDGs into national plans and policies. Implementation will be the main topic for discussion at the third workshop as part of this project in 2015.

### **Engaging on the SDGs**

The workshop discussed ways to engage various stakeholder groups in Australia on the importance of the SDGs and implementing them. Although the groups considered (see below) included only government, business, academia and civil society, it was acknowledged that the SDGs are relevant to everyone, not just to the obvious interested parties. Therefore there needs to be broad engagement and collection of information on what people want so as to inform the Australian Government's negotiations in the UN – and if this doesn't happen through political leadership it will need to be initiated by other groups.

Some common points arose from the discussions of the different stakeholder groups:

- Communications about the SDGs with different groups need to be tailored so that the framing and language resonates with the audience
- There is need for genuine engagement – that is with the intention of listening and modifying in response to suggestions
- We can build on existing engagement channels that already focus on sustainable development
- It may be useful to hold narrow sector-based workshops to engage with different audiences.

## **Government**

The responsibility for the SDGs negotiations rests with the Foreign Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but is relevant to the concerns of national, state, and local governments and to the community.

Suggestions include:

- Identifying opportunities for linking the SDGs with various government policies
- Developing tailored briefing products about the SDGs for people in government or interacting with government.

## **Business**

The private sector is a key stakeholder in sustainable development. We need to learn the lessons from the MDGs, when business was only brought to the table after an agreement had been reached, and ensure that business is genuinely engaged in the development of the SDGs. This is not currently happening.

Although business receptivity at the moment is low, there are opportunities to build on what business is already doing (including the new ASX Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations) and use existing active engagement channels such as the Global Reporting Initiative, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the UN Global Compact. B20 may be another avenue for engagement. The key is to engage on business terms, using business-related concepts.

Practical suggestions for engaging with the private sector include:

- Develop materials on the SDGs and what they mean for business that would make it easier for sustainability teams to engage internally
- Write to CEOs to let them know about the SDGs and invite to engage in the discussion
- Identify key genuine business leaders as spokespeople for business engagement in the SDGs
- Involve business associations like the Planning Institute of Australia and Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Bring overseas speakers (like Jeffrey Sachs) to talk to the business community
- Engage with investment community, who will know which businesses are already leading in this area.

## **Academia**

There is a lot already happening within academia in terms of research, partnerships and collaborations around sustainable development. Reframing this work around the SDGs can provide a way of encouraging further research, particularly inter-disciplinary research, and build the case for the relevance of universities in tackling real-world problems.

Suggestions for engaging academia around the SDGs include:

- Map out existing research, partnerships and collaborations around sustainable development to see what could be leveraged
- Write to university leadership about SDGs process, highlighting key benefits to the university, and encourage them to communicate with university community via newsletters etc.
- Look at how undergraduate and postgraduate course can align with the SDGs to help harness the energy and enthusiasm of students into research and jobs
- Develop stronger national, regional and international university networks and collaborations, for example through a workshop or symposium on an applied research agenda to implement the SDGs. Internationally, Future Earth and the Sustainability Science Congress 2014 (in Copenhagen, in

October) are such opportunities; in Australia, we could build on the Australia 2050 final report, which will be out soon.

- Engage with the public to develop their awareness of the SDGs and the role of the universities in addressing them. This could be done through location-based public series, a series of papers in The Conversation, and the establishment of a SD Commission (like the Climate Commission) to communicate with the public on sustainable development and the SDGs
- Develop better opportunities and frameworks for working with Indigenous communities on addressing their research priorities and building their capacity to undertake their own research
- Research public perspectives on sustainable development, either by consolidating existing data and market research, or by initiating new projects

### **Civil society**

Civil society is already engaged on the SDGs. However they can do more by engaging their wide group of constituents (community, business, donors, etc.) in a conversation on what the SDGs mean.

Specific suggestions for engagement include:

- Communicate with peak bodies (e.g., religious bodies, C20, ACFID) and make sure the right people know about this project and get involved
- Scenario planning (for example with or without the SDGs) with public dialogue, and getting people to vote for the world they want
- A global celebration “day” (like Earth Day) on sustainable development

## Annex 1: Workshop program

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### Day 1: Monday, 19 May 2014

<p><b>9:00–10:00</b></p>	<p><b>Session 1: Workshop overview</b></p> <p>This session will provide a background and introduction to the workshop and its aims. It will explain the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process and this current SDGs consultation for Australia. It will also provide an overview of the proposed goals and targets for Australia that form the starting point for the discussions at the workshop, and explain what the workshop is aiming to achieve.</p> <p><b>Chair: John Thwaites</b> (Monash Sustainability Institute)</p> <p><b>Presentation: Workshop background, overview and aims, and overview of proposed goals, targets and indicators for Australia – Sir Bob Watson</b> (Monash University) (40 min)</p> <p><b>Questions</b></p>
<p><b>10:00–10:15</b></p>	<p><b>Morning Tea</b></p>
<p><b>10:15–12:30</b></p>	<p><b>Session 2: Breakout groups on goal themes</b></p> <p>In this session participants will examine the proposed goal and targets for each theme to ensure that they cover all the key issues relevant to that theme for Australia. The session will follow World café style rotations, allowing each participant to comment on three themes.</p> <p><b>Chair: Dave Griggs</b> (Monash Sustainability Institute)</p> <p><b>Group 1: Food security and agriculture – Snow Barlow</b> (University of Melbourne)</p> <p><b>Group 2: Energy security and the transition to a low-carbon economy – David Green</b> (Clean Energy Council)</p> <p><b>Group 3: Water security – Rob Skinner</b> (Monash Water for Liveability)</p> <p><b>Group 4: Health – Zoe Wainer</b> (Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre)</p> <p><b>Group 5: Social inclusion and gender – Kate Auty</b> (University of Melbourne)</p> <p><b>Group 6: Education – Sara Glover</b> (Mitchell Institute)</p> <p><b>Group 7: Sustainable economic growth – Rod Glover</b></p> <p><b>Group 8: Biodiversity and ecosystem services – Bob Costanza</b> (Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU)</p> <p><b>Group 9: Governance – Haleh Homaei</b> (Special Assistant on Post-2015 Development Agenda to HE Emilia Pires, Minister of Finance, Timor-Leste)</p> <p><b>Group 10: Cities – Barbara Norman</b> (Canberra Urban and Regional Futures)</p>
<p><b>12:30–13:15</b></p>	<p><b>Lunch</b></p>
<p><b>13:15–14:30</b></p>	<p><b>Session 2 (continued): Report back by theme breakout groups</b></p> <p><b>Chair: Bob Watson</b></p> <p>Each of the breakout group leaders will report back briefly on any changes to the goals and targets for their theme (10 x 5 min)</p>



## Day 1: Monday, 19 May 2014 (cont.)

<p><b>14:30–15:30</b></p>	<p><b>Session 3: What are the synergies and trade-offs and how could the goals and targets be integrated?</b></p> <p>This session will discuss the importance of integrating goals to account for synergies and trade-offs between them. It will introduce a framework for exploring these interlinkages and ways of integration, which will be used in the next session's breakout groups.</p> <p><b>Chair: Bob Watson</b></p> <p><b>Presentation:</b> Interlinkages, synergies, and trade-offs – <b>Dave Griggs</b> (20 min)</p> <p><b>Commentary: Bob Costanza</b> (Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU), <b>Clare Walsh</b> (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) (10 min)</p> <p><b>Questions</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to breakout groups in the next session – Dave Griggs</b> (10 min)</p>
<p><b>15:30–15:45</b></p>	<p><b>Afternoon Tea and move to breakout rooms</b></p>
<p><b>15:45–17:30</b></p>	<p><b>Session 4: Breakout groups on integration</b></p> <p>In this session participants will consider synergies, trade-offs and potential links and integration across four of the themes. The groups will identify issues requiring integration between the different thematic goals and targets.</p> <p><b>Group 1: Food Security, Water, Biodiversity, Sustainable Economic Growth – Bob Watson</b> (Monash University)</p> <p><b>Group 2: Health, Social Inclusion and Gender, Education, Energy and Low Carbon – John Wiseman</b> (Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, University of Melbourne)</p> <p><b>Group 3: Energy and Low Carbon, Sustainable Economic Growth, Education, Food Security – Dave Griggs</b> (Monash Sustainability Institute)</p> <p><b>Group 4: Governance, Cities, Water, Health – Rebekah Brown</b> (Monash Water for Liveability)</p> <p><b>Group 5: Biodiversity, social inclusion, governance, cities – John Thwaites</b> (Monash Sustainability Institute)</p>
<p><b>17:30–19:00</b></p>	<p><b>Workshop reception</b></p>

## Day 2: Tuesday, 20 May 2014

<b>9:00–10:45</b>	<b>Session 5: Report back and analysis of revised synergies and trade-offs</b> <b>Chair: Bob Watson</b> <b>Quick recap of day 1 – Bob Watson</b> <b>Report back on analysis of the break-out groups</b> Reports back from each of the break-out groups on the synergies, trade-offs and possible interlinkages and recommendations for how to integrate between them (5 x 10 min) <b>Plenary discussion on integration</b> <b>Commentary: Taking the SDGs framework into C20 – Tim Costello</b> (CEO, World Vision Australia & Chair, C20 Steering Committee)
<b>10:45–11:15</b>	<b>Morning Tea</b>
<b>11:15–12:15</b>     <b>11:15–11:45</b>	<b>Session 6: The way forward</b> <b>Chair: Bob Watson</b> This session will develop a plan to engage various stakeholder groups and will begin a conversation on a way forward to implement the SDGs framework and recommendations developed in the workshop.  <b>The way forward – group discussion</b> Participants will divide into sectors (government, business, academic, civil society) and discuss the steps to be taken within their sector to promote support for the SDGs.  <b>Report back and discussion on the way forward</b>
<b>12:15–13:15</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>13:15–13:45</b>	<b>Session 6 continued: The way forward</b> <b>Chair: Bob Watson</b> <b>Discussion on next steps with the proposed sustainable development goals and targets for Australia</b>
<b>13:45–15:30</b>	<b>Session 7: Summary and workshop conclusions</b> <b>Chair: John Thwaites</b> <b>Summary of workshop outcomes – Bob Watson</b> (10 min) <b>Speech: HE Emilia Pires</b> (Minister of Finance Timor Leste and member of the UN High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda) (30 min) <b>Keynote presentation: Jeffrey Sachs</b> (Director UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Earth Institute at Columbia University) (30 min) <b>Questions</b>
<b>15:30–16:00</b>	<b>Close and afternoon tea</b>

## Annex 2: Participant list

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**Carol Adams**

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**Claire Bulger**

Columbia University

**Mark Burford**

Mitchell Institute

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CRC for Water Sensitive Cities

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UN Global Compact Network Australia

**Stephanie Copus Campbell**

Harold Mitchell Foundation

**Peter Cosier**

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**Robert Costanza**

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**Tim Costello**

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**Sasha Courville**

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Dairy Australia

**Jane Edquist**

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**Dan Evans**

B4MD

**Lyrian Fleming-Parsley**

CARE Australia

**Rowan Foley**

Aboriginal Carbon Fund

**Daniel Franks**

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University of Queensland

**Rob Gell**

World Wind

**Rod Glover**

Hands on Learning Australia

**Sara Glover**

Mitchell Institute

**David Green**

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National Australia Bank

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**Mark Joiner**

JB Were

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City of Melbourne

**Robyn Leeson**  
Net Balance

**Siamak Sam Loni**  
SDSN Youth

**Garth Luke**  
World Vision Australia

**Gordana Marin**  
Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria

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WWF-Australia

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Monash Sustainability Institute, Monash University

**David McInnes**  
Earthwatch Institute (Australia)

**Tony McMichael**  
National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, ANU

**Harold Mitchell**  
Harold Mitchell Foundation

**Kirsty Mitchell**  
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**Nicola Murphy**  
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## Annex 3: An Overarching Goal for the SDGs

By Robert Costanza, June 2014

It is clear that communities, countries, and the planet as a whole need to articulate shared goals and ways to track progress toward meeting them in order to stand any chance at achieving them. This is the essence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) process currently underway at the UN. This process is building consensus on what those shared goals are and how to measure progress toward meeting them. While discussion continues on a list of SDG's (currently 17) there is a critical missing element in the process. That missing element is the articulation and measurement of the overarching goal or "ultimate end" of the SDG's and how the list of sub-goals and targets contribute to achieving that larger goal.

There is broad emerging agreement about this overarching goal. There are many ways of expressing it, but the essence is "**a prosperous, high quality of life that is equitably shared and sustainable**"[1].

There are three elements to this goal that cover the usual three components of sustainable development – the economy (a high quality of life or well-being), society (equitably shared), and the environment (sustainable – staying within planetary boundaries). There is also the understanding that all three of these elements are highly interdependent and must be satisfied jointly. It is no good to have a high quality of life for an elite few that is not equitably shared or sustainable, or a sustainable but low quality of life where everyone suffers equitably, or a high quality of life for everyone that will collapse in the future. We want all three together in an integrated and balanced way and any one or two without the rest is not sufficient.

It is also important to recognize that the economy is embedded in society, which is embedded in the rest of nature[2,3]. These three elements are nested in a way that means that they are extremely interdependent. We can no longer treat the economy separately, without considering its dependence on society and the rest of nature.

This overarching goal can be seen as the "ultimate end" in a spectrum of means and ends (Figure 1). The SDG's can be seen as populating the "intermediate means" or "ultimate means" part of the diagram – the economy, society, and the environment. They can be considered as "sub-goals" contributing in different ways in different times and places to the overarching goal.

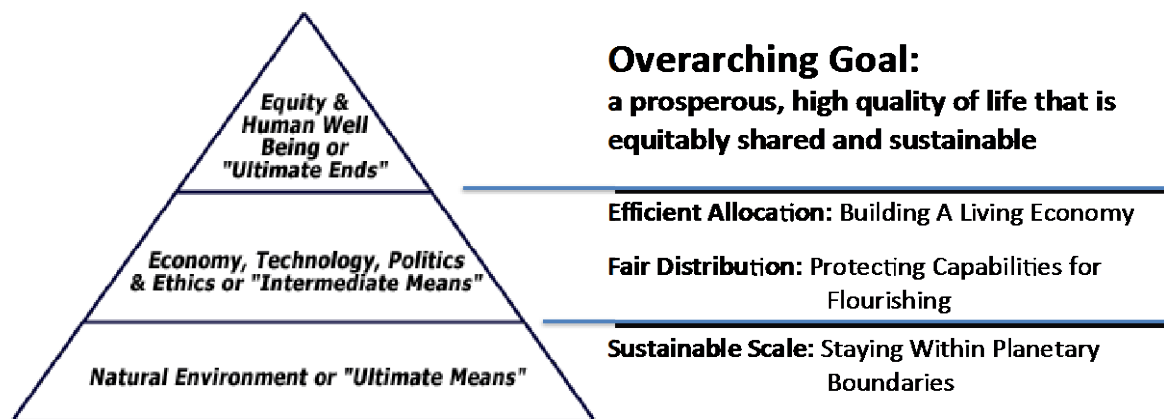


Figure 1. A hierarchy of goals along the Ends-Means spectrum [6]

For simplicity in what follows, we will refer to this overarching goal as "**sustainable well-being**" or **SWB**, recognizing that this well-being or quality of life must be equitably shared, both within and among nations, and that it is interdependent with the well-being of the rest of nature.

Another way of describing the three elements of SWB [3-5] is as the integrated provision of:

1. **Efficient Allocation:** Building A Living Economy
2. **Fair Distribution:** Protecting Capabilities for Flourishing
3. **Sustainable Scale:** Staying Within Planetary Boundaries

Table 1 shows how the current draft list of 17 SDGs cluster under these three headings as sub-goals.

A major challenge in achieving true sustainable development is developing a better understanding of SWB, of how the intermediate and ultimate means listed in the SDG's contribute to SWB, and how to measure progress toward SWB.

There are several alternative measures of progress toward SWB currently being developed and tested (see [www.wikiprogress.org](http://www.wikiprogress.org)). They can be divided into three broad groups: (1) those that adjust economic measures to reflect social and environmental factors; (2) those that depend on subjective measures of well-being drawn from surveys; and (3) those that use weighted composite indicators of well-being including things like housing, life expectancy, leisure time and democratic engagement [1].

None of these measures are perfect, but collectively they offer the building blocks for the integrated measures of SWB we sorely need. Creating a viable and broadly accepted measure of SWB will require a sustained, transdisciplinary effort to integrate metrics and build a broad consensus. This process is underway, but can be accelerated by connecting it with the ongoing SDG process, either as an integral part of the process or as a follow on.

It is often said that you get what you measure. To build a sustainable and desirable future we need to measure what we want, SWB, remembering that it is better to be approximately right than precisely wrong.

## References

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**Table 1. The three elements of SWB and the current list of 17 SDG sub-goals that most directly contribute to them as a way of organizing the SDGs.**

<p><b>Efficient Allocation: Building A Living Economy</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure access to affordable, sustainable, and reliable modern energy services for all</li> <li>2. Promote strong, inclusive and sustainable economic development and decent work for all</li> <li>3. Promote sustainable industrialization</li> <li>4. Build inclusive, safe and sustainable cities and human settlements</li> <li>5. Promote sustainable consumption and production patterns</li> </ol>
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<p><b>Fair Distribution: Protecting Capabilities for Flourishing</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attain gender equality, empower women and girls everywhere</li> <li>2. Reduce inequality within and among countries</li> <li>3. Peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions</li> <li>4. Strengthen and enhance the means of implementation and global partnership for sustainable development</li> <li>5. End poverty everywhere</li> <li>6. End hunger, achieve food security and adequate nutrition for all, and promote sustainable agriculture</li> <li>7. Healthy life for all at all ages</li> <li>8. Provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all</li> </ol>
<p><b>Sustainable Scale: Staying Within Planetary Boundaries</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote actions at all levels to address climate change</li> <li>2. Protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems and halt all biodiversity loss</li> <li>3. Take urgent and significant actions for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas</li> <li>4. Water and sanitation for a sustainable world</li> </ol>