

Guidelines and Ideas for Local Government  
to Develop a Local Agenda 21 Program

# LOCAL AGENDA 21

## The South Australian Experience



South Australian Partnership for Local Agenda 21



Department for Environment  
Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs  
Government of South Australia



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and the Local Government Association  
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Department for Environment  
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These Guidelines have been produced in consultation with Councils in South Australia  
who are part of the *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* or have made a commitment to  
develop a Local Agenda 21 program.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

DEHAA	Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs
EMS	Environmental Management System
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
ICLEI	International Council for Local Government Environmental Initiatives
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LGA	Local Government Association
SOE	State of the Environment

## FOREWORD

The South Australian Government and the Local Government Association through their involvement in the *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* are pleased to be part of the global effort and challenge of promoting ecologically sustainable development.

This challenge necessitates a response by all spheres of government. The Australian Government attended the United Nations Environment Summit of 1992 and became a signatory to Agenda 21. The strategies in Agenda 21 aim to promote ecologically sustainable development at an international, national, regional and local level. At a local level, thousands of local authorities throughout the world are now working with their local communities to implement Agenda 21, as part of their own Local Agenda 21 programs.

The South Australian Government, the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) and participating Councils have taken up the challenge, and are actively supporting the implementation of Local Agenda 21 through the *Partnership for Local Agenda 21*.

The *Partnership* was established in 1995 and is the first program of its kind in Australia. The *Partnership* aims to promote Local Agenda 21 programs in South Australia and integrate these programs with State Government planning and policy processes. The *Partnership* is therefore an excellent example of Local and State Government working cooperatively to achieve a common goal.

The success of the *Partnership* is highlighted by the fact that when it first started six South Australian Councils were undertaking Local Agenda 21 programs. In 1998 this number had grown to 29, representing 40% of Councils in the State, and the number continues to grow.

These guidelines have been produced for two reasons: firstly to document the successful experiences of Councils that have already commenced Local Agenda 21 programs; and secondly to provide other Councils with a suggested process for developing a Local Agenda 21 program. This suggested process is based upon the experiences of the South Australian Councils which have already explored the Local Agenda 21 concept.

The initiatives being undertaken by South Australian Councils means that they are at the forefront of Local Agenda 21 planning nationally. The South Australian Government and Local Government Association are therefore proud to be part of these efforts and are committed to continue their support for the South Australian *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* as a program that promotes ecologically sustainable development at a local and State level. The *Partnership* is therefore part of the State Government's and LGA's commitment to implement *Agenda 21* and the *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development*.



Hon Dorothy Kotz MP  
**Minister for Environment and Heritage**  
**Minister for Aboriginal Affairs**



Mayor Rosemary Craddock  
**President**  
**Local Government Association**



# SECTION ONE

## THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR LOCAL AGENDA 21 - Background Information



## Helpful Hint

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) guidelines for LA21 planning (see Section Three) or ICLEI's web site at <http://www.iclei.org> are useful reference points to explore the approaches to LA21 being employed in other countries and encouraged at an international level.

The Commonwealth Government agency, Environment Australia, is in the process of producing a manual to provide guidance to Australian Councils undertaking LA21 programs. The manual complements the South Australian guidelines in the process being recommended for LA21 planning. It also provides information about LA21 activities in other states and describes how a LA21 could be used as Council's overall strategic planning framework to achieve local sustainability. For further information on the national manual contact the Environment Resource Officer in your state or territory LGA.

## 1.1 THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

Over 2000 Local Governments are now undertaking Local Agenda 21 (LA21) programs in 64 countries. Each country has its own approach. In South Australia, LA21 has until now been principally used as a strategic framework to ensure that environmental and sustainability considerations are factored into all Councils' operations and that Local Governments work cooperatively with their communities and other spheres of government to promote ecologically sustainable development (ESD).

These guidelines outline a process for developing such a LA21 program. The process is based on the practical and successful experiences of a number of South Australian Councils that have been undertaking LA21 programs since 1995.

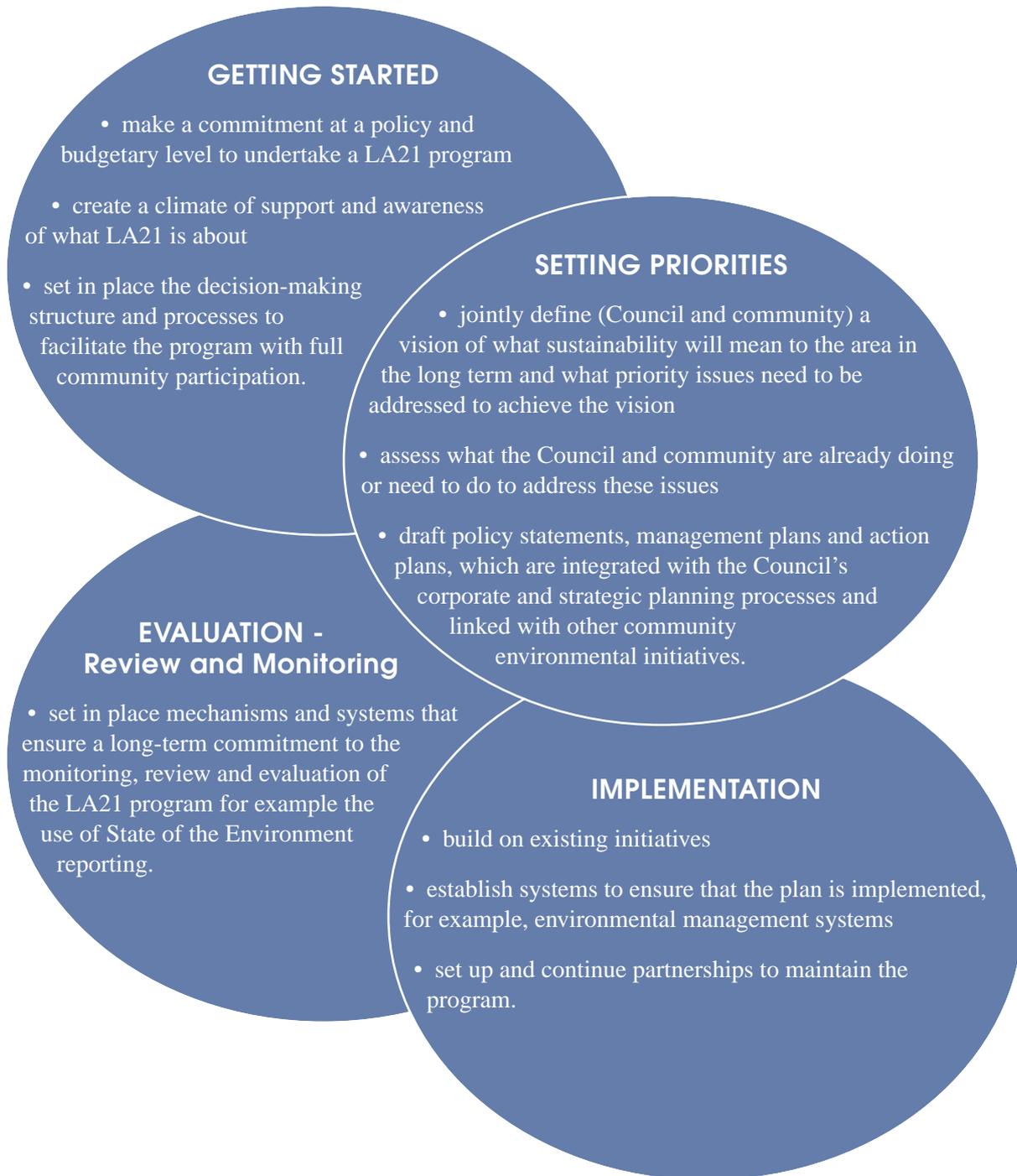
If there is one certainty about a LA21 program, it is that each one is different. This is because a successful LA21 reflects local needs and issues, and the organisational and operational structure of the relevant Council. One Council's successful process may not suit another. Therefore the process outlined in these guidelines can be adapted to suit your Council's and community's needs. Your Council may choose to use the LA21 process:

- to develop and implement its overall strategic planning framework and/or
- to ensure that environmental and sustainability considerations are integrated into the overall strategic and corporate planning and the day to day activities of Council.

This document is in three sections. This first section provides general background information about LA21. The second describes a four-stepped process for developing, implementing and reviewing a LA21 program and includes a number of 'snapshots' that describe how individual Councils have approached certain stages of the LA21 process. The third lists Council contacts and useful references. Throughout the document 'helpful hints' are provided to help Councils quickly identify useful contacts and references and access existing LA21 networks that operate at a state, national and international level.

The four-stepped process described in these guidelines is not necessarily linear (see diagram). Different steps can be occurring at the same time and in an order that best suits the needs of your Council and community. Environment and sustainability initiatives which may have started before the LA21 program, such as waste minimisation schemes or catchment management projects, can be incorporated into the LA21 program. In this way the LA21 program provides a strategic framework to coordinate and build upon existing initiatives.

## Summary of the process for Councils developing a Local Agenda 21 program



## 1.2 THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR LOCAL AGENDA 21

The *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* has had two distinct phases.

### Phase One (1995-1997)

In October 1995, the *Partnership* was jointly launched by the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources and the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) and representatives of five Councils committed to beginning a LA21 program. These Councils represented five different categories of local authority:

- City of Adelaide - city centre
- City of Marion - inner suburban
- City of Happy Valley - suburban-rural fringe
- City of Whyalla - regional centre
- District Council of Streaky Bay - rural.

In this phase the former Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the LGA provided support and advice to the five Partnership Councils and other Councils piloting LA21 programs in South Australia. Two other Councils, the City of Burnside and Stirling District Council (now part of Adelaide Hills Council), also began environmental planning programs in keeping with the principles of LA21.

During this period each of the Councils progressed significantly with its LA21 program and their efforts and experience now form the basis of these guidelines.

### Phase Two (1998 onwards)

In late 1997 the State Government's Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs (DEHAA) and the LGA agreed to a revised *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* program, coordinated by a LA21 Coordinator located in DEHAA and the LGA's Environment Resource Officer.

This second phase of the *Partnership* aims to build upon the success of phase one by:

- integrating the outcomes of LA21 processes and programs with State planning and policy processes
- increasing the awareness within State Government agencies of LA21
- providing ongoing assistance to Councils in developing, implementing and reviewing their LA21 plans.

The *Partnership* has become an important means of improving Local and State Government coordination and cooperation in promoting ESD (see Appendix 1 for the core objectives of ESD as defined in the *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development*).

## 1.3 THE ORIGINS OF LOCAL AGENDA 21

Local Agenda 21 finds its origins in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also referred to as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit) held in June 1992. This landmark international gathering of representatives from 170 national governments adopted Agenda 21 as a global environment and development plan.

The adoption of Agenda 21 recognised that ultimately strategies that promote ESD will succeed or fail at the local level. Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 called on Local Authorities to develop and adopt their own Local Agenda 21, in partnership with the local community, non-government organisations and industry. It stated, "as the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilising, and responding to the public to promote sustainable development" (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992). The importance given to Local Government stemmed from recognition that over two-thirds of the activities called for in Agenda 21 relied on its commitment and cooperation.

Since 1992 LA21 has become internationally recognised. The 1996 United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly review of Agenda 21 recognised that Local Government, through its LA21 activities, was proving to be the most effective sphere of government in implementing Agenda 21 and making ecologically sustainable development a reality (United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development 1997).

A 1996 review of LA21 undertaken by the International Council for Local Environment Initiatives (ICLEI) found that 1812 Local Governments had taken up the challenge of developing a LA21 program (International Council for Local Environment Initiatives 1997). The ICLEI survey also found that the response to LA21 is greatest where Local Government has been involved in managing national or regional LA21 support campaigns. This finding has been confirmed by the success of the *Partnership for Local Agenda 21*.

The potential of LA21 is being increasingly recognised nationally. At the APEC Ministers' meeting on Sustainable Development in Toronto in June 1997, APEC economies, including Australia, agreed to support Local Government in doubling the number of LA21 cities and Councils by the year 2003.

A major contributing factor to the increased national recognition of LA21 in Australia was the staging of the international conference *Pathways to Sustainability* held in Newcastle in June 1997. This gathering of over a thousand delegates show-cased local sustainability initiatives and led to the signing of the *Newcastle Declaration* which calls on all spheres of government to support LA21 planning (see Appendix Two).

## Defining sustainability

Defining sustainability is not easy. The experience of the South Australian Councils that have embraced the LA21 concept indicates that grappling with what is sustainable is part of the LA21 process and there are no easy answers.

A question posed by one Local Government employee highlights this complexity: "For example, if a 'green purchasing policy' is introduced, how do we determine the merits of one product over another? Is the vehicle which is produced locally, supporting local employment superior to that manufactured overseas which includes all recyclable parts, better fuel economy and less pollution?"

The benefit of LA21, however, is that it provides the capacity for a local institution, in consultation with its community, to address these complexities and define sustainability in its own local context. The path may change but the process guides. However, a central element of any LA21 program is that it ensures that environmental considerations are balanced with social and economic considerations if sustainability is to be achieved.

The City of Adelaide, as part of its LA21 planning, asked members of a community reference groups to develop a joint statement of their understanding of sustainability, which then helped frame the planning process. Workshops were held to develop the statement and it now appears in the Council's Local Agenda 21 plan.

The City of Mitcham more recently held workshops at which residents were taken through a visioning exercise of articulating what a sustainable future for the local area actually meant.

## 1.4 CORE FEATURES OF A LOCAL AGENDA 21 PROGRAM

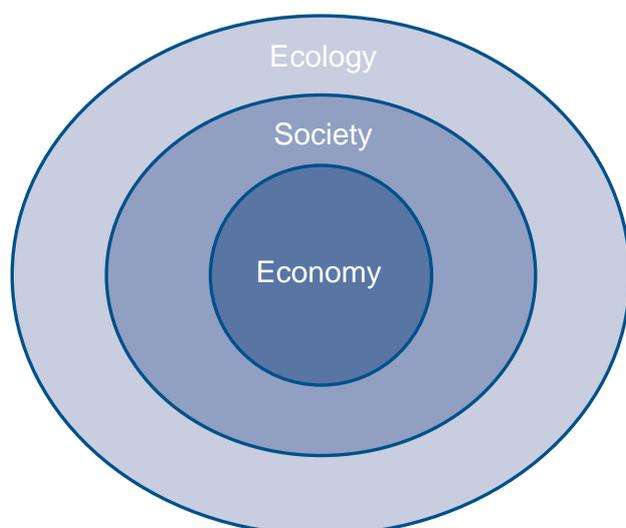
### Local Agenda 21 - a permanent process

A LA21 program does not start and finish, nor is it simply about producing a plan. Rather, it is a long-term commitment to achieve local ESD and is a permanent feature of the way in which the Council carries out its functions and responsibilities.

### Local Agenda 21 - a process of integration

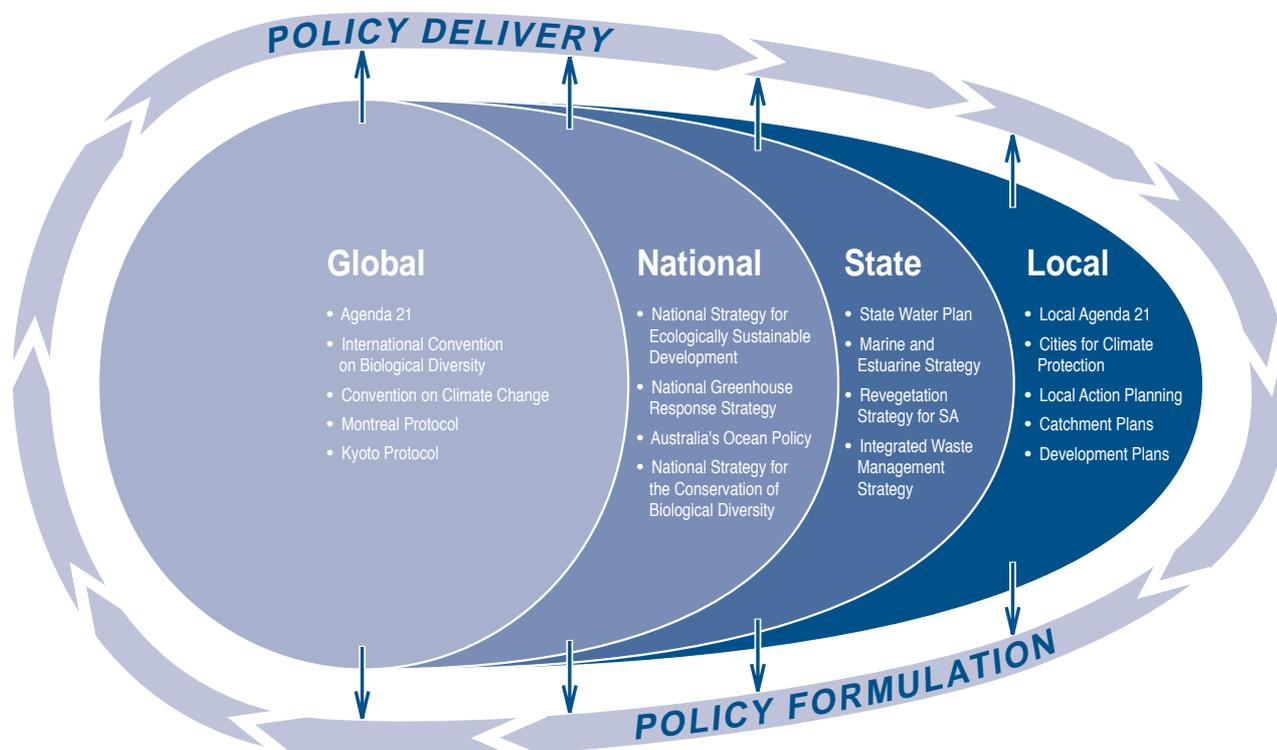
Full integration of the LA21 planning process with the overall corporate and strategic planning of a Council, ensures that environmental, social and economic considerations are incorporated in all decision making.

This model of decision making is supported in the 1998 *State of the Environment Report for South Australia*. This report states that for ESD to be achieved in South Australia a decision-making model that “*recognises that the economy is a subset of a society and that human society is constrained by the natural ecology of the planet*” needs to be adopted. Such a model “*requires integration of ecological thinking into all social and economic planning*” (Environment Protection Authority 1998). This model is central to the principles underpinning LA21 and is shown below.



Administrative boundaries do not necessarily coincide with natural environmental features. Even though there is a great deal that a Council can do to enhance environmental management performance within its own area, ultimately the need to consider, for example, the effect on neighbouring communities cannot be avoided.

The commitment to a LA21 therefore means that the Council will have to interact in an integrated, regional sense with other local, State and Commonwealth agencies in order to turn the policy into practice. Likewise, state and national governments need to ensure that the outcomes of LA21 programs are integrated with and inform all levels of planning and policy making. In this way LA21 can achieve its full potential as a process that can link and deliver international, national, state and local policy. This ‘closing of the policy loop’ is depicted in the figure on the next page.



*Partnership for Local Agenda 21* is attempting to achieve this level of policy integration through Local Government and State Government cooperation.

### Local Agenda 21 - local solutions to global problems

Linking local issues and actions with identified global issues is a core feature of LA21. The collective responses by Local Government have been internationally recognised as the most effective way of turning *Agenda 21* and other international and national strategies into a reality and effecting tangible changes that promote ESD. Local Governments have a direct role to play in managing several issues identified in *Agenda 21*.

*Agenda 21 chapters/issues relevant to Local Government roles and responsibilities in South Australia*

Chapter	Topic area
4	Changing consumption patterns
6	Protecting and promoting human health
7	Promoting sustainable human settlement development
8	Integrating environment and development decision making
9	Protection of the atmosphere
10	Integrated planning and management of land resources
14	Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development
15	Conservation of biological diversity
17	Protection of oceans, seas and coastal areas and protection/rational use of their living resources
18	Protection of freshwater resources: integrated management of water resources
21	Safe and environmentally sound management of solid wastes, sewage and related sanitation issues
23–32	Strengthening the role of major groups (community participation and representation)

## Local Agenda 21 - a community partnership

Community consultation and participation is an underlying principle of ESD. Therefore, a LA21 process seeks to make 'think globally, act locally' a reality by effecting change in the attitudes and activities of people at community level - in their households, workplaces and social groups, and through their local Councils.

The key issue remains that the local community, through community participation, feels ownership of the LA21 process. This means that any LA21 program should fully involve active community participation in the decision-making processes and structures that lead to the development and implementation of LA21 in the short-term and long-term.

### Local Agenda 21 - it is more than an environmental plan?

A LA21 is more than an environmental plan: its framework seeks to integrate the social, economic and ecological needs of the community in a balanced manner.

For example, the City of Whyalla draft LA21 highlights the need for Whyalla to diversify its economic base in recognition that it currently is "totally unsustainable, depending on non-renewable resources and importing almost all of its food and water". One of the objectives of the plan is to establish a renewable energy enterprise zone. The intention is to create a centre for manufacturing renewable energy systems - with links to Whyalla's tertiary education institutions that already have a strong interest in renewable energy. If successful, Whyalla will have a stronger economic base while also contributing to the protection of the global environment by reducing greenhouse gases through the uptake of renewable energy.

The City of Whyalla, however, did not have an environment plan, so it used the LA21 process to develop one. The Whyalla LA21 pulls together a range of environmental initiatives that the Council has been undertaking since 1995 and strategically links them with a vision for the future of Whyalla. This future sees Whyalla as an "eco-city - a city which is more sustainable over the long-term, which lowers real costs to the community and which strives for best practice in meeting State and national environmental targets".

### Helpful Hint

The fact that LA21 is an international movement means that the potential for sharing experiences and networking is limitless. At an international level, ICLEI facilitates international programs and networks. At a national level, Environs Australia (a national non-profit membership organisation for Local Government) coordinates national networks. At a state level, a LA21 Network has been established as part of the South Australian *Partnership for Local Agenda 21*. Information on each of these networks is available from the respective organisation, DEHAA or the LGA.

### Helpful Hint

The Cities of Adelaide, Burnside, Marion, Happy Valley (now part of the City of Onkaparinga), Unley, Salisbury and Whyalla have produced LA21 plans. These plans contain useful information on how to develop the strategic planning framework in different operational and structural settings.

### Helpful Hint

In 1997 ICLEI surveyed eight national municipal associations in developed and developing countries to determine how Local Governments were approaching the LA21 processes. The results of the survey provide an interesting insight into how some Local Governments are using LA21 as their primary strategic planning framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns, and others are using LA21 as a mechanism to integrate environmental concerns in the overall strategic planning framework. Copies of the survey results are available from ICLEI or from DEHAA.

## 1.5 THE BENEFITS OF UNDERTAKING A LOCAL AGENDA 21

Local Government has a unique relationship with the community it serves. Its functions and responsibilities bring it into contact with the livelihood of individuals, businesses and other government agencies as well as with people's lifestyle in their families, groups and organisations.

Residents and ratepayers now expect that their local authorities will play a leading role in managing the local environment in such a way that future development is sustainable. There are also other reasons why a Council might choose to decide to undertake a LA21. For instance, in an economic sense, a Local Government may seek to take advantage of:

- reducing or recovering its costs through conservation, efficiency and recycling
- avoiding penalties for environmental offences by making sure that there are no risks involved in its operations
- maximising the productivity of staff by improving their work environment.

From a political or legal viewpoint, elected members in Local Government may be interested in:

- responding to expectations of their electorate that Local Government plays a more active part in environmental management
- making sure that the Council meets the requirements of State and Commonwealth legislation or conditions for funding of environmental programs.

And, in a social context, a Local Government may want to:

- set a good environmental example for the community
- recognise the social justice links between the quality of the environment and the quality of people's lifestyle.