

Melbourne Model for Sustainability

In an address to The World Economic Forum on 31 January 1999, United Nation Secretary-General Kofi Annan challenged business leaders to join an international initiative – the Global Compact – that would bring companies together with UN agencies, labour and civil society to support to nine principles (soon to be ten) in the areas of human rights, labour and the environment. The Global Compact's operational phase was launched at UN Headquarters in New York on 26 July 2000. Through the power of collective action, the Global Compact seeks to advance responsible corporate citizenship so that business can be part of the solution to the challenges of globalisation. In this way, the private sector – in partnership with other social actors – can help realise the Secretary-General's vision: a more sustainable and inclusive global economy. Today, hundreds of companies from all regions of the world, international labour and civil society organisations are engaged in the Global Compact.

So what, do you ask, has the Global Compact to do with the City of Melbourne? Melbourne became the first city to join the Global Compact. The Melbourne Model created by the Committee for Melbourne is being used by Melbourne businesses in the pursuit of sustainability. This model is now being applied by other cities around the world, and has been endorsed and adopted by the United Nations. The City of Melbourne's strategic plan to achieve zero net emissions by 2020 and the Victorian government's 15% target reduction in water consumption by 2010 are examples that the intent of the Melbourne Model is being captured at ground level. There are several other examples including Origin Energy's Debt Spiral Prevention Project, the City of Melbourne's WaterMark project aimed at increasing re-use, and reducing consumption of water and a project backed by Premier Steve Bracks to prevent drug and alcohol abuse in young people.

This approach to sustainability makes sense, with almost half of the world's population living in large cities. Cities set to try the Melbourne Model include Porto Alegre (Brazil), New York (US), Nairobi (Kenya), Tianjin, Beijing (China), and Jamshedpur (India). Increasingly, sustainable cities will enact just as much change at the local government level as would sustainable businesses – giving rise to sustainable communities. Some say I live in a sustained dream state.

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