

# Study Guide for the Australian Collaboration Fact and Issue Sheet

## SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

### FOR REVIEW

#### 1 Comprehensive reporting of national and regional trends

1a. What is comprehensive reporting and how is it different to basic financial accountability?

1b. Why is regular comprehensive reporting necessary?

1c. How does the Australian Bureau of Statistics contribute to comprehensive reporting in Australia?

1d. What are the three main areas where reporting is needed?

1e. Do you know what “statutory independence” means? Can you work it out from the context? If not, look it up in an encyclopaedia.

1f. What would be the benefits of having Commissioners with statutory independence for monitoring and reporting?

#### 2 Comprehensive reporting of organisational performance

2a. What is the “triple bottom line”?

2b. Name two reasons why there has been a shift towards better corporate reporting.

2c. Describe in your own words why the need for transparency has increased.

2d. The Fact and Issue sheet lists eight steps that are typically taken by a corporation as it becomes aware of the need for better social and environmental accountability. What relationships can you see between these different steps? Can you organise them into a flow-chart indicating their interrelationships?

2e. What is the role of auditing?

2f. What is political accountability?

### FOR DISCUSSION

1. Topic for class brainstorming activity:

Identify products and services that demonstrate environmental and/or social accountability? How many examples can your class think of together? Think of the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the way you travel, etc. Some examples to get you started could be Fair Trade Coffee, Eco Tourism or free-range eggs. You might want to visit your local supermarket to look at a broad range of products. You could also look at the Yellow Pages to see what businesses say about themselves.

- Do your class’ examples fall into groups, such as “clean and green”, “socially equitable” or “good treatment of animals”?
- How do companies make their environmental, social or cultural accountability obvious to consumers? For example, is it written on the labelling? Does the label display a nationally or internationally recognised standard? Can you trust what is written on the labelling?
- Are social, economic, environmental and cultural accountability all equally important to you? What would most influence your choices as a potential customer, consumer or voter?

2. Question for a Think/Pair/Share activity:

Consider the following questions independently, providing reasons for your answers. Is your partner’s opinion different? What does your whole class think?

The Fact and Issue sheet states that the proportion of Australian companies that produce sustainability reports is very low. How do you think this should be addressed? It is currently obligatory for companies to provide financial accountability. Should it be compulsory to also produce reports demonstrating environmental, social and cultural accountability? Or do you think that market forces are sufficient, and that companies will eventually respond to customers’ and stakeholders’ values on sustainability?

3. Question for general discussion:

Is it possible to “measure” social, cultural and environmental impacts in the same way that we can measure financial performance? What impacts does this have on the way comprehensive reporting is or should be carried out?

## FOR RESEARCH

1. Have a look at the Australian Bureau of Statistic’s “Measures of Australia’s Progress” publication:

[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/3464C84A29113FE5CA2572C7001FBFC1/\\$File/I383055002\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/3464C84A29113FE5CA2572C7001FBFC1/$File/I383055002_2007.pdf)

Do a small poster project on the topics covered in the summary: individuals; the economy and economic resources; the environment; and living together. You might choose to focus on just one aspect of each topic. Are there any facts or figures that surprise you? In which areas has Australia improved its overall performance? Where does more effort need to be made?

2. How accountable is your local council? Have a look at the council’s website and see if there is an annual report you can download. If not, give the council a phone call and ask to be sent a hard copy of the most recent annual report. What aspects of the council’s activities are covered by the report? Do you think it provides an adequate account for rate-payers of how money has been spent? Do you consider the report to be a good example of comprehensive reporting?

3. Do some further research on the State of the Environment reporting undertaken by the Australian government. What are the goals of the reports? How do these goals compare to the requirements for good reporting outlined throughout the Fact and Issue sheet? In what way would a national State of the Environment reporting system run by a Commissioner or Commission with statutory independence likely to be improved? You can start your research here:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/about.html>