

Peter Dale's Observations on the Bathurst Declaration

1. We need to recognize that although we are dealing with some major global issues they are all matters about which each one of us can do something. It is easy to be defeatist hence it is important to remember that the world can be changed by individuals. We can make a difference and more so if we work together as a team.
2. Ideals are needed and the world would not survive without motherhood and apple pie. But that is insufficient. We need to convert ideals and statements of good intent into action plans that can be monitored. This is one role that professionals can undertake. I regard professionals as people who are at the interface between the general public and the forces that rule their lives – be it doctors and diseases, lawyers and the law or surveyors and the land. I hope that the member associations of FIG will take ownership of the Bathurst Declaration and convert some of the statements of principle into deliverable products and services.
3. Each community will of course start from a different cultural and economic state and its way forward will be along a different path to everyone else although the overall goal will be the same. In order that we can learn from each other we need common concepts and for the articulation of these we need a common language and a common set of definitions. I therefore welcome the proposals for the development of a thesaurus that will facilitate the processes of learning from each other.
4. Much that was discussed focused on the poor and the deprived. It obvious that their needs must be addressed in part through reforming land administration systems. But the Declaration is directed at the global community and not just at the developing world. Most western land administration systems are either going through or else need to go through various degrees of re-engineering. The process called joined-up government is concerned with improving the flow of information and decision making processes not only across government and between agencies but also between governmental agencies and the public who they are supposed to serve. That often requires a major change in attitude.
5. In Bathurst two paradigms emerged, one with a focus on information and the other on property. In the headlong rush to spatial data infrastructures we must not lose sight of the end product. Information is a means to an end. Even knowledge is insufficient. What matters is sustainable development. That is the end deliverable.
6. A major theme running through the Declaration is community involvement. The problem then arises as to distinguish between the views of the politically active and articulate and the rest. I had a growing nervousness that we are moving too far away from recognizing the rights of all individuals as individuals rather than as members of some conglomerate. I accept that sustainability is a local issue that has much wider dimensions and that greater interests must be taken into account. But I hope that we will not lose sight of the rights rather than the restrictions and responsibilities of individual citizens.
7. An underlying theme has been globalization and part of this process is the so-called commodification of property rights. I have a nightmare scenario where local property rights are traded in global markets with foreigners having equal rights but more cash to acquire local land. We have seen the power of the Banana Barons and the WTO in recent arguments between America and the European Community and this may be the

tip of an iceberg. With global spatial data infrastructures and efficient re-engineered land administration systems who will protect the rights of the individual citizens? The debate is similar to that raised in the discussions on the control of marine environments, especially those belonging to small island states. What we are advocating may be the catalyst for creating even greater wealth for the rich and even greater poverty for the poor.

8. Although the Declaration makes reference to the private and public sectors it says little about how to make partnership between them work. There is a tendency to think top down looking often reluctantly at what governments can put out to the private sector rather than seeking a true partnership. There are of course exceptions but in many countries, not only those that might be classified as developing, the private sector is an under-developed and under-utilized resource.
9. Finally, the Declaration does recognize that more must be done to respect community rights and in spite of what I have said about respecting the individual that must be correct. It also recognizes that we must take a multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary approach if we are to turn problems into opportunities. It is this that will be its lasting legacy.