

**MEASURING SUSTAINABILITY: PROSPECTS FOR CONVERGENCE
BETWEEN VARIOUS REPORTING SYSTEMS: THE NEW JERSEY
SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS**

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES NETWORK

MARCH 9, 2005

MATT POLSKY

**FORMER, SUSTAINABILITY TEAM LEADER, NJDEP;
CURRENTLY, PASSAIC RIVER COALITION**

INTRODUCTION & OUTLINE

- **NEW JERSEY REPORTING SYSTEM: HISTORY & DESCRIPTION**
- **CONVERGENCE: THREE TYPES**
- **PROVEN BENEFITS OF NJ SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR SYSTEM**
- **MIXED RECORD/WHERE THE JURY IS STILL OUT**
- **LACK OF SUCCESS OF NJ SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR SYSTEM**
- **CONCLUSIONS: IS CONVERGENCE IMPORTANT?**

MID-LATE 1990'S NEW JERSEY INDICATOR SYSTEM

- **INFLUENCE OF SEVERAL FACTORS: ERA OF HUGE POLITICAL CONFLICTS, INFLUENCE OF TWO NGOs, CONNECTIONS WITH THE NETHERLANDS, SUCCESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS SYSTEM MADE AN EASY TRANSITION TO A SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS SYSTEM**
- **MIX OF A TECHNICAL AND PUBLIC PROCESS**
- **11 MULTI-AREA SUSTAINABILITY GOALS; 41 SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS**
- **FIRST EDITION LED BY NEW JERSEY FUTURE, SECOND EDITION LED BY NJDEP AND STATE GOVERNMENT, THIRD VERSION (2004) LED BY NEW JERSEY SUSTAINABLE STATE INSTITUTE (NJSSI)**
- **A NEWLY RECONSTITUTED NJSSI WILL LEAD A PUBLIC PROCESS TO DEVELOP TARGETS FOR THE INDICATORS, BEGINNING WITH THE ENERGY INDICATORS**

CONVERGENCE OF INDICATOR SYSTEMS: THREE TYPES

- **GEOGRAPHY/SCALE: SOME THOUGHT: NESTING; GOVERNING RECOMMENDATION; LIVING III, PAGE 6**
- **BETWEEN SECTORS (GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS): J&J; NJDEP ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE TRACK INITIATIVE**
- **WITHIN ONE GEOGRAPHIC AREA: BILL MATES' POLICY PAPER DISCUSSED AND RECOMMENDED A SYSTEM OF SEVERAL TYPES OF INTEGRATED INDICATORS FOR NEW JERSEY**

PROVEN BENEFITS OF NJ SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR SYSTEM

- **POLITICALLY WORKABLE; AN EASY TRANSITION AND ENTRY TO SUSTAINABILITY; THEY RESONATE AND CAN PROVIDE A FOCUS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**
- **POTENTIAL ISSUE: “ARE INDICATORS PRIMARILY TECHNICAL OR PUBLICLY ORIENTED?” NOT A PROBLEM**
- **IMPROVED INTRA-DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION; BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DATA GAPS; ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING, INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF NEED TO IMPROVE EARLY APPROACH**
- **BASIS FOR INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION; COOPERATION BETWEEN NJDEP AND EPA**
- **INSIGHTS ACTUALLY DID IMPROVE OVER TIME**
- **SEVERAL OTHER BENEFITS...**

MIXED RECORD/WHERE THE JURY IS STILL OUT

- **CAN LIMIT VISION (BUT NOT ALWAYS)**
- **CATALYZED INTERNAL DEBATES, BUT MOSTLY ON TECHNICAL ISSUES; SOME WERE PRODUCTIVE, SOME POSSIBLY NOT**
- **DEEPER FUNDAMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES RARELY SURFACED (WITH SOME SUCCESSFUL EXCEPTIONS)**
- **ONLY ONE NOTED EXAMPLE, SEATTLE, WHERE INDICATORS LED TO SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC AWARENESS AND POSSIBLY CHANGES**
- **STATES AND MUNICIPALITIES NEW TO SUSTAINABILITY ARE LESS LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE INDICATORS**
- **OTHER MIXED/UNCERTAIN ISSUES...**

LACK OF SUCCESS OF NJ SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR SYSTEM

- **PROMISES DID NOT/MAY NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP: A MEASURE TO COMPETE WITH THE DOW JONES INDEX FOR PUBLIC'S ATTENTION; AN ANSWER TO: "HOW ARE WE DOING?"**
- **NOT AS POLITICALLY NEUTRAL OR INVULNERABLE; OR AS "WE CAN ALL AT LEAST AGREE ON THIS" AS WAS PROMOTED OR ASSUMED. VERY VULNERABLE TO SHIFTING POLITICAL WINDS: "EXUSE FOR INACTION!"**
- **DID NOT GET SIGNIFICANT MEDIA ATTENTION**
- **INSUFFICIENT AS THE ONLY WAY TO APPROACH SUSTAINABILITY**
- **HAS NOT (AS YET) LED TO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES TO PUBLIC POLICY, BEHAVIOR, DISCOURSE, BOLDNESS**
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF INDICATOR UPDATE EFFORTS AN UNRESOLVED PROBLEM**
- **SOME OTHER LIMITATIONS...**

CONVERGENCE WITHIN A REGION: MATES' ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS: IS CONVERGENCE IMPORTANT?

- **IF THINK PROS OUTWEIGH THE CONS, OR CAN, AN ARGUMENT FOR IT**
- **MY VIEW: INDICATOR SYSTEMS ARE A (VERY) GOOD SERVANT (TOOL); A BAD MASTER**
- **TO A LIMITED DEGREE, SOME CONVERGENCE MAKES SENSE**
- **CONVERGENCE MAY HELP WITH THE LIMITED VISION PROBLEM**
- **NOT SURE WHETHER A FULLY COMPREHENSIVE, CONVERGENT SYSTEM IS WORTH IT**