



The University of Sydney

Centre for Integrated Sustainability Analysis



## Development of the BL<sup>3</sup> software

### Background

Development of the BL<sup>3</sup> software was funded by a two-year<sup>1</sup> research grant<sup>2</sup> from the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation's Environmental Trust. The aim of the project *Sustainability Reporting for Organisations* was to take a highly complex Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting methodology developed in the School of Physics at the University of Sydney and make it accessible to organisations. At the time, because of its complexity, the methodology was only able to be applied by the School of Physics research team. Organisations therefore had to engage the university team on a consultancy basis if they wanted to make use of the methodology to produce their TBL reports.

The *Sustainability Reporting for Organisations* project was designed to develop a stand-alone tool that could be used independent of the University's expertise. *In order to ensure that the resulting software met the needs of business and industry it was developed in partnership with a range of organisations* through a process known as *participatory action research*. Participatory action research is an approach in which people work together over time to achieve a common goal. In this case the participants worked together over a two year period to develop the TBL accounting software.

The input of these research partners into the design and development was invaluable in ensuring that the end product was understood, user friendly and addressed the varying needs of business and industry, government and non-government organisations. The research partners gave advice on their needs, highlighted areas of difficulties, and provided feedback on the developing tool.

The outcome was a comprehensive TBL accounting framework and commercially available software tool. Part of the outcome was also a collection of information sheets<sup>3</sup> that were developed in collaboration with the research partners to address issues and information needs that arose during the course of the project.

### Participants

Project partners were drawn from a range of areas including:

- local government (NSW and VIC)
- non-government organisation (national)
- business (VIC)
- finance (Australia/NZ company)
- industry (global company operating in 40 countries)
- tertiary education (NSW).

*Versions of the software for **UK, Germany and Japan** were also built.*

All stayed with the project providing advice for the full two years.

<sup>1</sup> 2004-2005

<sup>2</sup> Project number: 2003/RD/G004

<http://www.google.com/search?q=NSW+environmental+trust+2003%2FRD%2FG004&rls=com.microsoft:en-us:IE-SearchBox&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&sourceid=ie7&rlz=117ADBR>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.isa.org.usyd.edu.au/research/TBLEPAinfo.shtml>



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### Software development

After much searching for a suitable software developer a Sydney based company, Dipolar Pty Ltd<sup>4</sup> agreed to undertake the development work. In the spirit of participatory research Dipolar agreed to work with the action research team in an iterative process of development and consultation.

*The software was developed **with** business and industry **for** business and industry*

During the two years of tool development three public workshops took place, attended by over 150 people who had input into the framework. Additional meetings were held with the research team and software developers over this time to provide detailed feedback on the developing software tool.

The software was launched by the acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2006. The launch was attended by representatives from a range of organisations including the *Global Reporting Initiative* represented by the then chair, Judy Henderson. Between 2006 and 2008 more than twenty workshops, attended by well over 200 software users were held in Australia and England.

Each workshop was also attended by a representative of the software company in order to take feedback and to incorporate suggestions into the on-going development process.

***In total four years and the expert feedback of hundreds of users has gone into the development of the BL<sup>3</sup> software tool.***

This project has laid the groundwork for a comprehensive and ultimately global TBL accounting tool that will provide the standardisation that the global reporting community is seeking. It has also laid the groundwork for a series of micro tools focused specifically towards the needs of different sectors in the economy. Two such pieces of software currently available are the Ecological and Carbon Footprint tools.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bottomline3.com/>