
COMMUNIQUE

16 September 2011

Environment and Water Ministers focus on national priorities.

Environment law reform, water, waste, biodiversity and clean air were on the agenda as national priorities for Australia's Environment and Water Ministers at their meeting today.

The meeting agreed how to deliver Council of Australian Government (COAG) reform of ministerial councils in the environment and water fields.

Ministers agreed that all levels of government needed to continue to work together to protect Australia's environment for future generations.

Environment law reform

Ministers endorsed COAG's recommended major reform of environmental regulation across all levels of government, aiming to cut red tape, reduce duplication and, most importantly, improve environmental outcomes.

The Australian Government will work closely with the states on achieving these outcomes, through a more strategic approach and by setting national environmental standards and harmonising environmental regulatory practice.

[Victoria, NSW and Western Australia expressed concern that proposed regulations regarding national parks to be made under the EPBC Act are not in keeping with a collaborative approach to the agenda for environmental reform.

The Commonwealth stated that it is following a statutory process on this issue additional to the work being conducted through the new Standing Council.]

Waste

Ministers welcomed the commencement on 8 August of the *Product Stewardship Act 2011*, which delivers a key component of the **National Waste Policy**: *Less waste, more resources*.

The Act paves the way for regulations that will require importers and Australian manufacturers of televisions, computer and computer products to fund and organise the recycling of televisions and computers; aiming for a recycling rate of 80 per cent by 2020-21

Ministers called on industry and stakeholders interested in the Act to comment on the draft Product Stewardship (television and computer) Regulations released this week.

Ministers endorsed in-principle the draft statement of the problem and the options to be analysed in the **Packaging Impacts Consultation Regulation Impact Statement** and reaffirmed that there will be open and transparent stakeholder consultation on the approaches for improving packaging resource recovery rates and reducing litter, including a container deposit scheme, an advanced disposal fee and co-regulatory industry product stewardship schemes.

Ministers agreed to a teleconference by the end of November to consider the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement for release for a four month consultation period.

They congratulated the **tyre industry** and jurisdictions working with them, giving in-principle support to its model for a voluntary product stewardship scheme to manage end of life tyres that may otherwise be illegally dumped, exported or stockpiled.

It encouraged the tyre industry to consult with key stakeholders on the development of the guidelines through the establishment of Tyres Stewardship Australia and seek accreditation under the new national *Product Stewardship Act 2011*.

:As part of extensive reforms recommended by COAG, council agreed to an updated **Implementation Plan for the Chemicals and Plastics** regulatory reforms to plug a gap in environmental protection. It agreed to submit the Implementation Plan to COAG through the Business Regulation and Competition Working Group.

Biodiversity

Noting that meeting took place in Biodiversity Month, ministers agreed that governments needed to continue to work together on a landscape scale, ecosystem approach to protecting Australia's unique biodiversity.

They supported an implementation plan across jurisdictions which draws together priority actions across national policies – including Australia's Biodiversity Strategy, National Reserve System Strategy, National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas and Native Vegetation Framework.

Focusing on natural resource management activity in both terrestrial and marine environments, ministers supported the development of common ecological information and support for the evaluation of national strategies.

Air

Ministers foreshadowed the development of a new National Plan for Clean Air. The plan will bring together a strategy for responding to the review of National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure and a robust framework for identifying cost effective actions and implementation arrangements to reduce air pollution.

Water

Ministers noted progress on implementing COAG's national water reform implementation work program; in the light of the reviews of the National Water Initiative and the National Water Commission.

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