

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

NRMMC 9

27 OCTOBER 2005

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from across Australia met in Launceston on Thursday 27 October 2005. This was the ninth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

2004-05 NAP and NHT Regional Programs Report

Council agreed to the public release of the second annual report on the performance of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the regional component of the Natural Heritage Trust Program. The 2004-05 Regional Programs Report details the achievements of \$844 million in regional investment through the \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust and the \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The 2004-05 Report is also the first year of performance reporting against management action and resource condition targets.

National Action Plan and Natural Heritage Trust – Implementation Progress Report

Council noted a detailed report outlining implementation of the NAP and NHT Programs. Some 52 of the 56 NRM regions now have accredited Plans in place. Regional delivery has progressed with a focus on the investment phase where projects are based on regionally identified priorities and with progress measured within a mutually agreed monitoring and reporting framework. Council noted that jurisdictions are considering the next phase of NRM programs, recognising that 2005-06 to 2007-08 represents the final three-year investment period for the current National Action Plan and the NHT Programs.

National Water Initiative

Council received a presentation from the Chair of the National Water Commission, Mr Ken Matthews, on the roles of the Commission and the NRM Ministerial Council in implementing the National Water Initiative and key areas for future work in meeting the NWI objectives.

Council endorsed a detailed work plan outlining its role in overseeing and implementing the National Water Initiative Intergovernmental Agreement. The objective of the work plan is to help jurisdictions meet their obligations under the

National Water Initiative where nationally consistent and compatible actions are required. Council also endorsed a comprehensive national set of performance indicators for the National Water Initiative. The performance indicators will contribute to the National Water Commission's 2010-11 assessment of progress towards the outcomes and objectives of the Initiative.

Council finalised its first annual report to COAG on progress by jurisdictions in implementing actions under the National Water Initiative.

National Guidelines for Water Recycling

Council agreed to release draft National Guidelines for Water Recycling for public comment, noting that the Environment Protection and Heritage Council also agreed to the release on 26 October. The Guidelines are expected to assist in long-term planning and development of water reuse schemes, and respond to considerable pressure to increase water recycling to cope with the impact of drought and increasing demand for water.

The Guidelines include a risk management framework and specific guidance on managing the health risks and environmental risks associated with the use of recycled water. They focus on sewage effluent and grey water and will be available for public comment from October 2005 to February 2006.

The next phase, expected to be developed from 2006, will address stormwater reuse, aquifer storage and recovery as a method of recycling reclaimed water and potable use of recycled water.

NRM and Climate Change

Council received a report requested at its last meeting in April 2005 setting out activities being undertaken by groups reporting to Council in addressing issues of climate change. Council also received a presentation from the Australian Government on the recently released report *Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability*. The report identified agriculture, water resources, biodiversity and settlements – especially coastal areas – as priorities for Australia. Council requested Standing Committee to identify priority areas and budgetary requirements for future action and report back to Council.

National Approach to Address Biodiversity Decline

Council received a report from the Biodiversity Decline Working Group outlining a number of recommendations in relation to developing a national approach to addressing biodiversity decline.

The proposed approach focuses on improving responses to priority threats that are best addressed at the national scale. The approach is focussed on reversing the decline of Australia's biodiversity, reducing the impact of invasive species and identifying actions to address the potential impact of climate change on biodiversity.

Council agreed to pursue a number of key policy directions and requested Standing Committee to develop a coordinated response to the recommendations made by the Working Group addressing the key causes of biodiversity decline.

Farm Forestry National Action Statement

Council endorsed a new Farm Forestry National Action Statement and Implementation Plan. The Statement outlines actions for the Australian, state and territory governments and the forest and wood products industry to further develop farm forestry. Council recognised that farm forestry has the potential to provide many positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for rural and regional communities. The Statement sets out a vision to increase the adoption of commercial tree growing and management as a widely accepted element of Australian farming and a component of regional natural resource planning.

Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

Council noted that Primary Industries and NRM Standing Committees had identified nine “themes” as the basis for further progress on Advancing Reconciliation. Council noted these themes will be further developed by the Standing Committees and achievements and success stories will be reported to Council in October 2006. Council underlined the need to give priority to this work and requested that Standing Committee, in reporting back in October 2006, outline individual State achievements.

Ecosystem Services

Council received a presentation from Victoria on NRM ecosystem services framework and recognised that many areas of work currently before Council, such as biodiversity decline, invasive species, climate change and native vegetation management, will potentially make an important contribution to improving understanding of the contribution of biodiversity to ecosystem services. Council therefore requested further work on the development of a national ecosystem services arrangement taking into account the experiences to date of State and Territory governments.

Market Based Instruments – Round Two

Council noted that a detailed evaluation had been undertaken by Standing Committee of Round One of the National Market Based Instruments Pilot Program. Round One of the Program has demonstrated potential to provide improved NRM outcomes when compared to traditional government instruments such as regulation. MBIs represented an important policy instrument for the management of biodiversity on private land. Standing Committee had, as requested by Council, also developed a detailed work program for implementing Round Two. On this basis, Standing Committee was now in a position to progress Round Two up to maximum funding of approximately \$5 million.

National Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management

Council noted a report from the NRMSC Task Group on Invasive Species on options for a robust national framework to prevent the establishment of new invasive species and to reduce the impacts of those that are already present. Council also noted the work being undertaken through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council on the National Biosecurity Strategy. Council endorsed a proposal to progress this work through a joint NRM and Primary Industries Standing Committee Steering Group developing an Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment. Council noted that the joint Steering Group will report to Council in six months time with a proposed workplan and on possible models for national institutional arrangements and pre-agreed resourcing and cost sharing arrangements.

Review of the Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching

Council endorsed new Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching. The Guidelines were developed collaboratively by the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments in close consultation with industry. They provide advice on watching whales and dolphins in the wild, including observations from the land, water or air as well as activities such as swimming and diving, feeding, touching, and making noise. They represent a consistent national policy to ensure that Australia remains at the forefront of whale and dolphin conservation.

Council also agreed to develop complementary regulatory regimes in each jurisdiction for the management of whale and dolphin watching.

Indigenous Take of Dugong and Turtle – Nationally Coordinated Response

Council approved the report, *Sustainable Harvest of Marine Turtles and Dugong – A National Partnership Approach*. The Approach provides a basis for further work to ensure that harvest of turtles and dugongs is sustainable by outlining how governments and Indigenous communities can work more closely together to increase the effectiveness of the protection and conservation of dugongs and turtles. The Approach is also intended to contribute to the conservation of turtles and dugong and ensure the important economic, spiritual and cultural relationships Indigenous people have with these animals are maintained for future generations.

OECD Environment Performance Review of Australia

Council agreed that jurisdictions will support Australia's upcoming OECD Environmental Protection Review through provision of necessary information and data as required. Council also agreed that those States/Territories nominated by the OECD for the state visit component of the in-country mission (expected to occur around August/September 2006) will host aspects of the visit with assistance from the Australian government. Council noted that Australia is proposing natural resource management to be the theme of the Sectoral Integration Chapter of the review.

Property Management Systems

Council noted the progress in the development and application of a range of industry driven property management systems (PMS) in agriculture across jurisdictions, and the potential valuable role in enhancing agricultural sustainability and achieving environmental outcomes.

Council noted that this proposal has also been considered by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council and agreed to establish a multi-jurisdictional working group, with industry, to investigate a national approach to PMS and provide recommendations to PIMC/NRMMC on how such an approach could be implemented.