

Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council
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Media Release

NRMMC 1

31 August 2001

NEW COUNCIL RESPONDS TO LAND AND WATER CHALLENGES

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from across Australia met jointly for the first time in Canberra today to consider the way forward on Australia's pressing natural resource management issues.

The new Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council was set up by the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to develop a coordinated approach to issues affecting the sustainability of Australia's land and water resources. The move recognises that the sustainable use and conservation of Australia's natural resources is a critical part of ensuring the continued enjoyment of a high standard of living by all Australians. All Australians benefit from natural resource based industries (for example, primary industries directly employ around 440,000 people with export income of over \$32 billion in 2000/01). Tourism and other industries also rely on natural resources and are major contributors to national prosperity.

The Council will tackle major issues such as salinity, deteriorating water quality and declining biodiversity. Land and water degradation costs Australia more than \$3.5 billion per year. Salinity already affects around five percent of Australia's cultivated land, one-third of Australia's rivers are in poor condition and species loss is a critical issue.

These challenges are impacting significantly on many rural communities and in some cases are directly affecting their viability. These issues also impact on our urban people, particularly through water supplies and coastal and marine environments.

Protecting natural values is fundamental to long-term economic prosperity and inevitably new and innovative approaches to landscape change and production practices will be necessary. One of the key principles for success is governments and community working in partnership to ensure that rural and regional communities are supported in maintaining and expanding profitable food and fibre production on a sustainable basis.

The new Council has already seen the benefits of bringing different perspectives to the one table. Ministers:

- ?? welcomed the extension to the Natural Heritage Trust and looked forward to implementing the second stage as a partnership between all levels of government, industries and communities
- ?? agreed to a consistent framework for the implementation of the Natural Heritage Trust and the \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

- ?? established a Taskforce to develop an indigenous reconciliation Action Plan, to enable indigenous communities to better participate in, and contribute to, natural resource management.
- ?? adopted the *National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation*
- ?? agreed to develop a national monitoring and evaluation framework for natural resources that allows communities and governments to measure their progress in addressing natural resource challenges, in a cost-effective, affordable and practical manner.

Immediate Priorities

Council also agreed on significant and immediate priorities:

- ?? implementing all aspects of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) with the recognition that many NAP activities (eg standards and targets, monitoring and evaluation, capacity building, etc) will have congruence with other activities for which the Ministerial Council is responsible
- ?? progressing the COAG Water Reform Agenda and consider future strategic directions in water policy
- ?? developing Commonwealth and State delivery and funding arrangements for the extension of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)
- ?? addressing the decline in water quality of inland rivers, wetlands, coastal rivers and estuaries and secure reliable water supplies for human use, industry and the environment
- ?? promoting action to reverse the decline in the native biological diversity, secure the long-term viability of native ecosystems, and maintain healthy ecosystem function as a basis for ecologically sustainable industries including agriculture, forestry and fisheries and
- ?? promoting the conservation and ecologically sustainable development of marine resources.

Key Issues

The Council agreed that key issues to be considered and acted on in the near future would be:

- ?? managing scarce resources (particularly water) for both sustainable growth and ecosystems
- ?? definition of governance arrangements and the rights, duties and responsibilities of resource users
- ?? increasing indigenous people's capacity and participation in managing Australia's natural resources
- ?? understanding the sources of degradation and the costs and benefits of prevention, repair, mitigation and adaptation strategies
- ?? valuing our natural resource assets for the production and ecological services they provide
- ?? design innovative tools and policy measures for the delivery of improved outcomes (eg markets for water, carbon, salinity and ecological services)
- ?? clear and effective communication systems to engage all levels of the community
- ?? skilling communities to develop effective natural resource management

- ?? actively and constructively manage adjustment implications of changes in resource use
- ?? identify a series of high level performance indicators that are meaningful, practical, cost effective and affordable.

Further inquiries:

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NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Objective

To promote the conservation and sustainable use of Australia's natural resources.

Vision

Governments working together to promote the conservation and sustainable use of Australia's natural resources through:

- ?? A meaningful and shared understanding of sustainability (leading to clear national goals);
- ?? Adopting innovative and imaginative means to manage the natural resource base and achieve healthier landscapes, vibrant communities and strong regional economies.
- ?? Understanding the geographic and social diversity of the nation; and
- ?? Engaging all communities in constructive partnerships recognising the importance of natural resources to industry and community.

Terms of Reference – NRM Ministerial Council

The proposed Terms of Reference for the NRM Ministerial Council are as follows:

- ?? To develop policies and strategies for national approaches to the conservation, sustainable use and management of Australia's land, water, vegetation and biological resources.
- ?? To oversee the development and implementation of national natural resource management programs including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the NHT and other agreed programs.
- ?? To monitor and evaluate outcomes of these policies, strategies and programs and the health of the nation's natural resources.
- ?? To promote community understanding of and engagement with the key challenges associated with the sustainable use and management of Australia's land and water, vegetation and biological resources.
- ?? To liaise with other Ministerial Councils and other bodies on matters relevant to the activities of the Council.

**NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

First Meeting
Canberra, 31 August 2001
Main Committee Room, Parliament House

ATTENDEES

Senator The Hon Robert Hill	Minister for the Environment and Heritage
The Hon Warren Truss MP	Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
The Hon Richard Amery MP	Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation New South Wales
The Hon Bob Debus MP	Minister for the Environment New South Wales
The Hon Sherryl Garbutt MLA	Minister for Environment and Conservation Victoria
The Hon Stephen Robertson MP	Minister for Natural Resources Queensland
The Hon Kim Chance MLC	Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Western Australia
The Hon Rob Kerrin MP (representing the Hon John Olsen, MP)	Deputy Premier and Minister for Primary Industries and Resources South Australia
The Hon Mark Brindal MP	Minister for Water Resources South Australia
The Hon David Llewellyn MHA	Minister for Primary Industries, Water and Environment Tasmania
The Hon Kon Vatskalis MLA	Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment Northern Territory
Mr Brendan Smyth MLA	Minister for Urban Services Australian Capital Territory
Mr Noel Playford	Senior Vice President of ALGA