

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

NRMMC 11

24 NOVEMBER 2006

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from across Australia met in Christchurch on Friday 24 November 2006. This was the Eleventh meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

Future NRM Directions

The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council endorsed for public release a *Framework for Future Natural Resource Management (NRM) Programmes* ('the Framework') as the basis for the further development of NRM programme arrangements by the Australian Government and the States and Territories. Current NRM arrangements, under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality ('the NAP') and the Natural Heritage Trust ('the Trust'), will lapse in June 2008. Council's endorsement of the new Framework reflected its recognition of the significance of the NRM programmes to Australia's environment and the sustainable use of Australia's productive natural resources, and the need to ensure an effective transition to future arrangements.

Council confirmed that future NRM programme arrangements will build on and enhance the national partnership between all jurisdictions in natural resource management. Governments will continue to invest at national, State/Territory, regional and local levels under future arrangements which will be negotiated between the Australian Government and the individual States and Territories.

Climate Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Report to COAG – Emissions Intensity Benchmarking

Council recognises the increasing impact that climate change is likely to have on natural resources and agreed to fund a number of strategic climate change actions. Council's immediate attention is on understanding and reducing the impact of climate change on biodiversity, agriculture, coasts and water resources. The actions include strategic assessments to determine impacts, developing practical information and management guides for natural resource managers, and communicating this information to managers.

Council also endorsed a report to COAG outlining the potential for emissions intensity benchmarking in agriculture to provide multiple greenhouse and profitability benefits. Environmental management systems are one avenue to implement benchmarking in agriculture. COAG will consider this report at its next meeting.

National Koala Conservation Strategy

Council agreed to review the National Koala Conservation Strategy which was developed jointly by the Australian Government, States and Territories through the former Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council in 1998. Reviewing the Strategy will allow nationally consistent objectives for protection of local koala populations that are under threat to be updated and used as a guide for regional and local land-use decision-makers.

National Approach to Address Biodiversity Decline

Council has been progressing development of a national approach to address biodiversity decline by developing an action plan for the three key system-wide threats agreed at its meeting last October - habitat loss and ecosystem decline, invasive species and climate change.

Council agreed five priority actions for implementation, including action in creating continental scale ecological linkages, biosecurity, targeted research and development, priority setting, and encouraging business interest.

Council agreed that actions to address the three system-wide threats will be a focus for future natural resource management programs and that the outcomes and priorities for a national approach to address biodiversity decline will be integrated into the review of the National Biodiversity Strategy.

Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

Council endorsed for public release a biennial report on programmes contributing to the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan. The report details the skills and training initiatives being undertaken through NRM and Primary Industry programmes to improve natural resource management. Council also considered a paper on water management for Indigenous communities and long term employment in natural resource management and primary industries. Council agreed that governments would work together to improve water management, including the reliability of supply and long term employment in Indigenous communities.

Market Based Instruments

Council approved funding for the nine National Market Based Instruments Pilot projects up to \$3,267,159 and to use the remaining Round Two funds for the development and implementation of a future work programme that would address communications, skills development, capacity building, evaluation, institutional arrangements and programme administration.

Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC)

Council noted that continual improvement in Australia's biosecurity arrangements is vital and noted progress in the enhancement of the Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment ('AusBIOSEC'). This will include provision of an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for Council consideration in April 2007. The IGA will define clearly the responsibilities of the Australian and state and territory governments in improving Australia's biosecurity system.

Council discussed national cost sharing arrangements for the public good component of a national emergency response to an incursion. A national response would first require agreement that:

- the incursion is of a nationally significant invasive species;
- the response would be feasible and cost-effective; and,
- the incursion is not eligible for funding under other emergency response arrangements which involve industry cost-sharing.

Council gave in-principle agreement to a cost sharing formula which would be based on the potential of an invasive species to affect a jurisdiction and the principle that beneficiaries contribute to a response.

Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

Council noted the need for ongoing commitment to the eradication of Red Imported Fire Ant from Australia beyond 2006-07 and agreed in principle to additional cost-shared funding of \$39.485 million over five years subject to an independent assessment that the strategy can achieve its objective of eradication. Council also agreed in principle to \$1.53 million funding for a three year eradication of the Red Imported Fire Ant incursion in Gladstone.

Australian Weeds Strategy

Council endorsed for release the revised Australian Weeds Strategy (first developed in 1997 as the National Weeds Strategy). The Australian Weeds Strategy provides a framework to establish consistent guidance for all parties, and identifies priorities for weed management across the nation with the aim of minimising the impact of weeds on Australia's environmental, economic and social assets.

The revised Strategy maintains the policy focus of the National Weeds Strategy, taking into account changes to the institutions, legislation, policies and programmes that support weed management in Australia.

The Australian Weeds Strategy is a vital part of Australia's integrated approach to national biosecurity, and complements other existing and new national strategies for invasive species, such as those for terrestrial vertebrate pests and marine pests.

MACC Strategic Workshop

Council endorsed the Strategic Priorities 2006-2008 of the Marine and Coastal Committee (MACC). The Strategic Priorities are based on the MACC'S July 2006 review of its work program. The MACC's Strategic Priorities 2006-08 define expected outcomes and targets, which will enable the MACC to better measure its performance and meet the requirements of the NRM Standing Committee and Ministerial Council.

National System for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pest Incursion

- **Ballast Water Management Arrangements and Funding**
- **Biofouling, Pest Management, Monitoring and Evaluation and Review**

Council endorsed key elements of the National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions (noting that NSW participation will be dependent on NSW Cabinet consideration). These included the Ballast Water Management Arrangements as a framework for putting in place consistent national ballast water legislation, and the best practice guidelines for biofouling management for commercial and other vessels, and other such things as ports and marinas. Council also endorsed the development of National Control Plans for six introduced marine pest species, the Monitoring Strategy and the Evaluation and Review Strategy. Governments will now work with the owners and operators of vessels, ports and marinas to better manage ballast water and biofouling. The National System will be progressively rolled-out over the next 18 months.

Seal and Human Interactions

Council endorsed the *National Strategy to Address Interactions between Human and Seals: Fisheries, Aquaculture and Tourism*. The Strategy identifies specific objectives and actions to be undertaken in the period 2007-2011 to address adverse human-seal interactions within these three sectors and outlines how governments and industry can work together to address conservation, industry and community expectations.

Ornamental Fish Trade – Final Strategic Plan

Council endorsed the “Ornamental Fish Trade – Final Strategic Plan” which provides a national approach to managing the ornamental fish trade and dealing with associated pest and disease threats. Council also agreed to provide funding for two years, with an option for a third, to implement the key recommendations of the plan.

Taxation Treatment of Structural Adjustment Payments

Council noted a paper from NSW on the tax treatment of structural adjustment payment schemes and agreed that these matters be referred to Treasurers for consideration.

AUSTRALIAN WATER MINISTERS MEETING

Water Ministers met in Christchurch on 24 November 2006, as part of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, to progress key issues in water reform. Ministers agreed a report for COAG outlining progress in 2005-06 on implementing the National Water Initiative (NWI). Ministers reinforced the view of Premiers and the Prime Minister at the November 7 Murray Darling Basin (MDB) Summit that the implementation of key NWI actions need to be fast tracked, especially water trading, overallocation, water accounting and data sharing.

Water Ministers reiterated their commitment to implement interim trading arrangements in the southern MDB by 1 January 2007, and to act on the recently released recommendations of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission for the setting of access and termination fees. This is an important step towards the introduction of full water trading.

Water Ministers endorsed steps to develop national water accounts with an initial framework and common chart of water accounts to be ready for consideration by April 2007. Water Ministers underscored the importance of this work in developing a full understanding of water resources and their effective long term management. Ministers also agreed on water metering standards, a key element to support public and investor confidence in the amount of water being traded.

Water Ministers endorsed the principle of open and efficient sharing of water data information.

Sharing of information will be an important step in developing an effective basin wide response to the emerging crisis in the MDB. It will also assist the CSIRO in its review of sustainable yields on a catchment by catchment basis in the MDB agreed at the Water Summit on 7 November 2006. An agreement for sharing data will be developed for signing by Ministers as soon as practically possible.

States and Territories will report back to Ministers on progress of arrangements for the management of shared groundwater resources. Ministers noted that where water is being extracted from connected ground and surface water systems, water plans should reflect this connectivity.

Almost all Australian cities are facing challenges of water scarcity. As each city moves to address their water deficits, Ministers agreed that there be enhanced co-operation and sharing of information and experiences so that each State can learn from the work of others in meeting this common challenge.

Water Ministers endorsed National Guidelines for Residential Customers' Water Accounts for public release. This will provide households with information on their water use relative to equivalent households in their community.

Ministers endorsed Phase one of National Guidelines for Water Recycling. These guidelines (focusing on sewage effluent and grey water) represent a significant advance by facilitating greater flexibility and innovation and are likely to encourage greater expansion in water recycling over the longer term. In endorsing the Guidelines, Ministers recognised the importance of safeguarding water supplies for the future, particularly in the face of challenges such as drought, climate change, and the inefficient and wasteful use of water.

Phase two of the Guidelines are currently being developed and expected to be completed by the end of 2007. They will address stormwater reuse, managed aquifer recharge and recycled water for drinking.

Ministers noted that work has commenced into developing product standards for equipment used for recycling with an aim to facilitate the development of water recycling in Australia. An initial report will be available in February 2007.

Ministers asked officials to consider how governments might collaborate in the development of appropriate national standards and guidelines for water recycling and reuse projects and products.

Ministers endorsed a national reporting model for benchmarking pricing and service quality for urban water delivery agencies and noted the need for continuing support for the completion and successful implementation of a rural benchmarking model.