

# **PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCILS**

## **Communiqué**

**18 APRIL 2008**

Natural Resource Management, Environment, Water and Primary Industries Ministers from across Australia met in Melbourne on Friday 18 April 2008 to consider issues affecting Australia's natural resources and primary production sectors. This was the thirteenth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC), which also met jointly with the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) on 17 April. Specific issues dealt with by the Councils in the two meetings are detailed below.

### **NRMMC 13 and PIMC 13**

#### **Climate Change – Future Directions**

Ministers discussed the central importance of climate change for primary industries and natural resource managers. They noted progress towards the design of the Australian emissions trading scheme and opportunities for engagement in framing the way forward. National action to address the impacts of climate change was also discussed.

Councils also emphasised the need to advance strategic mitigation and adaptation issues for the sectors and agreed to maintain the focus on improving knowledge about greenhouse gas emissions and about options to adapt to climate change. Ministers noted progress on a number of preliminary vulnerability assessments and agreed to consider future directions for climate change at their meeting in November.

#### **National Agricultural Monitoring System (NAMS)**

Councils agreed to continue the operation of the NAMS in 2008-09. They noted a review of the effectiveness of the NAMS, which concluded that the tool had met its primary objective of assisting in streamlining the Exceptional Circumstances application and assessment processes. Council will further consider the role of the NAMS as part of the PIMC review of drought policy.

#### **Advancing Indigenous Reconciliation in Primary Industries and Natural Resource Management**

Councils agreed to support the creation of ongoing full-time and part-time jobs for Indigenous people through the purchase of environmental services. They will encourage natural resource

management and primary industry programs to engage actively with Indigenous communities in providing opportunities for capacity building and development of business-orientated employment and business skills, as well as establishing the community infrastructure for assisting employment.

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

Councils endorsed, in-principle, a draft Intergovernmental Agreement for enhancing Australia's biosecurity system for primary production and the environment (AusBIOSEC). The AusBIOSEC arrangements will improve Australia's capacity and capability to respond to increasing pest and disease threats in a more systematic and timely manner. This will increase the effectiveness of national responses and minimise the costs caused by pests and diseases. The enhancements to AusBIOSEC include extending existing arrangements in the primary production sector to tackle pests and diseases that largely impact on the environment and social amenity. It is anticipated that Councils will be presented with a finalised Intergovernmental Agreement for signature later in the year.

### **National System for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pest Incursions**

Councils endorsed a new risk-based cost sharing formula for marine pest emergencies. This new formula is based on jurisdictions contributing funding to eradicate marine pest outbreaks according to the risk to their state. The Australian Government will continue to contribute fifty per cent of the costs of emergency responses. The Intergovernmental Agreement on a National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions (Marine IGA) will be revised to incorporate the new formula.

Councils also agreed that consistent national ballast water requirements should come into effect 12 months after implementation of Commonwealth laws which are being developed. Council agreed that the ANZECC Code of Practice for Hull-cleaning should be reviewed to increase the practical in-water cleaning options for industry to manage biofouling without increasing the threat to the environment.

### **Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program**

Councils agreed that Queensland has made excellent progress towards eradicating Red Imported Fire Ant since it was initially detected in Brisbane in 2001 and that the program remains on track for eradication to date.

### **Electric Ant Eradication Program**

Councils noted the National Electric Ant Eradication Program was on track to achieve its goal of eradication and agreed to future funding.

## **NRMMC 13**

### **Regional Chairs Forum**

Council received a comprehensive presentation from the NRM Regional Chairs Forum, which met on Thursday 17 April. The forum is an annual event comprising chairs of natural resource management regional organisations who meet to discuss common

experiences in regional NRM delivery. The 2008 meeting focused on the importance of a smooth transition to Caring for our Country and its delivery at a regional level. Council discussed with the forum a number of issues relating to regional delivery and future directions, including access to funds for national priorities, employment by regional bodies, delivery capacity and momentum in NRM projects.

### **McKell Medal**

Council presented the 18<sup>th</sup> (2007) McKell Medal to Welford and Marie Parsons from Port Vincent, South Australia. Mr and Mrs Parsons were awarded the medal for their work on dryland salinity and the rehabilitation of marginal lands. On their property, 'The Springs', they have controlled the spread of salinity, transformed the appearance of their farm and provided habitat for native flora and fauna by planting 300,000 trees and shrubs and constructing 45 kilometres of fencing over many years. They were selected particularly for their practical approach to land management and support for hands-on farm management, education and research, which has seen 'The Springs' regularly host visits from schools and university students, researchers, extension specialists and farmer groups.

### **Future Directions for Managing Water Issues**

Council welcomed progress being achieved through the COAG water reform process, including the work program and the Memorandum of Understanding on the Murray Darling Basin.

### **Bureau of Meteorology Report on New Role in Water Information**

Council received a detailed presentation from the Bureau of Meteorology on implementing its new responsibilities in regard to water information standards, water accounts and water forecasts.

### **Water Metering**

Council agreed, in principle, to support the Metrological Assurance Framework and the issuance of a discussion paper on the *National Framework for Non-urban Water Meter Standards*.

### **Water Accounting**

Council approved a workplan for 2008 and 2009 for the National Water Accounting Development Project, to develop national water accounting standards.

### **Performance Indicators**

Council adopted a new set of Performance Indicators to be used for the 2010-11 review of the National Water Initiative (NWI). This review will assess the extent to which the NWI contributes to the national interest and the impacts of implementing the NWI on regional, rural and urban communities.

### **Guidelines for Water Recycling – Phase 2**

Council endorsed the National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS) Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling, Augmentation of Drinking Water Supplies, which provides guidance on managing the health and environmental risks associated with the use of recycled water in drinking water supplies. The guidelines build on the risk management framework outlined in the Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling:

Managing Health and Environmental Risks, released in 2006. The new guidelines will be considered for endorsement by the National Health and Medical Research Council on 24 April 2008.

Ministers supported the release of the draft NWQMS Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling, Managing Health and Environmental Risks on Managed Aquifer Recharge, and Stormwater Harvesting and Reuse for public consultation. The period of consultation will be from April to June 2008. The relevant documents are available from the EPHC web site [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au)

### **Revision of the National Water Quality Management Strategy *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines***

Council agreed to support the revision of a benchmark document under the National Water Quality Management Strategy, the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. The current guidelines date from 2002 and their revision will further strengthen the quality of the definitive guidance to be used by the Australian water industry.

### **Future NRM Directions**

Council welcomed the Commonwealth's new Caring for our Country arrangements and noted that it offered many new opportunities for improving the management of Australia's natural resources. Ministers highlighted the importance of ensuring a smooth transition to the new arrangements, including maintaining the momentum of regional body activities. It was noted that transition year funding for regional groups will be finalised shortly to enable funding to be available from July 2008.

Council also noted the importance of all jurisdictions maintaining at least their current level of effort in tackling the threats to the health and sustainability of our ecosystems.

### **Natural Resource Policies and Programs – Work-in-Progress**

Council was informed of the work-in-progress by the Natural Resources Policies and Programs Committee to date and approved the introduction of a new priority work area for Council – *Knowledge and Information Management*.

### **Strategic Direction for the National Reserve System**

Council noted the central role of the National Reserve System (NRS) in protecting Australia's biodiversity in the face of climate change, and welcomed the additional resources that the Commonwealth has allocated over the next five years to building the NRS. Ministers agreed to strengthen their partnership in building a comprehensive, adequate and representative NRS, including new approaches for protected areas on private and Indigenous lands to help minimise the loss of native species. Council also agreed, given recent studies on climate change and the NRS, to review and update the NRS Directions Statement that was released by NRMMC in 2005.

### **Marine and Coastal – Work-in-Progress**

Council was informed of the work-in-progress by the Marine and Coastal Committee to date. Council noted that the Marine and Coastal Committee is in the process of reformatting its strategic directions.

**Marine Biodiversity Decline – A National Approach to Addressing Marine Biodiversity Decline Report**

Council endorsed a report that sets out a national approach to addressing marine biodiversity decline. The report identifies gaps in knowledge of Australia's marine biodiversity, provides examples of decline in Australia's marine biodiversity, and identifies five broad-scale threats to Australia's marine biodiversity. The five broad-scale threats to Australia's marine biodiversity are climate change, resource use, land-based impacts, marine biosecurity, and marine pollution. The response set out in the report aims to improve the effectiveness of program delivery, measure success, improve the knowledge base and respond to key threats.

**Progress in Implementing the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas**

Council endorsed a report from jurisdictions on progress in implementing the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas. The report highlights the major advances Australian governments have taken in developing a national representative system of marine protected areas, with over 240,000 km<sup>2</sup> of new marine parks and reserves declared in the past five years. There are currently twenty seven marine protected areas in Commonwealth waters and around two hundred in state and territory inshore waters.

**Review of the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation**

The Council confirmed the importance of the *National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation* (Native Vegetation Framework) for achieving a reversal in the long-term decline in the extent of Australia's native vegetation and an improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation. It was also agreed that the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee finalise the review of the Native Vegetation Framework, taking account of the concurrent review of the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Biodiversity*, and report to Council in 2009.

**Crime in Fisheries – National Study into the Australian Fishing Industry and Improved Fisheries Legislation**

Council noted the importance of raising the profile of crime in fisheries and agreed to raise a series of proposals with Attorneys General and Justice Ministers to implement a national response to illegal fishing and strengthen measures to deal with cross border trafficking in fish.

In recent years illegal foreign fishing has attracted public attention as a border security matter and it is now time to see that there are also robust measures in place for domestic fisheries to protect marine resources and access rights.

*Note that a separate communiqué was issued by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council relating to issues considered by that Council alone.*