

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

NRMMC 15

21 May 2009

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, and Environment Ministers from across Australia met in Hobart on Thursday 21 May 2009. This was the fifteenth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

McKell Medal

Council presented the 19th (2008) McKell Medal to Kevin and Alice Knight from Pittong, Victoria to acknowledge their lifetime of achievement and commitment to sustainable farm management. The Knights are pioneers of whole farm and catchment planning and over the past 40 years have provided leadership in engaging others in applying these principles as the basis for sustained large scale landscape enhancement, and productivity increases. Their personal commitment is demonstrated through the establishment of over 70,000 indigenous trees on their property, and the removal of significant areas of their farm from production to control salinity and prevent wind erosion. Both Kevin and Alice have been separately awarded the Order of Australia Medal for their contributions to natural resource management and support for local communities.

A Collaborative Approach to Managing the Negative Impacts of Feral Camels across Australia

Council agreed that feral camels are causing significant damage across Australia's rangelands, which will increase as the camel population increases unless concerted action is taken. Council agreed that affected jurisdictions and the Australian Government will prepare an action plan in the next three months and build on existing work to ensure management strategies are coordinated across jurisdictions and follow the principles set out in the Australian Pest Animal Strategy, including coordination across all levels of government in partnership with industry, land and water managers and all the community regardless of land tenure.

National Water Quality Management Strategy – Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling Phase 2

Council endorsed new national guidelines for recycled water as part of the National Water Quality Management Strategy. The new guidelines cover the use of aquifers for water storage and recharge, and stormwater harvesting and reuse for non-drinking water purposes. The proposed new guidelines are also being considered by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council, and will be released when these processes are finalised.

Water Trading: Service Standards for Permanent Trade Processing Times

Council agreed to a consistent service standard across the Murray-Darling Basin for approving permanent water trades as follows:

- approval times – 90 per cent within 20 days
- registration times – 90 per cent within 10 days.

This will improve confidence and transparency in the water market and facilitate greater efficiency. It builds on the previously agreed service standard for temporary water trades.

Australian Biosecurity System Reform – Beale Review Implementation

Council noted the commitment made through primary industries ministers to strengthen the working partnership on biosecurity between governments through the development of a new national agreement on biosecurity. Council also noted that the agreement would be developed under the Primary Industries Standing Committee and Ministerial Council, in close consultation with the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee and Ministerial Council.

National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program – Funding and Review

Council agreed that funding of \$15 million for 2009-10 was necessary for the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication program, pending completion of an independent review that will inform development of a longer term program. Funding remains subject to jurisdictional budgetary outcomes. The focus remains firmly on eradication of the Red Imported Fire Ant and the next year of the program will focus on retaining this option, as research into new detection methods for nests in rural areas progresses.

Weeds of National Significance Program – Continuation and Enhancement

Council endorsed the continuation of the Weeds of National Significance program, including the national coordinator network, with revisions to the program to take into account findings of a recently completed independent review. Funding remains subject to budget processes.

National Siam Weed Eradication Program

Council endorsed in principle the continuation of the Siam Weed Eradication program, based on the recommendations of the 2008 program review. Council endorsed the proposed budget and cost sharing. The program would be included in consideration of policy issues associated with long term eradication programs in November 2009. Continuation of the program will enable ongoing protection for primary industries and the environment.

Strategy for the National Reserve System

Council agreed Australia's Strategy for Australia's National Reserve System, which identifies priority actions for the ongoing development of a national system of protected areas and reserves for the next 20 years. Council noted the National Reserve System as the cornerstone of national efforts to protect terrestrial biodiversity. Council also noted that the National Reserve System is one of the world's great conservation partnerships and that the strategy will provide national guidance for improved collaboration across government and with all stakeholders, to enhance the ongoing development and effective management of the National Reserve System.

Caring for our Country – A Partnership Framework

Council agreed that opportunities for cooperation between jurisdictions and sharing of priorities in natural resource management continue to be pursued by jurisdictions. Council endorsed ongoing communication and collaboration in natural resource management, including in the delivery of Caring for our Country. As part of that communication, Council met with representatives of the chairs of the 56 regional natural resource management organisations. Discussion focused on the key strategic issues the regional organisations identified for the future, including a national planning framework, enhancing volunteerism in natural resource management and improving monitoring and reporting.

Climate Change in Primary Industries, NRM and Biodiversity – Future Directions

Council acknowledged the linkages of the Biodiversity Vulnerability Assessment study with its agreed climate change priority actions for 2009-12 and noted progress towards completion of the climate change priority actions.

Strategic Assessment of the Vulnerability of Australia’s Biodiversity to Climate Change

Council agreed to publication of *The Strategic Assessment of the Vulnerability of Australia’s Biodiversity to Climate Change*, a set of independent reports prepared by an Expert Advisory Group made up of prominent Australian scientists. Council acknowledged the significant contribution the reports make to understanding of the challenges for Australian biodiversity conservation in a changing climate. Council requested advice from officials on integrating the findings into policy, including the current reviews of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biological Diversity and the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia’s Native Vegetation.

Draft Revised National Koala Conservation Strategy

Council agreed to release the draft National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy for public comment and agreed to consider the revised strategy for final endorsement in November 2009.

Review of the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia’s Native Vegetation – Progress Report

Council noted the progress, key issues and future steps in the review of the Native Vegetation Framework.

Geoparks

Council voiced concern at the announcement by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to establish the Kanawinka Geopark without the formal endorsement of the Australian Government. As the management and other implications of Geopark listings are potentially significant, such actions require careful prior consideration by all jurisdictions. Council requested officials to provide further advice on the implications of Geoparks to assist Environment and Heritage ministers to develop a national position.

Advancing Indigenous Reconciliation in PI and NRM – Employment: Key Actions and Partnerships

Council agreed that more Indigenous people should be employed in the natural resource management and primary industries sectors, more so perhaps than other sectors, with the potential to assist in addressing the Closing the Gap strategy. Jurisdictions will consider the range of strategies that can be best progressed within their state or territory to act on this, including joint strategies with the Australian Government.

Progress on Implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Framework

Council endorsed the 2007-08 progress report on the Implementation Plan for a National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). Council also noted that the inquiry into Climate Change and Environmental Impacts on Coastal Communities will consider some of the key challenges for ICZM. Council will consider the application of the ICZM framework in addressing climate change issues following the release of the inquiry's report.

Code of Practice on the Humane Treatment of Wild and Farmed Australian Crocodiles

Council endorsed the Code of Practice for the Humane Treatment of Wild and Farmed Australian Crocodiles. The Code is limited to the taking of crocodiles from the wild and the farming of crocodiles. It does not cover the public display of crocodiles in zoos and animals parks.