

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué/Media Release

NRMMC 5

3 October 2003

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from across Australia met in Perth on Friday 3 October 2003. This was the fifth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

NRM Community Forum

At the April 2003 Council meeting, Ministers met with 80 community representatives from regional and national natural resource management organisations at the Natural Resource Management Community Forum. Arising from that meeting Ministers undertook to take forward a range of suggestions to Ministers addressing some of the key regional natural resource management issues.

A Community Forum Working Group has begun arrangements for the next Forum to be held in Adelaide in conjunction with the April 2004 Council meeting.

Council has established the Red Tape Reduction Taskforce, which included representatives of the Forum, to review mechanisms to simplify the administration of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust. The Taskforce has progressed well and presented Ministers with an action plan to address Community Forum concerns in relation to streamlining the administration of these programs. It will provide a final report on progress on these actions to the Council out-of-session prior to the April 2004 Forum meeting in Adelaide.

Council also received a report on progress against a review of all the Forum's recommendations. Australian Government Ministers also indicated they would write to Community Forum participants to provide a more detailed update on progress on the April 2003 recommendations.

National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust Extension

Council discussed the significant progress made in implementing the NAP and the NHT. Of particular note was the accreditation of regional NRM plans in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia by Australian and State Ministers and the agreement to the first comprehensive strategies for large-scale investment under the programs.

Some \$242 million has been committed under the NAP since its inception and \$55 million last year under the regional element of the Trust extension for regional plan development and priority actions. Ministers noted there will be a substantial increase in the roll-out of expenditure as plans are accredited and investments approved. The 2003-2004 budget allocation for the National Action Plan is \$107 million and for the Trust is \$250 million (\$114 million regional). This means that in 2003-2004, over \$220 million will be invested through regional organisations from these two NRM programs.

Ministers recognised that the developing partnerships between Australian, state and territory governments, local government and regional bodies have resulted in exciting NAP and Trust investments in a range of innovative actions across most jurisdictions.

National Land and Water Resources Audit – Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment

The Council considered recommendations arising from the National Land and Water Resources Audit Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002 report, which was released in April 2003. The Assessment identified a number of trends and continuing threats to biodiversity, and outlined information management priorities. The Council has agreed to continue with a national biodiversity assessment and maintain the existing information base developed collaboratively between governments. Council also agreed that options for a complementary assessment of marine biodiversity and a national program to address biodiversity decline should be explored for consideration at an upcoming meeting.

National Environmental Management Systems Implementation Plan

Council endorsed the National Environmental Management Systems Implementation Plan – a plan to implement *Australia's National Framework for Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in Agriculture*.

Senator Judith Troeth lead discussions at Council, noting that development of the Implementation Plan represented an important step forward in EMS collaboration that can lead to productive and mutually beneficial partnerships between industries, communities and government.

EMS has the potential to provide a flexible mechanism to help primary producers meet changing community, legislative and market demands for environmental assurance and improved natural resource management. The aim of the Implementation Plan is to give direction to governments in supporting the voluntary adoption of EMS by producers across agricultural industries. The Plan provides a template for working with industries and communities to improve information flows and support mechanisms, and to meet emerging education and training needs.

The 5-year Implementation Plan has been developed in collaboration between the Australian Government and states and territories, and an industry/community EMS Steering Committee. The plan acknowledges key principles that EMS should be voluntary and industry owned and driven.

Climate Change / Greenhouse Policy in New Zealand

Council received a presentation from the New Zealand Minister for Conservation, Chris Carter on current Climate Change and Greenhouse policy in New Zealand.

National Policy Framework for Co-investment in Afforestation and the Environment

Council agreed to work with the Primary Industries Ministerial Council on the framework that could achieve environmental and economic goals through private and public investment in plantations. The potential role of reforestation in cost effectively addressing a range of environmental issues in low to medium rainfall areas has been long recognised. Progress will be reported back to the two Councils at their first meetings in 2004.

Water Reform

Council reaffirmed its support for the resolution of ongoing water reform issues including water property rights, over-allocated systems in the Murray-Darling Basin, and trading and provision of environmental water. The recent agreement by COAG to a National Water Initiative is critical if Australia is to maximise the benefits of water resource management and use. Member Governments will be working together over coming months to develop an Intergovernmental Agreement for consideration by COAG at its first meeting in 2004.

Water Efficient Appliance Labelling and Regulation

The Council noted progress of the proposed Scheme, and the timing for an implementation plan to be submitted to the Environment Protection & Heritage Council (EPHC). The EPHC has been presented with a comprehensive implementation strategy which covers the legal options, the funding implications, a draft Regulatory Impact Statement, and the products to be regulated. EPHC members have agreed to seek whole-of-government approvals for the preferred regulatory approach, which may take several months. The Council supported the EPHC decision to proceed with development of the scheme.

Council also noted the need for industry to be consulted in this process. The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage has continued to consult with key stakeholders including manufacturers, plumbing regulators, and standards committees.

National Guidelines On Water Recycling – Managing Health And Environmental Risks

Ministers unanimously endorsed development of new benchmark National Guidelines on Water Recycling – *Managing Health and Environmental Risks*, which will be based on the latest scientific advances and understanding in this field and involve collaboration of several Ministerial Councils.

Recycling of water can play an important role in overcoming urban water problems. There is a need for clear and comprehensive water recycling guidelines to help protect public health and the environment. The first stage of the new Guidelines is expected to be completed by December 2004, focussing on the combination of source waters and end uses that offer the greatest potential for water reuse.

Working Towards Integrated Oceans Management

The Council endorsed a joint statement on integrated oceans management. It reaffirmed the commitment of all governments to cooperate on the development of policy and management plans leading to more efficient regulation, and ecologically sustainable development, of Australia's marine resources. The statement is intended to underpin further work by the Council during 2004, covering areas of sustainable use and development, knowledge management, consultation and participation, compliance and enforcement and environmental quality.

Building on lessons from integrated catchment management, integrated oceans management aims to ensure stronger coordination and complementarity across marine jurisdictions. The work that will flow from this statement will provide practical mechanisms for integration across governmental jurisdictions and sectoral management arrangements.

Implementing the work program will directly involve the Ministerial Councils for Transport, Mineral and Petroleum Resources, Tourism and Environment Protection and Heritage. There will also be close links with the agreed national cooperative approach to coastal issues to further progress the sound management and protection of Australia's marine and coastal resources.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management

In recognition of the increasing pressures on the coastal zone, Ministers today endorsed a landmark paper, *A National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management*. The paper lays the foundation for development of an implementation plan that will see collaborative support and effort by all government jurisdictions on issues of

national significance in the coastal zone.

Ministers agreed to consider the implementation plan in October 2004. The plan will provide the basis for jurisdictions to agree on cooperation on issues that would benefit from a national cooperative approach. These issues include: improving coastal and estuarine water quality, conserving and protecting Australia's coastal biodiversity, ensuring a solid basis for sustainable development and use of coastal resources by the industries dependent on them, and planning for and management of the impacts of climate change on the coasts.

The plan will be developed in conjunction with the integrated oceans management process.

National System for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pests

Council endorsed the recommendations of the High Level Officials Group (HLG), which set out the legislative, governance and funding arrangements and principles for a National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions.

The report recommends that the Australian Government should be responsible for the prevention of marine pest introductions to Australia, with State and Northern Territory Governments responsible for managing the risks of pest translocations within Australia as well as ongoing management and control of established pest populations. The report recommends that the Australian Government and the States/Northern Territory should share responsibility for emergency preparedness and response on a 50:50 basis. The basis for State and Northern Territory shares will be examined by the NRM Standing Committee.

Council agreed to the development of an intergovernmental agreement as the formal means of establishing responsibilities and implementing the recommendations. Council also noted that agreement to the recommendations is subject to resolution of funding arrangements by each jurisdiction through their respective Budget processes and that significant further work is required to develop detailed arrangements for implementation of the National System over the next three years. This further work will be carried out cooperatively between Governments in consultation with industry and other stakeholders.

Fisheries Resource Management

Council endorsed priorities and a timetable for negotiations between the Australian Government, States and Territories on fisheries arrangements during 2003-04 and 2004-05. Council also endorsed a model for introducing more flexibility into fisheries arrangements under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement to enable a more harmonious management of fish stocks within a cross-jurisdictional area.

Council noted progress on the development of a framework for resource sharing and management in Australian Government-managed fisheries. The framework, once implemented, will help to ensure that recreational and commercial fishers have greater certainty with regard to their rights to catch fish. It is envisaged that there will be an initial trial of the framework in the Southern and Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery and the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery, before being extended to other major Australian fisheries.

Ministers also noted that crime in fisheries is growing, both in scale and sophistication, particularly in the abalone fishery. This is a critical issue that needs dedicated action over the next two years. A scoping paper will be developed for Council on how to tackle this problem.

National Fisheries Ecologically Sustainable Development

Council agreed to continue and extend the valuable National Fisheries Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) Reporting Framework.

Ministers noted that good progress has been made in incorporating the principles of ESD into the management of Australia's fisheries. This is required under the legislation and policy aims of all jurisdictions. The nationally agreed ESD reporting framework allows for the measurement and reporting of how well fisheries are meeting the objectives of ESD. The framework can accommodate the fishery assessment requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The framework will be extended to encompass multiple-fisheries and multiple-sectors which will assist the move towards regional ESD reporting. This is consistent with the approach Governments are taking on Integrated Oceans Management.

Working group on Indigenous take of dugong and turtle

Council agreed to address the issue of Indigenous take of dugong and turtle. An Australian Government Working Group has been established to investigate current threats to dugong and marine turtle populations in Australian waters, to determine whether Indigenous take is sustainable in all regions.

Various Australian Government and State agencies have responsibility for the management of dugong and marine turtle species throughout their Australian range. Ministers agreed that State, Territory and Australian Government agencies will work through the Marine and Coastal Committee to develop a nationally coordinated response.

Governments will be working with Indigenous representative bodies and communities to ensure the sustainable management of dugong and marine turtle, noting the enforcement powers available through legislation.

National Reserve System

Council agreed to release a paper, *Directions for the National Reserve System - A Partnership Approach*, on the future development of Australia's protected areas system,. The paper recognises that to achieve a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system, collective efforts will be needed from the Australian Government, States and Territories, non-government organisations and the community. Council agreed to a six week public comments phase with Standing Committee to develop a consultation strategy for the paper.

Council Chairing Arrangements

Council considered options for chairing and agreed to maintain the existing arrangements

Landcare Review And Landcare Insurance

Council noted progress of the current review of the National Landcare Program. The Review has involved extensive public consultation which has indicated landcare is still a vibrant, community-based movement. There is continuing solid and widespread support for landcare within the community and key stakeholders, and an appreciation of the need for local activity linked to strategic regional approaches. A wide range of issues will be considered in the Review including insurance for landcare groups. Council also discussed the issue of insurance for Landcare groups and sought a report out-of-session as soon as possible on options for landcare groups to obtain appropriate insurance cover.