

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

NRMMC 6

16 April 2004

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from across Australia met in Adelaide on Friday 16 April 2004. This was the sixth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

Community Forum

Ministers had their second annual meeting with the Natural Resource Management Community Forum comprising representatives from regional natural resource management bodies, as well as Indigenous representatives and representatives from peak national natural resource management-related organisations such as the Australian Landcare Council.

The Forum provided an opportunity for exchange of ideas regarding regional natural resource management, especially implementation of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust. Discussion also covered the Forum's key recommendations on issues including regional planning and governance, investment, developing effective partnerships, facilitator support, the role of local government and administrative efficiency.

In subsequent discussion, Council asked Standing Committee to provide them with detailed advice on how to move forward on the key issues raised including piloting greater regional autonomy.

NAP & NHT 2 Implementation Progress Report

Council received a report outlining the significant progress made in implementing regional natural resource management through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust. Of particular note is the completion of the accreditation of all regional NRM plans for the National Action Plan in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. The Council agreed on the need to complete and accredit the remaining plans in other States as soon as possible.

The Council noted the need to review how plans are performing against their targets and to resolve the issues of matching National Action Plan contributions in those states where it is not yet resolved.

National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality – 2002 /03 Annual Report

Council received the National Action Plan Annual Report, which sets out National Action Plan achievements in 2002-03. The report focused mainly on the achievements gained from funding provided prior to the conclusion of investment strategies.

An important element of the report is regional summaries that link investments to the shorter and longer term regional natural resource management targets of the regional plans. Council noted that future reports will also cover the Natural Heritage Trust

program and agreed to release the Annual Report Summary on National Action Plan progress.

Annual Scientific and Technical Report – CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology

Council agreed to the publication of the first annual report from CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology providing scientific advice on natural resource management.

Recommendations in the report focus on strengthening knowledge transfer so that the best available science is applied to improving natural resource management through the regional delivery model. Key issues include improving mechanisms for decision-makers to access, analyse and interpret both natural resource data and research based information and coordination of strategic national NRM research and development issues by all relevant Australian Government, State and Territory agencies.

Council agreed that the report be made publicly available and that Standing Committee provide a report on its review of the principal recommendations.

Bush Tender

John Thwaites, Deputy Victorian Premier and Minister for Environment, Water and Victorian Communities, presented a paper on the recent Bush Tender trials in Victoria, which applies a price auction mechanism to fund native vegetation and threatened species management on private land. Council noted the trial has revealed that the auction approach delivered 25% more native vegetation than a grants (fixed price) scheme.

Bush Tender demonstrates that natural resource management oriented auctions can help governments to efficiently choose between best value suppliers and reduce the cost of natural resource management compared to traditional grant regimes.

Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation – Review of National Framework

Council reconfirmed its commitment to the need for native vegetation management. The Council agreed to review and update the *National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation* originally endorsed by Council in 2001. In reconfirming their commitment to the need for native vegetation retention, Council members agreed that the review should address the range of costs and benefits of vegetation management, including various management tools such as volunteerism, grants, market-based measures and regulatory approaches.

Salinity Mapping – Review Report

Council announced release of a Review of Salinity Mapping Methods in the Australian Context. The Review was conducted under the auspices of the Australian Academies of Science, and Technological Science and Engineering, involving many eminent Australian salinity scientists. The wider community and especially regional natural resource managers will now have access to authoritative information on more than 30 different salinity mapping methods, and a clear guide to their best use.

The Review produced a plain language User Guide and a comprehensive Technical Report, outlining the costs and benefits of salinity mapping and explaining the concepts of salinity hazard and risk. Both reports will be accessible via the Internet and in hard copy.

Invasive Species

Council recognised the significant and growing threat posed by invasive species (including weeds, pests and diseases) to both Australian agriculture and the environment. Invasive species are also recognised as a key contributor to biodiversity loss in Australia.

Council noted that significant achievements have been made through stringent border controls and implementation of the National Weeds Strategy. Council agreed, however, that there remained a need to develop a robust national framework for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to preventing significant new invasive species establishing in Australia, and to reducing the impacts of major pests and weeds already present.

Council noted that Standing Committee will investigate and report on options for a national framework for preventative action, early detection, awareness and ongoing control. This work would be done in conjunction with the Primary Industries Standing Committee and a report prepared for Council's consideration in 2005.

Review of the National Red Imported Fire Ants Eradication Program

Council reviewed progress of the red imported fire ant eradication program. Since 2001, when the ant was first detected in Australia (in the Brisbane-Ipswich area), Queensland has been implementing an eradication program with the financial backing of the Australian and all State and Territory governments.

Council noted that after two summers of treatment, the eradication program had succeeded in eliminating fire ants from 97% of previously infested properties. An additional three years of treatment and monitoring are anticipated. Council recognised that it will be necessary to treat and monitor a larger area than originally envisaged, and endorsed an increase in the program's budget of \$37.5 million over the remaining life of the program, subject to the normal financial approval processes required in each jurisdiction.

Cost-Sharing for Management of Four Weed Incursions in Queensland

Council agreed, subject to approval of jurisdictions, to provide funding of \$1.4 million over four years to 2006/07 to eradicate four serious new weed incursions with the potential to damage native and agricultural lands in tropical and sub tropical areas of Queensland. The program involves extensive community engagement to identify infested areas, combined with targeted weed surveys and weed control by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

Cane Toad Control – National Approach

Cane toads are spreading west and south across Australia; their arrival in Kakadu National Park is already having a significant impact on some species. Council directed its Vertebrate Pests Committee to investigate options for a national approach to eradicate cane toads. The Committee is to review the threat posed by the toads, assess the research in place to address the threat, as well as assess the costs and benefits of national action.

Prevention of Crime in Australian Fisheries

Council discussed the initiatives underway to combat crime in Australian fisheries and Australian waters including abalone poaching. The Council discussed the policy and legislative developments underway to deal with increasing criminal activity, including the National Compliance Strategy and the draft National Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. Council noted that a national approach is required to effectively combat illegal fishing, with consistent and improved compliance provisions. Council agreed to a national study on the extent of organised crime in fisheries and consideration of enforcement responses.

National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

Council endorsed actions, strategies and timeframes of the draft National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, which will be the first broad framework document to support adaptation to climate change in Australia.

The Plan is a key action in the National Objectives and Targets for Biodiversity Conservation 2002-2005 and will address a key objective of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity.

The focus of the draft Plan is on research, integration, and building skills and knowledge. The Plan outlines adaptation approaches to manage invasive species and to reduce the impacts of climate change on marine and estuarine, inland aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (Shark-plan)

Council endorsed a National Shark-plan to address shark conservation and management issues. The plan defines the roles of fishery/environmental agencies and promotes active partnerships between government agencies as well as all stakeholders with an interest in shark resources.

The Council agreed to submit the Plan to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Committee on Fisheries as Australia's Shark Plan and to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature given the Plan's relevance to migratory species.

Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

The Council endorsed its first annual report on implementation of actions to address Indigenous reconciliation by natural resource management agencies across Australia. The report recommends that jurisdictions undertake further review of products and services already being delivered in partnership with Indigenous communities. In addition, improved opportunities for employment and training in natural resource management and agriculture are also identified as areas for attention.

Landcare and NRM Community Group Insurance

Council noted the review of the National Landcare Program as it related to insurance for landcare and related projects. The Council agreed to terms of reference for a Standing Committee review of commercially available and state supported public liability and personal accident insurance policies available to natural resource management groups in all jurisdictions. The Council agreed to the review being completed in time for consideration at its next meeting.

Water Reform Progress Report

Council noted progress in the development of the National Water Initiative Intergovernmental Agreement and the expectation that the Council of Australian Governments will consider the NWI in mid 2004.

Key NRM Issues – Case Studies

Council received a progress report on a number of case studies into areas of significant natural resource decline - soil acidification, soil quality degradation and biodiversity decline. Ministers noted that Standing Committee will develop recommendations for Council including a National Program to address biodiversity decline.

National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions

Ministers noted the significant progress made to develop a National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions, since its last meeting in October 2003.

Provision of Data for Continental Landscape Assessment

Council expressed support for the collaborative arrangement between the Wilderness Society and South Australia, by agreeing that neighbouring States will share data that will assist South Australia to develop cross-border ecological data sets.