



## COMMUNIQUÉ

2 June 2007

### CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER TOP MINISTERS' AGENDA

At the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) in Cairns, Australian environment ministers discussed key environmental priorities relating to climate change, product stewardship, air quality, chemicals management, nationally protected areas and heritage conservation.

Ministers believed that dealing with climate change was of great importance to ensure protection of the natural environment. They agreed to pursue a national strategy for reducing transport associated greenhouse gas and air pollution levels, and to encourage purchase of more fuel efficient vehicles. Council also determined it would lead the development of national guidelines for carbon capture and storage.

Ministers were pleased to approve a draft set of national guidelines dealing with recycled water for drinking for release for three month's consultation, subject to the endorsement of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). The public consultation period on the draft guidelines is expected to commence later this month.

Product stewardship was another area of focused discussion, with Ministers agreeing that resource conservation and efficiency is a legitimate objective for national product stewardship action. Ministers commended signatories to the National Packaging Covenant for a positive year of action that resulted in an increase in the packaging recycling rate to about 56 per cent. Ministers encouraged the National Packaging Covenant Council, industry, stakeholders and consumers to continue this good work. They agreed to finalise the proposed National Environment Protection Measure for tyres as a priority, with work on other products including computers and televisions to follow in the near future. Ministers also welcomed the proposal by the Australian Government to phase out incandescent light globes by June 2010. The Council committed to exploring the need for safe disposal options for the more energy efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Ministers were pleased to release a discussion paper reviewing the national approach to ambient air quality standards and goals to protect public health and ensure Australia is at the forefront of international management trends. In response to community concerns, Council also discussed a study on air quality in and around traffic tunnels and Ministers agreed to facilitate further talks with health ministers.

Ministers signed an agreement committing to safe and sustainable production and use of chemicals in Australia and also agreed to a Chemicals Action Plan which will help industry, community and governments respond to chemical issues into the future.

Council agreed to initiate work on three priorities for protected area management: adapting to climate change, protected area tourism and capacity building for indigenous and private land managers of protected areas. Council committed to active development of the Alps to Atherton conservation corridor proposal, involving public and private land holders working together, aimed at improving opportunities for species to move and adapt in response to changes in climate.

Council agreed to pursue a World Heritage Tentative List - identifying Australian places to be considered for nomination to the World Heritage Committee over the next ten years. The Australian Government will work with states and territories to discuss possible nominations and

themes in late 2007. This is the first time all Australian jurisdictions have cooperated to develop a full inventory of our natural and cultural heritage places of outstanding universal value.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Vehicle fuel efficiency measures under COAG**

Following the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) consideration of an EPHC and Australian Transport Council report on current and potential measures to encourage the uptake of more fuel efficient and low emission passenger and light commercial vehicles, Council agreed to proceed with examining the feasibility and means of implementation of possible measures.

### **Transport initiatives under COAG**

Travel demand management enables sustainable transport outcomes by reducing single occupancy vehicle use, and leads to the achievement of a number of key environmental protection objectives. These include reducing greenhouse gas and air pollution levels, alleviating congestion, and promoting positive health outcomes. Ministers agreed to work within and across governments to identify further options for collaboration on travel demand management, including assessing the need for a national strategy.

### **Carbon capture and storage guidelines**

Ministers agreed to lead the development of nationally consistent guidelines for the environmental assessment and regulation of carbon dioxide capture and geological storage. They acknowledged the importance of working closely with the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources and agreed to establish a Joint Officials Working Group. Council noted that ensuring the environmental integrity of carbon dioxide capture and storage activities is vital to achieving community acceptance of this technology that could deliver a significant part of Australia's future greenhouse abatement.

## **WATER**

### **National Guidelines for Water Recycling - Phase Two**

Ministers endorsed, on behalf of both the EPHC and the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, a draft set of guidelines dealing with recycled water for drinking for public consultation, subject to its endorsement by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

A world first, the guidelines will provide a scientific basis to facilitate the safe use of recycled water for drinking in proposed and future schemes. The draft, on which public comment will be sought for three months, does not promote or endorse schemes, but describes the safeguards that are needed in order to protect public health and the environment.

This set of guidelines is one of three modules comprising Phase Two of the Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling, being developed as part of the National Water Initiative. Phase One was endorsed by environment, natural resource management and health ministers in November 2006. The draft recycled water for drinking guidelines describe how to apply the risk management framework outlined in Phase One to the specific use of recycled water for drinking.

Ministers agreed to request that the NHMRC urgently consider this matter, in light of the severe drought facing many parts of Australia, and to support jurisdictions such as Queensland, which is fast tracking recycled water for drinking.

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT**

### **Product stewardship**

Ministers agreed that resource conservation/efficiency is a legitimate objective for national product stewardship action under EPHC. The Council agreed to finalise a National Environment Protection Measure on tyres as a priority, with work on other products including computers and televisions to follow in the near future. Ministers agreed that resource conservation and efficiency is a legitimate objective for national product stewardship action, noting the COAG requirement for enhanced analysis of social and environmental costs and benefits.

Ministers agreed to consider options for developing national costing methods and tools at future meetings. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to improving the sustainability of products and to developing regulatory safety nets to support negotiated product stewardship initiatives where appropriate.

### **Plastic bags**

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to phasing out plastic bags by January 2009. They welcomed the submissions received during the recent public consultation process on regulatory options for dealing with plastic bags and agreed to consider this issue again along with a revised Regulatory Impact Statement at their next meeting.

A working group of State and Territory officials was established to explore options for nationally consistent regulatory action, including the options of a ban on plastic bags and a mandatory retail charge. The options from the working group, and the outcomes of the regulatory impact assessment process, would allow Ministers to make a fully informed decision at Council's next meeting.

The Australian Government noted its view that the options being developed for plastic bags should meet COAG's regulatory impact requirements, with underpinning analysis allowing for a fully informed decision.

### **National Packaging Covenant**

The Council welcomed the National Packaging Covenant 2005-06 Annual Report and commended signatories for a positive first year of action. Ministers particularly welcomed the increase in the packaging recycling rate to about 56 per cent. The Council recognised that there is still considerable work to be done before the Covenant is in a position to achieve its goals and overarching targets. Ministers noted that while the Covenant Council has an important role to play, it will require active participation by all signatories to ensure that the Covenant succeeds.

### **Compact fluorescent light bulbs**

Ministers welcomed the Australian Government initiative to phase out inefficient incandescent light bulbs by June 2010 as a way of reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. They agreed to explore the need for end-of-life management options for the more energy efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs.

## **AIR QUALITY**

### **Diesel Vehicle Emissions NEPM Review**

Council welcomed a report of the review of the National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) for Diesel Vehicle Emissions. While noting the overall effectiveness of the Measure, Council agreed that it should be updated to ensure it adequately reflects the availability of new technologies and experience gained in implementing this measure. Council is expected to initiate a variation process at its next meeting

## **Ambient Air Quality NEPM Review**

Ministers were pleased to release a discussion paper on the review of the Ambient Air Quality National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) to obtain stakeholder input to any need to vary this important Measure.

The Ambient Air Quality NEPM was established to provide a nationally consistent approach to the monitoring and reporting of air quality in Australia and contains a nationally agreed set of air quality standards for the protection of public health. This discussion paper reviews the performance of the NEPM in achieving national consistency and highlights a number of options for possible changes to the NEPM to provide greater flexibility and to ensure that it remains at the forefront of current issues and international trends in air quality management.

## **Management of air pollution in and around tunnels and busy roads**

Ministers discussed the current National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) study on air quality in and around traffic tunnels. This study will complement the Ambient Air Quality

NEPM Review which will look at community exposure near busy roads. The NHMRC study was prompted by the Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing in response to community concerns. Ministers welcomed this opportunity for further engagement between health and environment ministers.

## **Excess of Waste Oil**

Council discussed the acute problem facing Western Australia in the disposal of used oil. Previous users of waste oil as burner fuel have converted to using fuel such as natural gas, and waste oil collections have therefore slowed or stopped, resulting in most of the State's storage capacity for used oil being filled.

Ministers agreed to form a working group comprising Western Australia, South Australia and the Commonwealth to investigate the waste oil issue and solutions to it as a matter of priority.

## **CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT**

### **Improving environmental management of chemicals**

Environment Ministers signed an agreement to improve environmental aspects of chemical management, such as promoting the safe and sustainable production and use of chemicals in Australia.

Ministers also agreed to a Chemicals Action Plan which will ensure federal and state governments will be well placed to respond to chemical issues when they arise here in Australia or overseas. It will also allow environment agencies to better identify and effectively manage the environmental impacts of industrial chemicals.

The work on National Chemicals Environmental Management (NChEM) links closely with the COAG agenda to help reduce red tape and streamline regulation.

## **INNOVATIVE POLICY TOOLS**

### **Assessment of Site Contamination NEPM Review**

Ministers agreed to initiate a process to vary the Assessment of Site Contamination NEPM based on recommendations made in the October 2006 NEPM review. The proposed variation will ensure that the NEPM remains the premier document for the assessment of site contamination in Australia by drawing on the latest methodologies for assessing human and ecological risk from contaminated sites, and updating guidance on site assessment methods in line with technological changes in Australia and overseas.

The EPHC has long been committed to strengthening partnerships and the health sector has often played important roles in the development of NEPMs. Ministers today acknowledged the support of the NHMRC in contributing to the preparation of the proposal for a variation to the NEPM.

### **National Pollutant Inventory NEPM**

Ministers agreed to a variation to the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) NEPM. In making the variation, Council agreed that the NPI should be varied to include transfer of wastes and greenhouse gas emissions pending the establishment of a national purpose built greenhouse reporting mechanism.

The Australian Government recorded its strong opposition to the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions in the NPI, because it considers the NPI option will provide neither the streamlining nor the comprehensive data set needed, and that proceeding with the NPI option would be a waste of valuable resources when the Australian Government is pursuing another course of action for emissions reporting which will be much broader in scope than the NPI.

Reporting on emissions from aquaculture operations was not included in the NPI NEPM.

The NPI has been in place for eight years and provides information on emissions of substances to air, land and water. The inclusion of transfers will align the Australian NPI with similar overseas registers. The variation follows a comprehensive review of the NPI conducted in 2005.

## **REVIEW OF NEPC ACTS**

### **Independent Review of the National Environment Protection Council Acts**

The National Environment Protection Council (NEPC) agreed to the tabling in Parliaments of *The Report of the Second Review of the National Environment Protection Council Acts*, prepared by John Ramsay Consulting Pty Ltd. The review concludes that the core aspects of NEPC activity and processes are sound. It notes the NEPC model appears to have some unique benefits and appears to be cost effective in its approach to matters such as jurisdictional cooperation, consultation and engaging relevant expertise in jurisdictions.

The review makes a number of recommendations aimed at streamlining and improving processes; promoting greater uniformity and accountability in the implementation of NEPMs in jurisdictions; and making the NEPC Act more responsive to the environmental needs of the present day. NEPC is expected to respond to the recommendations of the review at its next meeting.

## **NATIONALLY PROTECTED AREAS**

### **National Protected Area Establishment and Management and Alps to Atherton Initiative**

Environment Ministers noted the importance of national parks and reserves, not only for conserving Australia's native plant and animals and associated cultural heritage, but also for other values such as supporting nature-based tourism. A further focus will be the need to build the capacity of indigenous and private land managers of protected areas.

Ministers are committed to working together at a national level on three priority policy collaboration areas: adapting to climate change, protected area tourism and capacity building for indigenous and private land managers of protected areas.

Council has established a Protected Areas Policy Working Group to progress these priorities and work with key stakeholders and other interested groups over the next three years.

Ministers were pleased to note that there has been good support from all states and territories, and also from a number of stakeholders for the Alps to Atherton conservation corridor proposal. Through public and private land managers and members of the broader community working

together, the proposal will improve the connectivity between parks and reserves and other land holdings along the Great Dividing Range and improve the opportunities for species to move and adapt as our climate changes.

## **HERITAGE CONSERVATION**

### **World Heritage Tentative List**

Council agreed to support the preparation by the Australian Government of a new Australian World Heritage 'Tentative List' for consideration over the next ten years, as sought under the Convention.

Ministers agreed that Australia's World Heritage Tentative List preparation would be undertaken in light of thematic reports by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) identifying gaps in the World Heritage List, and considering tentative lists of other state parties.

The Australian Government agreed to host a workshop in late 2007 to discuss possible nominations and themes with states and territories. Ministers welcomed this step and noted that this is the first time all Australian jurisdictions have cooperated to develop a full inventory of heritage places of outstanding universal value that Australia will consider putting forward to the World Heritage Committee over the next ten years.

The Council agreed that places to be considered for inclusion on the Tentative List would include the Central Victorian goldfields, the Australian Alps and suitable areas of Cape York. Developing a new tentative list is not expected to delay existing submissions by the WA Government on Ningaloo Reef-Cape Range or by Queensland on the Cooloola extension to Fraser Island.

New Zealand has recently undertaken a similar exercise and finalised its own Tentative List in early 2007.

## **ABOUT THE EPHC**

The Environment Protection and Heritage Council is made up of ministers from all states and territories, as well as the Australian, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea governments. It aims to ensure that governments work together with communities to achieve and enhance a healthy natural and cultural environment in harmony with social and economic goals.

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