

AGREED STATEMENT

25 November 2016

Meeting of Environment Ministers

Commonwealth, state and territory Environment Ministers met today in Sydney to advance the protection of species and habitats, improve the environment for human health, and discuss climate change.

Environmental accounting

Ministers agreed to work together to develop a common national approach to environmental accounts in 2017. This important work will ensure accurate and reliable information is available to governments, communities and business to better understand the condition of the environment and make better decisions. It will improve the ability to track outcomes in specific locations and across state and territory boundaries, and demonstrate the value of the environment to our standard of living.

As a first step, the Australian Government will collaborate with a number of states in bringing together relevant stakeholders, Natural Resource Management organisations and academia to progress environmental accounts. This will take place in early 2017 and will build on action already under way in all jurisdictions to move towards a common national approach.

Biodiversity

Australia's unique species are an international treasure and a national asset. Ministers considered and agreed to release the review of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030. The review found that there were opportunities to build on good outcomes achieved so far including by enhancing partnerships to take practical and focused action to implement the strategy.

As the strategy supports our implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Ministers agreed that it should be updated to meet current and emerging challenges. Ministers highlighted the importance of reform of the strategy to enhance collaboration with Indigenous people, private landowners, businesses, environmental organisations, and communities to achieve tangible on-the-ground improvements for our species and recognised the importance of bringing the broader community along with this reform. This will mean leveraging the resources and effort of government and focusing that effort on a set of shared priorities to ensure there is robust protection of Australia's globally important species and landscapes. Ministers agreed that closer cooperation across Australia, guided by a national plan, will lead to better outcomes.

Ministers highlighted significant steps already taken to improve and protect biodiversity across the country, in particular:

- Australia's internationally recognised National Reserve System which covers over 17 per cent of the country. It includes national parks and protected areas on public, private and Indigenous land. This is a significant achievement but there is still more to be done to ensure the system is robust and well managed.

- As it relates to threatened species, the importance of ongoing efforts including close collaboration, pooling of resources and sharing best practice, for example the strong cooperation that the Commonwealth and Tasmania are continuing to protect the nationally endangered orange bellied parrot and the Tasmanian devil.
- Australia's world leading collaboration between land managers, Landcare groups, Natural Resource Management organisations and local communities across the country which protect Australia's unique species, improve our productive landscapes and preserve our habitats.

Environment and human health

Ministers were concerned about the impact on communities and business of contamination from fire retardant chemicals, such as per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances (PFASs, including PFOS and PFOA). Ministers welcomed the release of the Commonwealth Environmental Management Guidance on PFOS and PFOA by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy as an important step in the development of practical responses to the management of these toxic chemicals.

Ministers noted that the Commonwealth would be releasing a Regulatory Impact Statement on the ratification of the listing of PFOS under the Stockholm Convention in early 2017.

Ministers acknowledged the challenges of managing PFAS contamination and agreed to work more closely, including in the timely communication of information to the public and around ensuring that regulatory approaches are aligned and effective.

All jurisdictions will have a critical role to play in the development of nationally consistent standards for environmental contamination and will support Victoria in hosting a summit in early 2017 and will report back to Ministers in mid-2017.

Food Waste

Ministers agreed that jurisdictions, led by the Australian Government, will work cooperatively to support initiatives that lead to a 50 per cent reduction in food waste by 2030. Food waste is estimated to cost the Australian economy in the order of \$20 billion annually. As a first step, jurisdictions will support the Australian Government in the development of a National Food Waste Strategy and contribute to a National Food Waste Summit in 2017.

Ministers discussed their desire to move quickly on tangible actions that would result in enduring reductions in food waste, and to develop methods to measure progress.

Packaging Waste

Ministers discussed the importance of reducing packaging waste and welcomed the significant update of the Australian Packaging Covenant. There was consensus in favour of the new approach to the Covenant, with NSW and Queensland to finalise their position shortly. These reforms will ensure the Covenant promotes businesses working across their supply chain to reduce waste, design more sustainable packaging and increase the rate of recycling.

Ministers welcomed the new five year strategic plan and the significant investment of resources by industry to support the plan.

Plastic Microbeads

Ministers discussed the need to work with businesses to achieve a voluntary phase out of microbeads. Microbeads are typically found in personal care products, cosmetics and some cleaning products and are having significant impacts on our marine environment. Ministers agreed dumping products containing microbeads on the Australian market was unacceptable and that the industry must meet targets for the ban quickly and comprehensively. Ministers discussed the importance of working directly with smaller manufacturers and importers, alongside peak industry bodies, to make sure all affected businesses understand and ensure that all products containing microbeads were captured under the ban.

Ministers will reassess the effectiveness of voluntary action in mid-2017. Ministers were clear that if the voluntary approach does not result in an effective ban they will move at that time to regulate to give effect to a ban.

Plastic Bags

Ministers noted that Australians consume billions of plastic bags each year and that this contributes to the toll that plastic litter takes on marine life around Australia. Ministers acknowledged the bans on plastic bags already implemented by SA, Tasmania, ACT and the NT and noted Queensland's announcement today to have a ban in place by 2018. Ministers supported the work Victoria and NSW are doing, including the work NSW is doing to investigate the behaviour of biodegradable plastic bags in the environment. Ministers asked officials to report back at the next meeting on progress being made in other jurisdictions to ban plastic bags.

Photovoltaic Systems

Ministers discussed the impending rapid growth in the contribution of photovoltaic systems, including PV panels, inverter equipment and system accessories such as energy storage batteries, for domestic, commercial and industrial applications. Victorian analysis has estimated that the waste stream from PV panels will grow from around 580 tonnes in 2015 to around 31,000 tonnes by 2035. Ministers acknowledged the importance of ensuring that programs are in place to deal with this cost. The Victorian government is leading innovative programs working throughout the life cycle of photovoltaic systems to reduce environmental impacts.

Ministers agreed to Victoria leading work to develop an industry led voluntary product stewardship arrangement to address the emerging risks posed by end-of-life photovoltaic systems entering the waste stream. Photovoltaic systems have been listed under the national Product Stewardship Act to signal an intent to consider a scheme to deal with these wastes.

National Pollutant Inventory

Ministers noted the importance of robust information to support the management of pollution in Australia, and noted the role of the National Pollutant Inventory in providing this to governments, industry and the community. Ministers acknowledged that the list of 93 substances reported under the scheme had been almost unchanged since its inception. Ministers agreed to review the NPI focussing on identifying whether the right substances were being reported, the most valuable information was being collected and whether its collection

was cost effective. Ministers agreed to terms of reference for a review of the National Pollutant Inventory to be completed in 2017.

Clean Air

Ministers endorsed release of the National Clean Air Agreement Mid-term Review Report. Ministers were pleased to note that good progress has been made over the first 12 months of the Agreement. Air pollution reporting standards have been significantly strengthened and work is well underway on key emission reduction strategies for example, significant progress toward implementing emission standards for non-road spark ignition engines and equipment such as garden tools and outboard motors that contribute to about 10 per cent of smog in our cities.

Tyre Stewardship

Officials will report back to the next meeting on the progress of the ACCC review into Tyre Stewardship with a view to improving outcomes in relation to tyre recycling.

Climate change

Minister Frydenberg relayed the outcomes of the 22nd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Marrakech. He noted the strong continued international momentum for action on climate change including recent agreements around phasing out HFCs and reducing emissions in the international aviation sector.

Australia's ratification of the Paris Agreement was warmly welcomed in this context and sends a clear signal of Australia's commitment to the Agreement.

Minister Frydenberg provided an update on the work of the COAG Energy Council to better integrate climate and energy policies across jurisdictions.

Minister Frydenberg noted the Commonwealth's 2017 climate change review. State and territory Ministers noted their activities in mitigation, adaptation, policy, targets and programs to address climate change.