

AGREED STATEMENT

28 July 2017

Meeting of Environment Ministers

Commonwealth, State and Territory Environment Ministers met today in Melbourne to progress work on threatened species protection, improve the environment for human health, and discuss climate change.

Threatened Species

The Threatened Species Prospectus released by the Commonwealth Government in February this year has mobilised commitments of more than \$2.7 million in funding for our nationally listed threatened species. Ministers noted its success and that of State and Territory initiatives as examples of innovative partnerships and alternative funding models to achieve environmental outcomes.

Australia State of the Environment Report 2016

Ministers received an update from the Commonwealth on the Australia State of the Environment Report 2016. Commissioned every five years, the report assesses the current state of the Australian environment, how well it is managed, recent trends and the future outlook. Ministers agreed to work together to identify opportunities for cross-government collaboration to address concerns raised in the report.

Climate Change

Ministers received an update from the Commonwealth on the Commonwealth's 2017 review of climate change policies and the independent review of the National Electricity Market by Dr Alan Finkel. Ministers agreed that jurisdictions would assist the Commonwealth in preparing the 7th National Communication report to the UNFCCC.

Environmental-Economic Accounting

Environmental-economic accounting helps us understand the condition of the environment and its relationship with the economy. Ministers endorsed the objectives of a common national approach to environmental-economic accounting and the free and open sharing of environmental data between jurisdictions.

Plastic Microbeads

Microbeads – typically found in personal care products, cosmetics and some cleaning products – pollute our marine environment. Ministers welcomed industry progress to deliver a voluntary phase out of microbeads by mid-2018 and will review a compliance protocol for their phase out at their next meeting in December. Of the 52 companies identified as supplying products containing plastic microbeads, 42 (80 per cent) have already phased out or have committed to phasing out microbeads. Ministers reasserted their position that if the current industry-led approach does not effectively phase out microbeads by mid-2018, governments will move to implement a ban. Ministers thanked NSW for playing a leadership role in driving this important reform.

Used Tyres

More than 56 million tyres are disposed of every year, with only 10 per cent recycled. Acknowledging the need for a long-term strategy to meet these challenges – and to realise economic opportunities – Ministers endorsed the National Market Development Strategy for Used Tyres. The Strategy outlines actions for the next five years to increase the uptake of tyre-derived products in road, rail and civil engineering applications. Ministers thanked Victoria and Queensland for their leadership in preparing the Strategy.

Container Deposit Schemes

Ministers acknowledged the progress State and Territory governments are making to implement container deposit schemes.

National Rechargeable Battery Recycling Program

Only 5 per cent of handheld rechargeable batteries in Australia are recycled, with many containing hazardous substances that have the potential to harm people and the environment. Two successful pilot collection and recycling programs - funded and supported by the Queensland government and the Battery Industry Working Group – highlight the community's willingness to recycle batteries. Ministers agreed to continue working with the battery industry and thanked Queensland for its leadership and funding commitments to-date. Ministers agreed to consider stewardship approaches at their next meeting, with these approaches to potentially involve regulatory options to underpin a voluntary scheme and other options as States see fit.

National Litter Index

The National Litter Index is an annual report on litter types and volumes found across Australia. It informs litter management strategies used by State, Territory and local governments. Ministers noted discussions are occurring between jurisdictions on methodology and funding arrangements for the Index in 2017-18 and beyond.

Plastic Bags

Each year Australians consume billions of plastic shopping bags, which increases the overall plastic pollution in the environment and the toll on marine life around Australia. In addition to the large volume of lightweight plastic shopping bags, around 900 million thicker-style plastic bags are supplied each year. To address this, State and Territory Ministers agreed to work with retailers to explore options to reduce thicker plastic shopping bags, potentially under a voluntary code of practice. Ministers thanked Queensland for leading this work and for its \$50,000 contribution toward the initiative.

Food Waste

Food waste costs the Australian economy roughly \$20 billion each year. Ministers are continuing to support the Commonwealth's National Food Waste Strategy to halve Australia's food waste by 2030. Ministers are identifying opportunities for sharing data and collaborating on state food waste reduction programs. Ministers look forward to the National Food Waste Summit in November 2017 where they will discuss how regulation is supporting or preventing reductions in food waste.

Chemicals Management

Ministers thanked Victoria for its leadership in hosting the PFAS Regulators Summit in April 2017 and noted a draft PFAS National Management Plan. The final Plan, which will be considered by Environment Ministers by the end of 2017, is expected to propose a practical basis for nationally consistent environmental guidance and standards for managing PFAS contamination.

Ministers agreed in-principle to the approach for a National Standard, which will provide Australians and industry with clarity on how industrial chemicals need to be managed to keep the environment and communities safe. The final National Standard will be considered by Environment Ministers by the end of 2017.