

AGREED STATEMENT

15 December 2015

Meeting of Environment Ministers

Commonwealth, state and territory Environment Ministers met today in Melbourne to progress environment issues of national significance.

The National Clean Air Agreement

Ministers today endorsed the **National Clean Air Agreement** – over six months ahead of schedule. The Agreement will deliver actions to reduce air pollution and establishes a process for jurisdictions to work cooperatively to address emerging air quality issues—ensuring Australians continue to enjoy clean air into the future.

The Agreement's initial work plan for the next two years focuses on priority issues of concern, including reviewing and strengthening air quality monitoring and reporting standards, targeted measures to reduce emissions from key sources of air pollution, improving access to air quality information for communities, and fostering partnerships with industry. Three initial actions under the Agreement were agreed by Ministers today:

- Ministers agreed to measures to reduce air pollution from **wood heaters**, including the adoption of new emission and efficiency standards for new wood heaters and sharing best management practices across jurisdictions. This approach encourages innovation and sharing of cost effective approaches and allows each jurisdiction to tailor actions for local conditions and priorities.
- Ministers agreed to introduce emission standards for new **non-road spark ignition engines** (such as garden equipment and marine outboard motors). Non-road spark ignition engines are a significant contributor to air pollution. The introduction of new standards will bring Australia into line with existing international standards, particularly those in North America. Ministers also noted that a working group of experts is on track to provide interim advice this year on implementing the standards, with the aim of introducing legislation into Federal Parliament in mid-2016.
- Taking into account the latest scientific evidence of health impacts, Ministers agreed to strengthen national ambient air quality reporting standards for airborne fine particles. Ministers agreed to adopt reporting standards for annual average and 24-hour PM_{2.5} particles of 8µg/m³ and 25µg/m³ respectively, aiming to move to 7µg/m³ and 20µg/m³ respectively by 2025. Ministers also agreed to establish an annual average standard for PM₁₀ particles of 25µg/m³. Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory will set, and South Australia will consider setting, a more stringent annual average PM₁₀ standard of 20µg/m³ in the state, while ensuring nationally consistent monitoring and reporting against the agreed National Environment Protection Measure standards. The decision was also taken to review PM₁₀ standards in 2018. The review will be co-led by the NSW and Victorian governments, in discussion with other jurisdictions.

Biodiversity Conservation

Ministers held a productive discussion on biodiversity conservation reforms. Jurisdictions provided updates on their current conservation activities, including on threatened species following the Threatened Species Summit in July 2015, and environmental regulatory reform.

Ministers noted the importance of addressing both climate change mitigation and adaptation issues as part of a long term biodiversity and threatened species strategy.

Ministers considered the outcomes of recent consultation on the review of *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030* and agreed to release public submissions and survey responses. Ministers noted the review provides a significant reform opportunity, with a report on the review being prepared for their consideration in 2016. Information on the review and feedback received through consultation processes are available on the Commonwealth Department of the Environment's website:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/strategy>.

Ministers endorsed the approach to implementation of the Common Assessment Method for Listing Species and Ecological Communities and agreed that an inter-governmental working group, including representatives from all jurisdictions, will work together on the listing assessment reform and resolve any implementation challenges as they arise. Ministers noted the importance of robust cross-jurisdictional implementation arrangements to ensure there is no reduction in the level of protection for threatened species. Ministers agreed that the Common Assessment Method is about continuous improvement of standards. The Commonwealth Minister welcomed the decision by Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory to sign the agreement for the Common Assessment Method. Victoria expressed its continued support for the Common Assessment Method and will consider signing the agreement following consultation on reforms to Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and state-wide Biodiversity Strategy.

Ministers discussed management of koala overpopulation in southern jurisdictions. Victoria reported on the work, being co-led with the Commonwealth, to develop national koala translocation guidelines. These guidelines will be consistent with the draft recovery plan for the nationally listed koala (combined populations of Queensland, NSW and the Australian Capital Territory), and Victoria's and South Australia's respective state koala management strategies. The guidelines will focus on health, welfare and genetic implications of translocations. Ministers noted that work will commence on the guidelines in 2016, following the release of the draft recovery plan.

Cities and the Built Environment

Federal Minister Jamie Briggs outlined the Australian Government's new cities and the built environment agenda which seeks to improve the productivity, liveability and accessibility of Australia's urban environments. Ministers noted the need for ongoing deep cooperation and partnerships across the Commonwealth and with states, local government and the business community to achieve transformative change in cities.

Waste Initiatives

Following consideration of a report that highlighted a significant decrease in domestic tyre recycling, Ministers today discussed a national project to develop a market development strategy for end-of-life tyres. The project, co-led by the Queensland and Victorian governments and jointly funded by the Queensland, Victorian, NSW and Western Australian governments, will be undertaken in partnership with Tyre Stewardship Australia. Ministers congratulated the tyre industry and the jurisdictions involved on their continued interest and involvement and look forward to considering the strategy in 2016.

Ministers agreed that NSW and Queensland will co-convene a ministerial roundtable on 29 February 2016 with small and large retailers, peak business chambers, local government, environmental groups and interested jurisdictions to inform a harmonised approach to reducing the environmental impact of plastic shopping bags. The roundtable will review the experiences of jurisdictions who have already implemented plastic shopping bag bans. Around 7-8 billion plastic bags are consumed nationally each year. Plastic bags and fragments of bags can persist in the environment for many hundreds of years and cause a range of visual and ecological impacts.

Ministers agreed that NSW and the Australian Government will lead further work to secure a voluntary agreement from industry to phase out microbeads in personal care, cosmetic and cleaning products. This will be considered at the next meeting, with a phase out period of two years following commencement of the agreement, but no later than 1 July 2018. Ministers agreed that they would consider further actions, if required to address outstanding products that contain microbeads. This progresses a commitment made at the February 2015 meeting to reduce the amount of microbeads in ‘rinse-off’ products reaching the marine environment and affecting the health of aquatic organisms, ecosystems and the food chain.

Climate Change Collaboration

Ministers welcomed the outcomes of the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) held in Paris last week.

The Victorian Minister updated the meeting on the Climate Change Adaptation Working Group, chaired by Victoria. The group has met three times since its establishment in February 2015 and has agreed on an agenda. The working group will share knowledge and progress policy on issues such as adaptation planning and strategies, coastal adaptation and legal liability, climate change and insurance, and private sector engagement. In November, the working group discussed barriers to effective adaptation and climate science.

Ministers noted the update on the implementation of the Emissions Reduction Fund, including results from the successful second auction held over 4-5 November 2015.

Ministers noted the ongoing work of the Climate Change and Energy Working Group convened by South Australia, with Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, and with the Commonwealth, NSW and Tasmania participating as observers. The working group will continue to work on key areas including identifying opportunities to drive uptake in renewable energy, harmonisation of energy efficiency schemes, improving information sharing and best practice delivery in adaptation and sharing of information on emission reduction targets.

World Heritage Tentative List

Ministers discussed updating Australia’s World Heritage Tentative List and agreed to explore potential nominations for Cape York, subject to community and Traditional Owner views (Queensland), and Budj Bim Cultural Landscape (Victoria). If nominated, Budj Bim could become Australia’s first place inscribed on the World Heritage list exclusively for Aboriginal cultural values. This would represent a significant step in the recognition of Australia’s Aboriginal heritage and its significance to the international community. Ministers noted the Gundiṯjmara peoples’ tireless pursuit of inscription on the World Heritage List for several decades. Ministers also noted the Northern Territory’s intention to pursue a nomination for the Tjorita/West MacDonnell National Park for the World Heritage tentative list.

States will work over the forward year to conduct further research and consult with community and key stakeholder groups to prove that a credible case for World Heritage List inscription can be mounted before they are added to the Tentative List. NSW will continue to progress consideration of Royal National Park for the tentative list.

Ministers also agreed to retain the current extensions to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and Fraser Island (Great Sandy Region) World Heritage areas on the Tentative List.

Australian Government officials will continue to consult with jurisdictions on a number of other properties that might be included in the update to the Tentative List. These will be discussed at a future Meeting of Environment Ministers. Currently, Australia has 19 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.