

AGREED STATEMENT

15 July 2015

Meeting of Environment Ministers

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

The National Clean Air Agreement

Ministers considered the outcomes of recent public consultations to inform the development of the National Clean Air Agreement, which saw broad and positive engagement from industry and the community with over 300 submissions received. Ministers agreed to release the submission summary and public submissions.

Ministers endorsed in-principle the **National Clean Air Agreement** and have committed to finalise the Agreement and its initial work plan, before the end of 2015 – over six months ahead of schedule. The Agreement will deliver actions to reduce air pollution and establish a new process for jurisdictions to work cooperatively to address emerging air quality issues, to ensure Australians continue to enjoy clean air into the future.

The Agreement's initial work plan will see a range of actions taken over the next two years to address 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. These will deliver sustained improvements in air quality.

Ministers agreed in-principle, and committed to finalise by the end of 2015, the introduction of emission standards for new **non-road spark ignition engines** (such as garden equipment and marine outboard motors). New 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 place in North America and consistent with those in Europe and parts of Asia. Ministers agreed to establish a working group of experts, led by Bruce Edwards from the Australian Government Department of the Environment, with representatives from every state and territory, industry and the community. The working group will provide interim advice on actualisation of the standards and framework legislation by the end of 2015 with the aim of implementing standards in the first half of 2016.

Ministers agreed in-principle to reduce air pollution from **wood heaters** by working with business to ensure compliance with tougher new Australian Standards for new wood heaters and adopting effective measures to reduce emissions from existing wood heaters.

Ministers agreed to formally make decisions on options for both non-road spark ignition engines and equipment and wood heaters by the end of 2015, subject to Office of Best Practice Regulation endorsement and whole of government approvals.

Ministers noted the progress of preliminary work being led by Victoria to review the Ambient Air Quality standards for ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide. This review will consider new evidence on the health effects of air pollution, and Ministers agreed to consider this work following further consultation and development.

As a key element of the National Clean Air Agreement, Ministers signalled their in-principle support for varying the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure to implement strengthened reporting standards for airborne fine particles, taking into account the latest scientific evidence of the health impacts of airborne particles. Ministers agreed in-principle to adopt reporting standards for annual average and 24-hour PM_{2.5} particles of 8µg/m³ and 25 µg/m³ respectively, with a move to 7µg/m³ and 20µg/m³ respectively over the longer term. Ministers agreed to finalise their consideration of the NEPM by 31 December 2015, including appropriate annual and 24-hour standards for PM₁₀.

Biodiversity Conservation

Ministers endorsed in-principle the concept of a **common assessment method** to list nationally threatened species and, where agreed by individual jurisdictions, ecological communities. A common assessment method will help to ensure a consistent, efficient and robust listing practice across the country and underpin continued protection for our unique species. Ministers agreed to further consider implementation matters at the next meeting in late 2015.

Ministers opened public consultation on the review of *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030*. The review will examine emerging issues and implementation challenges, alignment with Australia's international obligations such as those under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and opportunities to improve and streamline the Strategy. Comments can be made via the Commonwealth Department of the Environment website <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/strategy>.

In preparation for the 16 July **Threatened Species Summit**, Ministers endorsed the national declaration in relation to feral cats. Ministers agreed to review arrangements within their respective jurisdictions and, where necessary, to remove unnecessary barriers to effective and humane control of feral cats. This opens the doorway for new feral cat eradication programs to access the \$50 million for management of established pest animals recently announced as part of the national *Agriculture Competitiveness White Paper*.

There was agreement that, as a priority, the Commonwealth lead development of a recovery plan for the listed koala. Ministers discussed the issue of managing koala overabundance in southern jurisdictions, particularly in Victoria. The Commonwealth and Victoria agreed to co-lead work on national koala translocation guidelines, consistent with the koala recovery plan, and in consultation with relevant jurisdictions, with a focus on consideration of health, welfare and genetic implications of translocations.

Improving management of chemicals in the environment

Better management of the environmental and associated human health risks posed by harmful chemicals is a step closer today with agreement from the Commonwealth, Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, and South Australia, and in-principle support from Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory to establish a **National Standard for Environmental Management of Industrial Chemicals**. The latter jurisdictions will confirm their formal agreement on the reforms in the coming months subject to whole of government processes. The National Standard, to be established under Commonwealth legislation and implemented by each state and territory, will streamline regulation of industrial chemicals enabling a more transparent, predictable and consistent approach to environmental management of industrial chemicals across all jurisdictions.

This historic step forward to establish a common approach will improve the effectiveness of Australia's chemicals management framework by establishing arrangements equivalent to those already in place for other sectors such as poisons scheduling, transport of dangerous goods and workplace health and safety. Ministers agreed to further consider progress of the new approach at a future meeting, including implementation issues.

Waste Initiatives

Ministers considered progress on solutions to ongoing waste management problems.

Used Batteries

Ministers asked that work to explore an industry driven stewardship approach be refined to focus on hazardous and rechargeable battery types, such as button cell, power tool, sealed lead acid and emergency lighting batteries. This work will continue to be led by Queensland. Ministers noted the work with Queensland on pilot collection initiatives for power tool and emergency lighting batteries and congratulated these sectors for this work. Agreement was reached for the Commonwealth, Queensland and South Australia to meet with the battery industry to encourage participation in a national voluntary scheme.

Waste Paint

Ministers endorsed the Victorian and industry-led paint stewardship approach developed by the paint industry and congratulated manufacturers, master painters and major retailers on their work. Industry has now applied for ACCC authorisation, the final step needed before the voluntary paint stewardship scheme can commence, which is anticipated by May 2016.

Microplastics

Ministers acknowledged the ongoing environmental issues associated with microplastics, which have been shown to move chemical pollutants to fish causing effects such as liver toxicity. Ministers also noted progress in New South Wales on phasing down microbeads, a type of microplastic used in personal care products.

Televisions and computers

Ministers welcomed recent changes to the **National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme** to place the scheme on a more sustainable footing. A significant change is the requirement for industry to recycle 50 per cent of waste televisions and computers in the current financial year, up from 35 per cent last year. Ministers thanked television and computer companies for their leadership, funding and delivery of the scheme.

Climate Change Collaboration

Ministers endorsed the terms of reference for the Climate Change **Adaptation Working Group**, which they established in February 2015. The Working Group, chaired by Victoria, will foster best practice approaches to adaptation and enable jurisdictions to collaborate and consult on priority matters of common interest.

The South Australian Minister reported on a South Australia-led Ministerial forum to foster collaboration across states and territories on climate change issues.

Minister Hunt provided an update on the Emissions Reduction Fund and process for consultation on the post 2020 climate change targets.

National Food Waste Strategy

Ministers noted the Commonwealth's interest in developing a **National Food Waste Strategy** to coordinate activity underway by governments and non-government organisations.

Jurisdictions agreed to cooperate in the identification of current actions and investigate priorities for collaboration to improve national outcomes.