

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

NRMMC 10

21 APRIL 2006

Primary Industries, Natural Resources, Environment and Water Ministers from Australia and New Zealand met in Sydney on Friday 21 April 2006. This was the Tenth meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Council commenced by acknowledging the contribution made to its activities since its creation by the former Australian Government Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald.

Specific issues dealt with by Council are detailed below.

Community Forum and Regional Delivery

Council received a comprehensive presentation from the NRM Community Forum which met earlier in the week. The Forum comprises mainly chairs of Natural Resource Management regional organisations that focused during the 2006 meeting on the subjects of learning from each others' experiences, governance, knowledge brokering and promoting partnerships. Council discussed with the Forum a number of issues relating to Regional Delivery, including future funding for the current regional model, broadening the range of investment sources and communicating positive messages about regional NRM in Australia.

McKell Medal

Council presented the 16th (2005) McKell medal to Mr Robert Quirk from Duranbah in northern NSW. Mr Quirk was awarded the medal for his outstanding and long-term contribution to NRM and agricultural innovation, education and leadership, including advances in dealing with acid sulfate soils in volcanic and tidal soils.

Regional Delivery- Future NRM Directions

Council discussed the next steps involved in progressing future arrangements for the NRM programs. Council noted that, following stakeholder consultations undertaken across Australia last year and the completion of NRM program evaluations, there is now sufficient information available to develop concrete proposals to address a number of the key strategic issues that will shape future NRM arrangements.

As a basis for this future work, Council endorsed objectives and principles to guide future NRM Programs. Council agreed to further refinement of the strategic issues by Standing Committee, with a report back to Council in November 2006. In doing so, Council noted the strong support among stakeholders across Australia for the regional approach already used to deliver the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water quality and the regional component of the Natural Heritage Trust. Council also noted the importance of ensuring a smooth transition to future NRM arrangements, and keeping the broader community fully informed on the development of these arrangements. Council affirmed its support for continuing the effective collaboration between the Australian Government, the States and Territories and local government on NRM matters.

National Water Initiative

Council noted progress on a range of technical actions under the National Water Initiative (NWI) including work on water registers, water resource accounting, water metering and measuring, benchmarking pricing and service quality for urban and rural water delivery agencies and guidelines for customers' water accounts.

Council endorsed a report "*Compatibility of Water Registers*" as a guide to best practice in compatible water register systems and as a basis for further work on better and more compatible registry arrangements. Council noted revisions to some timelines under the NRM Ministerial Council NWI work plan, and noted the formation under a single joint Committee of the EPHC and NRMMC to better coordinate urban water reform matters.

Council requested that Standing Committee work with the National Water Commission to arrange a meeting of Ministers responsible for water to discuss progress on water reforms.

Climate Change in Agriculture and NRM- National Priorities

Council discussed the importance of acting now to reduce the impact of climate change on Australia's natural resources. It noted the Strategic national initiatives on climate change set out by COAG and the specific request for Council to report on the potential for development of emissions intensity benchmarks in agriculture and associated environmental management systems.

Council agreed to a number of climate changes priorities and draft initial actions for 2006-08. Council asked for a report at its next meeting in November on critical and achievable actions in these priority areas, along with cost implications. Council endorsed the National Agriculture and Climate Change Action Plan and agreed to its public release. Council supported the continued implementation of the National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. These national plans for biodiversity and agriculture provide a basis for addressing climate change impacts for agriculture, biodiversity and natural resource management.

National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity

Council agreed to review the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity* (National Biodiversity Strategy) and the *National Objectives and Targets for Biodiversity Conservation 2001-2005* (National Objectives). /

The National Biodiversity Strategy covers all of Australia's biological diversity, including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic biological systems. The review process will be fully collaborative, have extensive consultation with key stakeholders and will aim to build upon, and complement wherever possible, existing and proposed State and Territory biodiversity strategies.

Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

Council endorsed a new framework for the 2006 Annual Report of the Working Group for Advancing Reconciliation, due in November 2006. Council noted the practical actions being undertaken by each jurisdiction to advance reconciliation under the nine agreed "themes". An interim report has shown a collective emphasis on creating and sustaining employment in Indigenous communities by providing skills and management training and assistance with the development of small business enterprises.

Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC)

Council noted a progress report on the development of the Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC). Council agreed that pre-agreed, and capped, national cost sharing arrangements are fundamental to timely and effective responses to biosecurity events. Council noted that effective national biosecurity arrangements are in place for the primary production sector, but few arrangements exist for managing invasive species with environmental impacts.

Council endorsed progress in developing national arrangements for managing a biosecurity event, such as a new incursion, where there are predominantly environmental impacts. Council endorsed in-principle a preferred national cost-sharing option for the public good component of a biosecurity event, noting that New South Wales and the ACT reserved their position on whether State and Territory shares should be population based where a risk-based approach is not possible.

Council requested that the joint PISC/NRMSC Steering Group report in November 2006 on progress in the development of AusBIOSEC, and agreed to consider the content of a possible Intergovernmental Agreement for implementation of AusBIOSEC.

Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

Council noted the satisfactory progress of the eradication program and the view of the National Consultative Committee that eradication remains possible.

Council also noted that a small post-eradication program will be required after 2006/07 and planning for this will be presented to the next Council meeting.

Subject to member's budgetary processes, Council agreed to funding of \$10.3 million in 2006/07 for the Program.

Contingency Planning for Eucalyptus Rust

Council received a presentation on Eucalyptus Rust and its potential impact in Australia. Council noted that the establishment of eucalyptus rust in Hawaii significantly increased the threat of the pathogen reaching Australia and endorsed the preparation of the eucalyptus rust prevention and contingency strategies.

National Marine Bioregionalisation

Council endorsed a new Integrated Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia, known as IMCRA version 4.0. The new version, IMCRA v4.0 includes provincial-scale bioregions for the continental slope and abyssal plains, a national analysis of geomorphic units and finer-scale resolution of oceanographic features off the continental shelf. It covers all of Australia's waters with the exception of Antarctica and Heard and Macdonald Islands and it will become the new framework for the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas.

National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions

Council endorsed as key elements of the National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions. The best practice guidelines for fishing vessels, domestic recreational vessels and small international and apprehended vessels. The Communications Strategy and the Research and Development Strategy were also endorsed.

Governments will now be working with the fishing industry as well as domestic and international recreational vessel owners to effectively implement these guidelines. Detailed implementation arrangements for the remaining elements of the National System will be considered by Council in November 2006.

Marine Biodiversity Assessments

Council considered the options and costs for conducting a marine biodiversity assessment similar to the Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment produced in 2003. Council recognised that the Australian Government's regional marine planning processes will compile significant data on biodiversity and agreed that the completion and presentation of a formal marine biodiversity assessment be delayed until the completion of the rollout of the regional marine planning process. Council noted arrangements for upcoming work to extend the scope of the National Approach to Addressing Biodiversity Decline to include marine biodiversity decline.

Mapping Acid Sulphate Soils

Council noted the findings of new research into the extent of naturally occurring acid sulfate soils in Australia. Council received a presentation showing that Australia has double the previous estimate of naturally occurring acid sulfate soils and that failure to manage development on coastal acid sulfate soils would lead to significant environmental harm and substantial economic losses. Council agreed that Planning and Local Government Ministers Council should also be offered briefing on this issue.