

APPENDIX 6

Ecologically Sustainable Development and Environmental Performance Reporting

Our commitment

The department is committed to pursuing ecologically sound practices by implementing measures to ensure the prevention of pollution and to minimise environmental impact generally. It is striving to achieve environmental best practice in office management and general operations. It is also committed to compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Actions and administration of legislation

Section 516A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* requires the department to report on the following issues:

- ▶ how the actions and administration of legislation accorded with the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- ▶ how the outcomes specified for the department in an Appropriations Act for 2002–03 contribute to ecologically sustainable development;
- ▶ the effect of the department's activities on the environment;
- ▶ measures, if any, taken to minimise this impact; and
- ▶ mechanisms, if any, in place for reviewing and increasing the effectiveness of those measures.

The department has undertaken a number of initiatives to minimise the effect on the environment of the department's everyday activity.

Departmental initiatives

The department is committed to pursuing ecologically sound practices through continual improvement of our environmental performance in relation to our national and state office buildings and everyday activity. It does this through the implementation of measures within its offices to ensure the prevention of pollution and minimising of environmental impact generally.

The department is in the initial stages of establishing an Environmental Management System (EMS) that meets the requirements of the international standard for such systems. The EMS will act as the driver for continual improvement in the department's environmental performance. It will require the department to regularly monitor and report on environmental performance, and review environmental management programs at least annually to assess whether the objectives and targets are being met and whether the desired outcomes are being achieved.

As part of the EMS, the department belongs to a consortium of Commonwealth agencies in the Australian Capital Territory purchasing bulk electricity from ActewAGL, which includes 10 per cent green energy.

The EMS is being trialled initially across the department's National Office buildings,

with the aim of being implemented progressively throughout the department.

Other departmental initiatives undertaken during 2002–03 include:

- ▶ The department's standard Request for Tender and Request for Quote documents require staff to consider the application to the proposed tender or quote of the principles of ecological sustainability set out in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Staff are directed to the Environment Australia website for further information about the Act. If the Act applies to the project, additional clauses will be inserted into the request for tender or contract.
- ▶ Donation by the department of approximately 4500 computer items to the *Computer Technologies for Schools Project*, a department initiative funded through MCEETYA. These are serviceable items that were surplus to departmental requirements as a consequence of a major upgrade in our desktop infrastructure. Since establishment in 1997, the project has received approximately 30 000 items of equipment donated by many agencies for distribution to government and non-government schools.

Programme initiatives

Ecologically sustainable development is one of our national research priorities, and also one of the *National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*. Through its research, science and education programmes, the department makes a significant funding contribution to a range of initiatives.

National research priorities

In late 2002, the Prime Minister announced Australia's national research priorities. This initiative will encourage additional research effort in areas of economic, social or environmental benefit. Work towards achieving the priority goal of an environmentally sustainable Australia includes research on:

- ▶ efficient and sustainable water use;
- ▶ enhanced cleanliness and efficiency of energy production;
- ▶ overcoming soil loss and salinity; and
- ▶ sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity.

Commonwealth research and research funding bodies have a particular responsibility for implementing the national research priorities.

Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC)

In December 2002, a working group of PMSEIC considered opportunities in emission-reduction technologies. The working group also identified strategies and research activities to assist Australian industries and communities in identifying and adapting to the expected impacts of climate change.

Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) programme

This programme provided funding in 2002–03 to 62 CRCs. Of these, 24 centres were related to ecologically sustainable development outcomes. Programme funding for these centres amounts to some 36 per cent of total programme funds in 2002–03.

CRC research programmes are directed towards a wide range of environmental or biodiversity outcomes which include:

- ▶ catchment hydrology;
- ▶ biological control of pest animals; and
- ▶ coastal zone, estuary and waterway management.

Major National Research Facilities (MNRF) programme

The MNRF programme provides funding for 15 facilities around Australia over a five-year period. Of these the Arafura–Timor Research Facility's activities focus on ecologically sustainable development outcomes.

Benefits arising from research at several other facilities will also contribute indirectly to ecologically sustainable development or biodiversity. These include the Australian Genome Research Facility, Provisor Pty Ltd (formerly known as the National Wine Industry Research Cluster) and the Australian Phenomics Facility.

National repository for the disposal of Australian low-level radioactive waste

In order to protect both people and the environment, the Australian Government has established a national repository for the disposal of Australian low-level radioactive waste.

A draft environmental impact statement on the national repository proposal, released for public comment in July 2002, described the proposal, the likely environmental, social and economic impacts, and measures to mitigate any adverse impacts. Comments received during the public submission phase were addressed in a supplement to the draft statement, published in January 2003.

In November 2002, the draft statement was submitted to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage for assessment and approval. The Minister granted conditional approval to establish the national repository at two sites near Woomera, South Australia, subject to satisfactory completion of further environmental studies and an Environmental Management and Monitoring Plan. The Minister for Science announced in May 2003 that the national repository would be established at Site 40a, located in the Stony Desert 20 km east of Woomera.


An Environmental Management and Monitoring Plan must be completed for the national repository. The plan requires audits to be undertaken every five years to demonstrate compliance with the conditions of the environmental approval.

Graduate diploma in environment and planning

As part of the *Building a Stronger Tasmania* election commitment, the Commonwealth has provided \$300 000 for a three-year period from 2003 to 2005 to the University of Tasmania to establish a new Graduate Diploma in Environment and Planning. Six scholarships are also to be provided at an additional cost of \$60 000. The initiative will assist in meeting the growing demand for professionals versed in the complexities of integrated social, economic and environmental planning that advances ecological sustainability.

Environmental education in schools

Under the *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* all education authorities are required, as a condition of funding from 2001, to make a commitment to the *National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*. One of these goals is:



“When students leave school they should have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development.”

This goal is being progressed under the Australian Government’s National Action Plan for Environmental Education, which is managed by Environment Australia, and the National Environmental Education Network. The network aims to help governments coordinate the delivery of environmental education, promoting a more efficient use of scarce resources and achieving better outcomes. The network is made up of representatives from the Commonwealth and state and territory environment and education agencies.

An example of a National Environmental Education Network project is the Sustainable Schools pilot programme, involving schools in Victoria and New South Wales. Students are actively involved in making their schools more sustainable.

In 2003 a National Environmental Education Curriculum and Resources Review was completed by the Curriculum Corporation, in consultation with the Commonwealth. The review identified environmental concepts and activities in all state and territory curriculum documents, and opportunities for the introduction of the study of environmental issues or environmentally sustainable practices to school programmes.