



## 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 and strives 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 the *Appropriations Act for 2004-05* contribute to ecologically sustainable development
- the effect of the department's activities on the environment
- measures, if any, taken to minimise this impact
- mechanisms, if any, in place for reviewing and increasing the effectiveness of those measures.

## DEPARTMENTAL INITIATIVES

The department continues to implement initiatives to reduce the impact of our operations on the environment. The department's Environmental Management System (EMS) provides the framework for continual improvement in this regard.

During 2004-05, the department has continued to implement:

- waste management measures, including baling and collection of cardboard for recycling, and improved waste collection arrangements in new sites at 240 City Walk and the Benjamin Offices
- use of multifunctional office machines which offer efficient energy use, low emissions and an environmentally friendly disposal system for used toner cartridges
- use of recycled materials in planned office refits, including furnishings which are made from recycled or recyclable materials, installation of kitchen waste and recycling centres in kitchen refurbishments, and through the purchase of office equipment
- purchase of bulk electricity in the ACT, which includes 10 per cent Greenpower, as part of a consortium of Government agencies
- whole-of-life considered purchasing, including disposal of information technology equipment through donation to schools as part of the *Computer Technologies for Schools Project* (see below)

- a continued effort to engage staff in the implementation of the department's electronic records management system, DiREct, which reduces the need for paper files. A dedicated DiREct work team has worked to engage and assist staff through the change with concerted training, awareness raising activities, presentations and one-on-one assistance. DiREct allows both documents and emails to be stored in electronic files.

To meet the Australian Government's environmental management targets in government operations, the department is developing a targeted plan of activities and initiatives to undertake during the next two years.

The department acknowledges that although we were not placed to seek ISO 14001 certification during 2004-05, we are continuing our planning and Environmental Management System development activities to achieve certification over 2005-06.

Other departmental activities undertaken during 2004-05 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
- approximately 76 pieces of computer equipment have been donated by the department to the *Computer Technologies for Schools Project*, an Australian Government funded initiative that provides surplus computer equipment to Australian schools in greatest need. These are serviceable items that were surplus to departmental requirements as a consequence of major upgrades in desktop infrastructure. Since its establishment in 1997, the project has received about 136 200 items of equipment donated by various Australian Government, state/territory/local governments and private companies for distribution to state and non-government schools across Australia.

## QUESTACON

Questacon has begun to implement its Environmental Management System (EMS) in general operations throughout the centre. The system was certified under ISO 14001 in August 2005. The Questacon EMS committee has been formed from staff members throughout the Centre and the committee has completed management and staff awareness training on the system's operation and implementation. Questacon has continued proactive energy reduction throughout the Centre with reductions in general energy usage and moves to increase the green energy component from 15 per cent to 20 per cent in 2005.

# PROGRAMME INITIATIVES

## National Research Priorities

In late 2002, the Prime Minister announced Australia's national research priorities. This initiative encourages additional research effort in areas of economic, social or environmental benefit. These are areas in which a whole of government focus has the potential to improve research and broader policy outcomes. The four national research priorities are:

- an environmentally sustainable Australia
- promoting and maintaining good health
- frontier technologies for building and transforming Australian industries
- safeguarding Australia.

Australian Government bodies that perform or fund research have a particular responsibility for implementing the National Research Priorities in 2004. All agencies reported in 2004 on their performance in implementing the priorities<sup>33</sup> and will report on their 2004-05 implementation progress in October 2005.

## The Chief Scientist

In 2004-05, the Chief Scientist gave a number of presentations on sustainable development to a variety of audiences. These included:

- International Conference on Sustainability Engineering and Science – New Zealand (7 July 2004)
- Fifth National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development – Melbourne (3 September 2004)
- CSIRO Food Futures Flagship Workshop – Canberra (7 September 2004)
- Land and Water Australia Showcase – Canberra (8 September 2004)
- Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum – Melbourne (13 September 2004)
- Engineers Australia/Engineering Leadership 2004 – Sydney (24 September 2004)
- Chemeca 2004 – Sustainable processes and the chemical engineer's contributions to the triple bottom line – Sydney (27 September 2004)
- Institution of Electrical Engineers South Australia – Adelaide (12 November 2004)
- Joint Industry Forum: Technical Textiles and Non-woven Association and Plastics and Chemical Industry Association (16 March 2005)
- Committee for Economic Development of Australia – Melbourne (18 April 2005).

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<sup>33</sup> see <http://www.dest.gov.au/priorities>

## Cooperative Research Centres Programme

As at 30 June 2005, Australia had 69 *Cooperative Research Centres*, of which 25 were related to ecologically sustainable development. *Cooperative Research Centre* activities are directed towards a wide range of environmental or biodiversity outcomes including:

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

## Major National Research Facilities (MNRF) programme

The *Major National Research Facilities* 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. 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.

## Management of Australian radioactive waste

On 14 July 2004, the Prime Minister announced that the Australian Government had decided to abandon the project to establish a national radioactive waste repository at Site 40a near Woomera in South Australia. He indicated that this decision had been taken in light of the Federal Court decision that determined the Commonwealth’s acquisition of the national repository site to be invalid and the effective failure of the states and territories to cooperate with the Australian Government in finding a national solution for the safe and secure disposal of low level radioactive waste.

The Prime Minister said that the Australian Government would examine sites on Commonwealth land, both onshore and offshore, for establishment of a facility for management of low and intermediate level radioactive waste produced by Australian Government agencies.

On 15 July 2005, Dr Nelson announced that the Australian Government would be conducting field studies at Defence Department properties at Mount Everard, Harts Range and Fishers Ridge in the Northern Territory to determine the most suitable site for the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility. Establishment of the facility will demonstrate the Commonwealth’s responsible attitude towards management of its radioactive waste.

## International Centre of Excellence in Water Resources Management

Seed funding of \$6.72 million over four years was awarded in 2004, under the *International Centres of Excellence* initiative to a consortium of universities and industry representatives led by the University of Adelaide, to establish the International Centre of Excellence in Water Resources Management.

The Centre's mission is to raise Australia's international profile as the leading expert in water resources management through a range of activities such as international exchanges across the education, industry and research sectors; international conferences and workshops; enhancing and extending Australia's suite of education programmes in water resource management; engaging Australia's technical and educational expertise in consulting services; and developing business networks and collaboration with industry governments and relevant organisations in Australia and internationally.

The consortium has now formed a company, WaterEd Australia Pty Ltd, with seven university and industry shareholders and with additional support from five state government agencies and organisations. It is now fully operational and is currently involved in mapping the current course offerings and professional expertise in water resource management at Australian institutions, establishing an international collaborative network, including with Ho Hai University (China) and the Chinese Academy of Science and developing a coursework Masters degree and professional doctorate programmes as well as a suite of short specialised courses.

### **National Environmental Education Council**

The department participates in the National Environmental Education Council. This is a non-statutory body providing expert advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage on the effectiveness and profile of the Australian Government's environmental education activities and environmental education issues generally. The department has a representative on the council and also on its school education and further and higher education working groups. The working groups advise the council on priority needs in the formal education and tertiary sector, including recommending actions to be taken to address needs in areas such as integration of education for sustainability into core curricula, and management of facilities.

### **Graduate diploma in environment and planning**

The Australian Government provided \$300 000 to the University of Tasmania to establish a new Graduate Diploma in Environment and Planning. Six scholarships were also provided for an additional \$60 000. The initiative is now helping to meet the growing demand for professionals versed in the complexities of integrated social, economic and environmental planning that advances ecological sustainability.

### **Capital Development Pool**

The Australian Government is providing \$2 million between 2004 and 2005 to the Flinders University of South Australia for a new teaching wing and associated infrastructure for its Lincoln Marine Science Centre. The facility will help the university meet increased student demand for programmes in marine science and will allow greater articulation and collaboration with the Spencer Institute of TAFE. The initiative has the support of several groups, such as the City of Port Lincoln and the Department of Primary Industry.

## Environmental education in schools

Under the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together - Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004*, all education authorities are required, as a condition of funding for 2005-2008, 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 the Department of the Environment and Heritage and the National Environmental Education Council, through the National Environmental Education Network. The network aims to help governments coordinate delivery of environmental education, promote a more efficient use of scarce resources, and achieve better outcomes. The network is made up of representatives from the Australian Government and state and territory environment and education agencies.

In 2004 the Student Learning Support Services Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed the development of a National Environment Education Statement for Australian schools.

The statement forms the reference point for all:

- reviews of curriculum development that contain references or potential references to the environment in relevant learning areas and subjects in all the states and territories of Australia
- schools as they decide on their environment education programmes from kindergarten to Year 12
- stakeholders who want to promote the development of knowledge, skills, concepts, values and action programmes in schools
- developers of environmental education materials for schools.

MCEETYA endorsed the National Environment Education Statement in May 2005. The statement will be distributed to all Australian schools in August 2005. Release of the statement this year will be an important achievement for the start of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

The successful *Sustainable Schools Initiative*, supported by the Australian Government through the Department of the Environment and Heritage and piloted in Victoria and New South Wales, provides a nationally applicable model for the trialling of sustainable approaches to environmental education. Funding under the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme* will be available for use by states and territories to provide professional learning for schools and teachers running programmes in environmental education and education for sustainable futures.

