

COMMUNIQUÉ

24 August 2012

PACKAGING ON MINISTERS' AGENDA

Packaging was a priority for environment ministers in Canberra today, at the third meeting of the Standing Council on Environment and Water.

Ministers agreed to push ahead with work to find better ways to manage Australia's packaging waste, noting the strong response to the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) released last December.

The hundreds of submissions from industry, environment groups, the community and local governments on the Consultation RIS showed strong support for further action to address the environmental impacts of packaging waste and litter.

Ministers agreed to develop a Decision RIS to undertake a more detailed analysis, including regional and other distributional impacts.

In response to consultation feedback, ministers agreed that in addition to the options considered in the Consultation RIS, including the options put forward by Boomerang Alliance and industry, three further options be included in the Decision RIS:

- an industry co-regulatory stewardship scheme focussing on beverage containers only;
- an approach similar to the Australian Packaging Covenant, with a substantial increase in industry funding for initiatives, and
- a container deposit model based on the South Australian system.

Ministers asked senior officials to consult with key stakeholders on the design elements of the additional options before they are modelled in the Decision RIS. The South Australian Minister acknowledged the importance of recognising other social and environmental factors that are more difficult to assess in economic terms.

Queensland noted that it does not oppose the progression of further national work or the development of a Decision RIS but will not be participating in or funding further work in this area as it has elected to work directly with the packaging industry.

Ministers thanked contributing stakeholders and assured them that the process would continue to be transparent and consultative.

Air Quality

Ministers agreed to the release of a study of Australian Child Health and Air Pollution next month after consultation with participating schools. The study by researchers from University of Queensland and Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and funded by the Australian Research Council and the Standing Council on Environment and Water will inform revision of the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure, and the development of a National Plan for Clean Air.

Environmental Regulation Reform

The Council noted significant progress in implementing COAG's decision of 13 April 2012 to fast-track bilateral agreements to accredit States and Territories to undertake environmental impact assessment approvals currently undertaken by the Commonwealth under national environment law. It remains on track to meet COAG deadlines for the reform.

The Council noted consultation on the proposed new matter of national environmental significance – ecosystems of national significance. However, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland expressed their opposition to the addition of ecosystems of national significance as a new matter of national environmental significance given the potential breadth of such a trigger.

Water

Ministers discussed the appropriateness of a mandatory trust account requirement for water market intermediaries and agreed to look at this option further in the Regulation Impact Statement. Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania do not support a mandatory approach. Ministers agreed to release a toolkit for identifying high ecological value aquatic ecosystems, and the Australian Ramsar Site Nomination Guidelines.

Other matters

Ministers approved a Minor Variation to the Movement of Controlled Waste National Environment Protection Measure. Ministers also agreed that the *Best Practice Guidelines for Eco-opportunities in Protected and Natural Areas* are a useful reference and supported their use where not inconsistent with jurisdictional approaches.

Council also discussed a range of potential areas for future cooperation, including looking at establishing best practices for encouraging greater levels of corporate investment to supplement the public sector environmental budget. These will be further explored for Council's next meeting.

About the Council

The Standing Council on Environment and Water comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory and New Zealand environment and water ministers, and a representative of the Australian Local Government Association. It was established as part of the COAG reforms to Ministerial Councils.

The Council incorporates the National Environment Protection Council.

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