

ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING

9 June 2023

Agreed Communiqué

Australia's environment ministers met today in Sydney with a renewed purpose to work together to achieve a Nature Positive Australia to leave our environment better off for our kids and grandkids.

Ministers agreed the need to take action now, and for future generations, to:

- Build a **nature positive** Australia where we **protect** more of what's precious, **manage** nature better for the future and **repair** more of what's damaged.
- Work together in pilot regions to support proponents for renewable energy, critical minerals and other projects to bring forward **better informed** proposals that avoid impacts on our unique nature and precious heritage and support **stronger clearer protections and faster, better decisions** under environment and heritage legislation. This will include providing joined-up support, data and information.
- Shift Australia toward a **safer, circular economy** by putting in place a new packaging regulatory scheme that will for the first time, develop mandatory packaging design obligations, so packaging is designed to minimise waste and be recovered, reused, recycled and reprocessed.

Ministers agreed to approach these reforms with a commitment to early, meaningful partnership with First Nations peoples as stewards of land and sea country and Australia's unique cultural heritage.

Protecting more of what's precious

Implementing our Nature Positive Plan

Ministers acknowledged the significant progress in reforming national environmental laws, including the release of the Australian Government's *Nature Positive Plan: better for the environment, better for business* in December 2022. The top priority for 2023 is to consult on the new nature positive laws and national environmental standards with details of the legislation to be released for broad consultation in the second half of 2023.

Improving national environmental data and our ability to share that data with the public will ensure decisions are transparent. Ministers noted the establishment of Environment Information Australia – as our national environmental data office – and agreed to work together to identify and remove barriers to enable sharing of information between jurisdictions.

Ministers acknowledged the importance of supporting a transition to a net zero economy. As a result, Ministers agreed to identify priority renewable energy and critical minerals projects by September 2023, and to support these projects to put forward better applications based on strong protection and best practice to avoid environmental impacts and achieve faster decisions with clear and coordinated regulatory timeframes and robust First Nations engagement.

Ministers also agreed to identify where, with better harmonisation of environmental assessments, there is opportunity for reduced timeframes, stronger protections and to make better and faster decisions.

Responding to the new, ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework

Ministers acknowledged the significant outcome in the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in December 2022, which includes the flagship '30 by 30' target. Australia must now chart a course to a nature positive future aligned with the ambition in the Framework.

Ministers agreed to:

- Take shared action to address the biodiversity crisis by setting ambitious national targets, in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework, by mid 2024
- By 2024 develop a roadmap to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's land
- Strengthen Australia's marine protection, and identify shared marine and coastal protection, pollution abatement and restoration actions to include in a national Sustainable Ocean Plan.

Repairing more of what's damaged - enhancing threatened species recovery

Threats to our imperilled plants and animals do not stop at the borders and the recovery of these species can most effectively be tackled where all levels of government join forces. This means aligning approaches to conservation planning and protection and undertaking coordinated on-ground action.

Ministers agreed to increased ambition to recover threatened plants and animals by tackling key invasive species, including a gap analysis for feral cat control and to make legislative reforms providing greater certainty and consistency in national protection for threatened species and ecological communities.

Managing nature better for the future – transitioning to a circular economy

Ministers reiterated their commitment to transition Australia from a "take, make, waste" economy toward a more resilient and regenerative circular economy that maximises the value of materials and minimises waste and pollution. This is a big challenge as only 12 per cent of plastics were recycled in Australia in 2020-21.

Ministers noted the role and focus areas of the Commonwealth's Circular Economy Advisory Group and invited the group to provide advice on priorities for cross-jurisdictional collaboration to accelerate Australia's transition to a circular economy in early 2024.

Ministers also agreed the importance of the Australian fashion industry implementing a well supported product stewardship scheme by 30 June 2024. They agreed to closely monitor industry participation in this and other schemes and will take steps to regulate product stewardship outcomes if required.

Ministers agreed that:

- the Australian Government will lead development of a national framework to direct Australia's transition to a circular economy, informed by the work of the Circular Economy Advisory Group.
- for the first time, Australia will mandate obligations for packaging design as part of a new packaging regulatory scheme based on international best practice and make industry

responsible for the packaging they place on the market. This scheme will also regulate out harmful chemicals and other contaminants in packaging. To support food waste recycling Ministers agreed that a timeline will be set to remove contaminants from compostable food packaging.

- a national roadmap will be developed for staged improvements to the harmonisation of kerbside collections, taking into account circumstances of metropolitan, regional and remote communities for Ministers to consider in 2024.

Ministers agreed to progress several approaches for consideration at the next meeting to further progress waste and recycling reforms, including:

- a national framework for recycled content traceability that will provide manufacturers and other users the confidence they need to use quality recycled materials, thereby supporting the transition to a circular economy.
- accelerating product stewardship efforts including by developing a framework to guide interjurisdictional efforts and drive action on problematic products. This framework will support national efforts to regulate packaging, solar panels and electrical equipment and support jurisdictions to progress reform in relation to particular products. In the first instance, Ministers agreed that Western Australia will lead on the development of national principles for product stewardship for tyres, and that NSW will lead on a product stewardship approach for solvents.