

ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING

10 November 2023
Agreed Communiqué

Australia's environment ministers met today in Adelaide, agreeing to develop ambitious national targets to protect nature, critical next steps to transition Australia to a circular economy, and practical on-ground actions to boost conservation and leave nature better off for our kids and grandkids.

TRANSITIONING TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

National Packaging Laws

At their last meeting, Ministers agreed that government would regulate how packaging is designed.

At this meeting **Ministers agreed** that the Federal government will step up as the new regulator of packaging standards. The Federal government will mandate how packaging is designed, will set minimum recycled content requirements, and prohibit harmful chemicals being used. This will make decisions at the checkout much easier for shoppers, who won't have to spend precious time comparing the environmental credentials of different products.

Australia's new Federal national packaging laws will provide regulatory certainty and consistency, and make businesses take responsibility for the 6.7 million tonnes of packaging they place on the Australian market. Strengthened regulation will drive investment, minimise waste and support circular economy outcomes, industries and jobs. Better packaging design makes it easier to reduce waste, and to reuse, recycle or compost packaging waste. Creating demand for recycled content will also increase recycling rates.

Recycling Traceability

Ministers endorsed a national traceability framework – so that when Australian businesses want to use recycled materials or buy products made from recycled materials, they can have confidence about what they are buying. This is a world-leading initiative and other countries are looking to Australia to show how this can be done. A traceability framework is key to driving the reuse of recovered plastics, glass and other materials, into new products – and to our transition to a circular economy. Users of recycled content will be confident that material they are using is free of hidden harmful chemicals or other contaminants, as well as where that material has been sourced from – whether Australia or overseas.

Product Stewardship

Ministers agreed a framework that will accelerate product stewardship by better coordinating work across governments, including WA leading on tyres and NSW leading on solvents. Environment ministers agreed product stewardship schemes play a key role in holding producers accountable for managing their waste and driving circularity. However, these schemes are not open-ended, and where industry does not respond sufficiently government will regulate – as is happening with photovoltaic systems, electrical and electronic equipment, problematic single use plastics and packaging – including oil containers. Others, such as the clothing textiles industry, are on notice for the need for action: if voluntary product stewardship doesn't work, government will regulate.

Environment ministers also noted common concerns around batteries across jurisdictions, particularly around lithium batteries and safety risk, and noted that the Queensland government will lead work across jurisdictions that might inform future regulatory actions.

NATURE POSITIVE REFORMS

Global Biodiversity Framework

Ministers agreed to develop ambitious national targets, in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework, to better protect nature and boost Australia's contribution to global efforts to protect nature. The targets will prioritise national action around:

- Effective restoration of degraded terrestrial, inland water, marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Tackling the impact of invasive feral species.
- Building a circular economy and reducing the impact of plastics on nature.
- Minimising the impact of climate change on nature.

Action to achieve these targets will complement existing targets to:

- Protect and conserve 30% of Australia's land and 30% of Australia's oceans by 2030.
- Work towards zero new extinctions.

Additionally, **Ministers agreed** three elements are essential in achieving the national targets:

- Ensuring environmental data and information is widely accessible and supports planning.
- Incorporating nature into government and business decision-making, including financing, reform of policies, regulations and planning processes.
- Ensuring equitable representation and participation in decisions relating to nature, particularly for First Nations people.

Ministers agreed the Commonwealth will lead national consultation on updating Australia's Strategy for Nature which will be finalised by mid-2024 in time for the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Ministers noted progress on the national framework for terrestrial other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) and the national 30 by 30 roadmap.

The Commonwealth continues to work with jurisdictions on agreed products to support achievement of the 30 by 30 target. Since ministers met in June 2023, principles to guide the recognition of OECMs in Australia have been revised in response to public feedback, a site assessment tool has been developed, and implementation options for the national OECM framework have been identified. The 30 by 30 and OECM frameworks are under development and on track to be considered by ministers in 2024.

Environmental regional planning

Ministers discussed a framework for environmental regional planning – to show how regional plans will make a practical difference, including how we will better protect, restore, and manage nature while de-risking projects for business.

Since the last meeting of Environment ministers in June, South Australia has joined Queensland in committing to develop regional plans focused on renewable energy. The Commonwealth is also collaborating with NSW and Victoria on planning initiative.

Renewable energy, transmission, critical minerals and housing are vital infrastructure priorities for Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments with urgent action required to ensure ongoing power supply, harness emerging opportunities and address housing pressures for Australians.

Regional plans used in the context of achieving the best outcomes for biodiversity and ecosystem services provide an opportunity to better protect, restore and manage nature at a landscape and/or seascape scale at the Commonwealth, State, Territory and local levels. They have been designed as a tool for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to work together to de-risk projects for business, address cumulative impacts and deliver nature positive environmental outcomes in regions with priority development.

Feral cat threat abatement plan and feral horses in the Australian Alps

Ministers agreed to collaborate to protect threatened species from feral cats. Each state and territory has in principle committed to sign up to the Federal Government's feral cat threat abatement plan (TAP), when it is finalised in 2024.

This will be an Australian first – a jointly agreed TAP by all jurisdictions to coordinate action across the country to address a key threat to our biodiversity. This represents a model approach for collaboration on other TAPs going forward. All Australian governments are united in their commitment to addressing the impacts of feral cats on the natural environment recognising different state, territory and local arrangements.

Ministers agreed to support actions taken by the NSW government to reduce the impact of feral horses on Kosciuszko National Park.

National Emergency Preparedness

Ministers agreed to work together to better protect critical areas of the environment prior to and during natural disasters. Ministers will share progress made to incorporate environment in their respective emergency response management and planning systems by November 2023.

Natural disasters wreak havoc on the environment and leave a devastating impact on threatened species and landscapes.