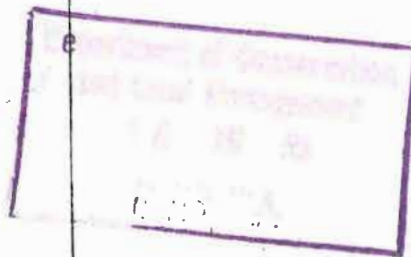


OUR COUNTRY OUR FUTURE

Statement on the Environment
The Hon. R. J. L. Hawke, A.C.
Prime Minister of Australia
July 1989

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

Preservation of the environment should be underpinned by more than just human-centred survival or economic or aesthetic considerations. While plants and animals are useful to us, as their custodians, we have a responsibility towards their preservation. Plants and animals have intrinsic value in and of themselves and many people believe that, as such, they have a right to survive.

Australians have a responsibility to preserve the unique ecosystems of this continent and to play our part in maintaining the Earth's biological diversity. The community also puts a high value on economic development and growth so that everyone can enjoy a better standard of living. The task is to ensure that we meet the needs of the present without destroying the natural heritage of future generations or compromising their ability to meet their needs.

While acknowledging that people will continue to seek improvements in their material wellbeing, the Government is committed to meeting these aspirations through ecologically sustainable development.

The co-operation of governments at local, state, national and international levels, and the support of the community is essential to the resolution of most of our environmental problems.

Following extensive consultations, the National Conservation Strategy for Australia was developed in 1984. In 1988, when announcing the establishment of the Resource Assessment Commission, three principles to underlie the Government's decisions on resource use issues were also announced. These principles drew on the National Conservation Strategy, and provide the basis for this Government's actions on the environment.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE

The Role of the Commonwealth

Under the Australian Constitution, the States and Territories have primary responsibility for protecting and regulating the environment. But because of its constitutional powers relating to such matters as foreign affairs, trade and commerce and foreign investment, the Commonwealth also has a role in relation to the use of resources. The Government has used these powers to protect the environment and to set conditions controlling resource use.

Many of the environmental problems we face today do not respect State and Territory boundaries, and cannot be resolved piecemeal. Increasingly the Australian community and investors are demanding national approaches to major environmental issues. They need to be certain that the Commonwealth can respond quickly to national or global environment problems. They do not want as many systems for dealing with these problems as there are States and Territories.

Given the record of constitutional reform in this country, the Government believes that there should be wide-ranging community debate to increase awareness of national environmental issues. If and when that awareness has reached a sufficiently high level, the Government would consider proceeding with a referendum addressing the constitutional powers of the Commonwealth over the environment. The Government naturally would prefer to go to the people with bipartisan support.

The Government has already proposed to the States and the Northern Territory the establishment of a consultative group that would consider environment and development issues in a broader and more integrated way. Such consultations would facilitate joint studies and the development of a national approach to managing our environment. The Government proposes to invite State and Territory governments to an initial meeting later this year.

The Government has also written to industry, union and conservation representatives proposing the establishment of a forum that will enable discussion of their concerns.

The Government will develop, with the States, agreed national minimum environmental standards. These standards would address matters affecting air, water and noise quality. The Commonwealth will be discussing with the States ways in which these standards can be achieved.

The Government also believes that there is a need for a better understanding in the business community - both in Australia and overseas - about the Commonwealth and State processes for obtaining approvals for projects that may have a significant impact on the environment. We will be examining the approvals process for major development projects with a view to improving both its definition and its timeliness.

In its own deliberations, the Government is ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated into its economic decisions. Cabinet submissions on matters that have significant environmental implications will be required to explain the environmental issues.

In recognition of the importance of environmental considerations to the structural adjustment of the Australian economy, the work program of the Structural Adjustment Committee of Cabinet will pay particular attention to developing an integration of environmental and economic objectives. The Minister responsible for the environment will be a member of the Structural Adjustment Committee.

Information, Research and Analysis

The Government in 1988 established the National Resource Information Centre (NRIC) and provided funding to develop a Forests Inventory. The Government has now decided to fund an Environmental Resources Information Network to draw together, upgrade and supplement information on the distribution of endangered species, vegetation types and heritage sites. The project will receive \$1.8 million this year and \$2.1 million next year.

The Environmental Resources Information Network will be closely linked to and involve the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS), with a component of project funds being provided as grants through the ABRS.

The Government has commissioned the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) to undertake a comprehensive review of environmental research in Australia and to recommend strategies to address deficiencies in research effort. ASTEC will be working closely with all those agencies involved in environmental research and will report back to the Government by June 1990.

The Government has already announced that it will refer Australia's forests and timber resources to the RAC as its first inquiry. The Government has now decided that, in view of the environmental and economic importance of Australia's coastal zone, and its often haphazard development, the Resource Assessment Commission will be asked to inquire into the use of coastal zone resources.

International Action

The Government is committed to strengthening Australia's participation in international efforts to tackle environmental problems. This commitment has already resulted in Australia becoming a signatory to the Declaration of The Hague on the Protection of the Atmosphere and the Government's decision not to sign the Antarctic Minerals Convention.

To take Australia's international efforts further:

- the Government will be working intensively within the appropriate forums to develop an international framework convention on climate change

- we will be at the forefront of work towards the development and acceptance of an international convention for the protection of biological diversity
- we will be pressing for a global ban on driftnet fishing
- we will be working both within international organisations and at the regional level to promote better forestry management practices.

So that Australia is well placed to pursue these important initiatives in a consistent and effective way, the Government has decided to appoint a special Ambassador for the Environment. This will help give Australia a strong and clear voice in the important international debates and forums dealing with environmental issues.

Many of the most urgent environmental problems are to be found in developing countries. Australia will continue to provide practical assistance to countries to help them sustain their development over the long term. Increased efforts will be made to ensure the environmental soundness and long term viability of activities funded under the aid program, and new guidelines have been established.

As part of its new policy on aid and the environment, the Government has now decided to establish, within the aid program, a four year special Environment Assistance Program worth \$20 million.

TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE

NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS

Biological Diversity

As well as playing a leading role in the development of an international convention for the protection of biological diversity, the Government will prepare a national strategy on biological diversity with a view to developing a biological diversity program. Key elements of the strategy will include the Government's Save the Bush remnant vegetation program, the National Index of Ecosystems currently being developed by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Resources Information Network and the Endangered Species Program.

Endangered Species

The Government has allocated \$2.0 million for each of the first two years of a ten year Endangered Species Program.

Introduced Plants and Animals

Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers will investigate the potential of a new virus to control rabbits. Funding for a five year fox control study will be made a priority research area under the Endangered Species Program.

Recent research, funded by the Commonwealth and States, into the cane toad problem will be evaluated with the aim of developing an intensified control program.

International Co-operation - Agreements

Australia has concluded two bilateral agreements on migratory animals, the Australia-Japan Migratory Birds Agreement and the Australia-China Migratory Birds Agreement. The Government is now considering accession to the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. The Government is also actively working towards the establishment of agreements with the USSR and ASEAN for the protection of migratory birds.

Australia has recently ratified the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region.

In view of concern about the survival of the African elephant, Australia will be actively seeking an international prohibition of trade in ivory, except for antique ivory.

Preservation of Habitat

Through co-operation with the States, the Government will continue to work towards a national strategy to ensure all ecosystems are represented in a reserve network.

The Government has decided to provide an additional \$1.3 million in 1989-90 and \$1.35 million for 1990-91 for the Western Tasmania Wilderness National Parks. These funds will be used to reduce the effects of increasing numbers of visitors to the area by upgrading tracks and constructing new tracks, and to provide visitor facilities and interpretative displays.

Because of the damage to the Great Barrier Reef, the Government has decided to allocate an additional \$750,000 to June 1991 to supplement the existing funding for research into the coral-eating Crown of Thorns Starfish.

Funding for the National Wilderness Inventory will be increased to allow rapid completion for all areas of Australia. The National Wilderness Inventory is a necessary management tool for identifying and predicting the effect development proposals may have on wilderness qualities.

Oceans and Fisheries

The Government will use every opportunity at international forums to pursue effective international measures aimed at the protection of our oceans.

A major policy statement will be released in September which will examine the range of policies which can foster an efficient and dynamic Australian fishing industry operating within the sustainable limits of the resource. It will state the rationale and objectives of management of the Australian Fishing Zone.

Australia will be using every opportunity to convince all nations involved of the grave threat to Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) stocks and will press for a moratorium on the taking of SBT. The Government has decided to allocate an additional \$1.45 million over the next two years to supplement the existing SBT Program.

Australia will press for a global ban on driftnet fishing.

Protection of Antarctica

The Government has decided not to sign the Antarctic Minerals Convention.

Instead, Australia is urging the negotiation of a comprehensive environmental convention for Antarctica. Within that convention, and within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System, Australia is seeking the establishment of an Antarctic Wilderness Reserve. Meanwhile, Australia will be seeking to prolong and strengthen the present moratorium on mining in Antarctica.

Australia's policy interests in Antarctica as agreed by successive governments since the 1960s have included the objective to derive any reasonable economic benefits from the living and non-living resources of the Antarctic. Consistent with its decision not to allow mining in Antarctica, the Government has amended that policy objective to make it clear that it excludes deriving benefits from mining or oil-drilling.

ATMOSPHERE

The Greenhouse Effect

The Government's approach to the greenhouse effect combines international activity; a research program into causes, impacts and limitation and adaptation responses; public education; and a national strategy that will involve government, industry and community groups.

Australia has signed the Declaration of The Hague on Protection of the Atmosphere. The Government will take an active role in developing a new framework convention on climate change. Australia will offer to host a negotiating session.

Australia will continue to give the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change strong support. We believe that ways must be found of drawing more developing countries into the work now being undertaken.

Australia is giving high priority to ensuring that national, southern hemisphere and regional concerns are taken into account internationally.

Under its aid program Australia has undertaken a preliminary study on climate monitoring in the Pacific. Australia will now establish a network of climate monitoring stations through the South Pacific region, at a cost of \$6.25 million.

The Government has provided \$7.8 million for a two-year program of high priority greenhouse initiatives, of which \$5.54 million is for research.

The Government has appointed a National Greenhouse Advisory Committee of eminent scientists to advise on priority areas of research and set objectives for a dedicated research grants scheme to commence in 1990-91.

The Government will undertake a detailed evaluation of the options for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from activities within Australia.

Australia will play its part in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, both domestically and internationally. It may be that the sensible global strategy is for some energy-intensive activities to be relocated to efficient energy-producing countries such as Australia. Bearing these considerations in mind, and within the context of international action, Australia will actively work towards the domestic reduction of major greenhouse gases and, for those which are energy related, will work towards increased energy efficiency to yield a lower level of gas emissions for a given level of production.

Following the call by the Toronto Conference in 1988 for a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, the Government will carry out investigations and consult with relevant conservation and industry groups with the objective of achieving a global reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions. This will involve processes such as energy efficient manufacturing and vigorous moves to energy conservation in Australia and abroad. These investigations and consultations will determine the extent of reductions on greenhouse gas emissions that can be achieved. The Government will convene a meeting of relevant interests in the near future to take these processes forward.

The Government will seek the co-operation of State Governments to reduce transport energy consumption per capita by encouraging an integrated approach to public transport and land use planning.

The Australian Minerals and Energy Council and the National Energy Consultative Council are considering possible energy policy changes to encourage reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has started to identify possible adverse health consequences, and to advise governments on effective national strategies.

The Government recognises the need for public awareness and education. It is providing initial funding of \$350,000 over two years for a long term education campaign. The Government will continue to support bodies such as the Commission For the Future, the Australian Conservation Foundation and CSIRO to build on work so far. CSIRO will hold a Conference on Greenhouse and Energy in December this year.

Ozone

Australia has ratified the Vienna Convention on Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

By the end of 1989 the import or production of polystyrene packaging and insulation material containing CFCs will be banned, as will the production or import of aerosol sprays which use CFC propellants (except in the case of essential uses). A ban is already in place on the import and manufacture of drycleaning machinery capable of using CFCs.

New Government regulations, to be introduced this year, will require the phasing out of nearly all CFC and halon use by the end of 1994, and it is likely that a total phase out of CFCs and halons will be possible by the year 2000.

LAND

Soils

In 1989 the Australian Soil Conservation Council, released a National Soil Conservation Strategy. This Strategy, aimed at achieving sustainable land use, will guide the Commonwealth and States in soil conservation policy. Another document will soon be released setting targets and performance criteria.

The Commonwealth's contribution to the Strategy is Landcare, comprising three elements: the Year and Decade of Landcare; a review of policies; and expansion of the National Soil Conservation Program (NSCP).

A Year (1990) and Decade of Landcare (to the year 2000), suggested initially by the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation, will entail awareness, participation and education programs among rural and urban communities. During the Decade of Landcare, the Government expects to provide over \$320 million for land care and related tree planting and remnant vegetation conservation programs.

Rural policies will be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with Landcare objectives. Drought relief assistance is already under review by a Commonwealth Government Task Force. The Government will review the taxation arrangements relating to the prevention and treatment of soil degradation, with a view to determining whether the effectiveness of those arrangements can be improved. A Landcare Liaison Group will be established to ensure co-ordinated policies and programs between the CSIRO and the relevant Commonwealth Departments.

Over the next two years, \$49 million will be provided to the NSCP. Of the \$23.4 million that will be provided in 1989-90 some \$10 million will be used to overcome current constraints. The main steps will be to improve information on land capability and the location and extent of degradation, and to make more skilled advisers available. A national assessment of land degradation will be undertaken to allow priorities to be objectively developed and specific targets set. About \$6 million will be used to fund projects of Landcare Groups, co-ordinators, and the preparation of farm and regional plans. About \$5 million has been allocated to research and development projects, including research into economic issues. The remaining funds will be for information and technology transfer projects, such as school curriculum material, ecological advice for landholders, technical bulletins and training programs.

The Commonwealth will support Tasmania, currently the only State without specific soil conservation legislation, to develop an Act that will be the most modern in Australia. The Commonwealth will offer expert advice to the Tasmanian Government and any other government wishing to review or upgrade their existing soil conservation legislation.

A Natural Resource Management Strategy for the Murray-Darling Basin has been developed to support community efforts and has the support of the Commonwealth and the NSW, Victorian and South Australian Governments. The Commonwealth will provide an additional \$3 million in 1989-90 and \$5 million in 1990-91 to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to begin implementing the Strategy taking total Commonwealth funding for the Commission to \$7.8 million in 1989-90 and up to \$10 million in 1990-91.

Water

The Government will:

- support and encourage State initiatives through the Australian Water Resources Council and the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council.
- pursue the development of pricing policies which will encourage efficient water use and help prevent environmental degradation
- take greater account of the inter-relationship between land use management - whether it be for agricultural, domestic or industrial purposes - and its effect on our water resources

The Government will establish a new body, the National Resources Research and Development Corporation, to examine soil, water and forestry issues and promote an integrated approach to land and water research.

Trees

The Government has decided to establish two new programs to help protect and enhance our native tree and vegetation cover. The One Billion Trees Program will commence this year. The Government's aim is to have a billion more trees around Australia planted by the year 2000. This will entail:

- A Community Tree Planting Program to plant over 400 million trees. The program will include:
 - financial assistance for community groups and landholders to implement tree projects
 - a schools nursery project to provide a hands-on learning experience for young people
 - major projects involving participation by community, corporate and government organisations.
- A Natural Regeneration and Direct Seeding Program to establish over 600 million trees in open areas of Australia:
 - this program will start with trials and demonstrations across the country to improve these methods of growing trees and to encourage action by landholders.

The Commonwealth will also establish a Save the Bush program to support efforts to conserve the remnant areas of forest, woodlands, heaths, grasslands and wetlands which lie outside national parks and other reserves. These areas are critical to ensuring the future of many species of plants and animals. Funding of \$1 million has been allocated in 1989-90 and \$1.5 million in 1990-91 to the Save the Bush program.

The Government recognises that native forests are valuable for a variety of reasons, and that forestry industry development needs to be balanced with protection of other values, including biological diversity, air and water quality, soil conservation, wildlife habitat and recreation.

The Government is adopting several measures to secure this balance, including:

- a commitment to establish a Forests Accord
- development of a National Forests Inventory to assess the values of our forests, costing \$2.9 million over three years
- the sending of a reference on the use of Australia's forest and timber resources to the new Resource Assessment Commission
- provision of a further \$3.9 million over the next two years to the National Afforestation Program to hasten the establishment of hardwood plantations and so help reduce the forestry industry's reliance on native forests.

The Government will develop exacting but achievable guidelines for bleached kraft pulp mills. These guidelines will be based on a report recently received from the CSIRO and will be finalised after consultation with the States and Territories, industry and conservation groups. The Government also intends to negotiate a joint assessment arrangement with the States. The new arrangements will ensure that only those mills incorporating the very best process and effluent technologies will be built in Australia. They will also ensure that mills will only be approved following thorough base-line studies and incorporating effective environmental impact monitoring and reporting systems.

The Government has moved quickly to protect Australia's rainforests and reduce the level of destruction of tropical rainforest overseas. In addition to having the Wet Tropics of North East Queensland inscribed on the World Heritage List, the Government has taken the following steps to help conserve the world's remaining tropical rainforests:

- the allocation of \$1 million to establish and maintain the Institute of Tropical Rainforest Studies in Cairns
- a consultancy by the Government to review the implications of restricting or eliminating rainforest timber imports into Australia
- a donation of \$250,000 to help establish a 180,000 square kilometre ecological reserve in the Amazon Basin, the largest tropical rainforest reserve in the world
- a contribution of \$60,000 through the International Tropical Timber Organisation towards a study into forestry management policies and practices in Sarawak.

HUMANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Historic and cultural environment

Protection of the historic and cultural environment is just as important as protection of the natural environment. Historic sites, Aboriginal cultural places and historic objects such as documents and works of art are all part of our cultural heritage and much of that heritage is intimately linked to the natural environment and people's relationship with it.

For the Commonwealth's part, the identification and protection of Aboriginal and historic places and moveable cultural heritage is largely done through the Register of the National Estate.

The Australian Heritage Commission last year was given extra resources to allow it to clear backlog of nominations to the Register of the National Estate. This will help ensure the preservation of Aboriginal cultural places and historic sites and objects.

The Urban Environment

The Commonwealth will consult with local authorities in planning for any major changes in property usage to ensure that re-development or disposal contributes positively to that urban

environment. The Commonwealth Minister for Local Government has approved a new grant category 'environment management' under the Local Government Development Program.

The Commonwealth will be encouraging the development of guidelines covering energy efficient and environmentally sound land development patterns and building design and siting principles.

The Government will seek the co-operation of the States and Territories in ensuring that environmental factors are properly reflected in decisions about transport infrastructure development, use and pricing.

The NH&MRC is developing national air quality goals for indoor air. Interim goals and a strategy for achieving them are to be produced by March 1990.

In addition, the Australian and New Zealand Environment Council has agreed that Commonwealth and State authorities will co-operate in developing national water quality guidelines.

The Commonwealth has allocated to the CSIRO an additional \$200,000 to supplement its current research on industrial waste and sewage treatment.

Waste Management and Industrial Chemicals

The Commonwealth, New South Wales and Victorian Governments are co-operating in the development of a facility for the safe disposal of hazardous waste. The Commonwealth will provide an additional \$350,000 towards the operation of the task force which is to identify an appropriate site, and will continue to support the development of this facility.

The Commonwealth has also provided \$100,000 for the Northern Territory Government to conduct a study into the feasibility of establishing a low level radioactive waste repository in the Territory. The NT Government is currently assessing the study.

To give effect to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal in Australia, the Government has drafted legislation to control the import and export of hazardous waste, and this is expected to be introduced later this year.

The Government intends to legislate this year to regulate the use of industrial chemicals.

The Government is also examining ways of:

- enhancing environmental monitoring of chemical levels in air, water, soil and living organisms to establish real levels of exposure
- upgrading testing of chemicals which could pose health or environmental hazards in food or other products.

The Government will review the Customs duty rates on unbleached sanitary goods, and sanitary goods bleached other than by a chlorine bleaching process, with a view to providing duty-free entry for such goods.

At a meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Environment Council on 6 July 1989 the Commonwealth and the States agreed to set up a working group to develop standards for recycled paper for government use and to examine further uses for low grade recycled paper.

The Prime Minister has asked all Ministers to report on the strategies which their Departments have adopted and ways by which these strategies may be improved or extended.

The Government will introduce legislation to exempt from wholesale sales tax certain printing and writing paper, tissue and toilet paper and paper bags if they are made out of wholly recycled paper. We will also examine whether it is practicable to extend the exemption to any other recycled paper products.

The Australian and New Zealand Environment Council is sponsoring a study of recycling of plastics litter.

Coastal Zone Management; Tourism and the Environment

The Government has decided to refer coastal zone issues to the Resource Assessment Commission. The Commonwealth will also establish a National Working Group on Coastal Management with representatives from all levels of government and industry and community groups to facilitate dialogue on coastal zone issues.

At the Tourism Ministers Council meeting in October 1988, the Commonwealth agreed to prepare draft environmental guidelines for tourism developments as an aid to the States and Territories.

Energy

To increase energy efficiency and conservation the Government will continue to support the development of new and renewable forms of energy generation that minimise damage to the environment.

Specifically the Government will:

- increase its commitment to the development of energy conserving technologies and research into new and renewable forms of energy
- place a higher priority on clean coal technology
- explore with State and local governments improved land-use planning and cost efficient and appropriate public transport systems
- encourage improved design and insulation of housing, more efficient lighting, heating and cooling of office blocks
- encourage industry at all levels to become more efficient energy users
- work with State, Territory and local governments, industry, unions and community groups to develop a national plan to increase energy efficiency and conservation and an Australian response to international action on this issue.

Mining and the Environment

The Government will continue to be involved, where appropriate, in setting environmental standards and monitoring performance in the mining industry. Where the legislative capacity exists, the Commonwealth will continue to protect environmentally valuable areas from mining where it is deemed in the national interest.

The Government's decision to prevent sandmining at Shelburne Bay on Cape York is an example of this. And the Government stands firm on its policy of not approving the export of mineral sands from Moreton and Fraser Islands.

The Government has decided to fund a four year environmental study of the Torres Strait. Funds of \$150,000 in 1989-90 and \$200,000 in 1990-91 will be provided.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy and the Minister for the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories will be examining the consultative arrangements at Roxby Downs to ensure that appropriate environment requirements are being met.

REVIEWING PROGRESS

As knowledge is improved the Government's policy responses will be reviewed, so that at all times the Government's environmental policies are relevant and effective.