

COMMUNIQUE

30 November 2011

Packaging and Water on Environment and Water Ministers' Agenda

Ministers for Environment and Water reinforced their commitment to addressing community expectations about packaging and litter waste.

The Standing Council on Environment and Water agreed to release the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) on Packaging Impacts for public comment on 7 December 2011. The Consultation RIS considers options to improve resource recovery and reduce litter associated with a wide range of consumer packaging, including food wrappers and beverage containers.

The Consultation RIS provides the opportunity for an informed debate on options to address packaging waste. An extended consultation period over 16 weeks will allow for the Christmas and summer holidays.

Ministers acknowledged the important input of environment groups and industry in formulating the seven options in the consultation paper.

The options include container deposit schemes, industry-funded schemes that may be co-regulated under the *Product Stewardship Act 2011 (Cwth)*, and nationally consistent government initiatives. In recognition of the differing views held by stakeholders, Ministers incorporated one option proposed by environmental groups and one option proposed by industry.

The release of the Consultation RIS is a key step in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process for considering national regulation.

Ministers emphasised that the Consultation RIS does not include a preferred approach and that stakeholder input was vital in testing a range of approaches.

The analysis includes a base case which recognises existing packaging recovery and litter reduction systems, including the long-standing South Australian container deposit scheme and the implementation of the Northern Territory container deposit scheme; the servicing of most Australian households by kerbside recycling; and the Australian Packaging Covenant.

The Council recognised assessment of the costs and benefits of options has many dimensions and cannot be based on quantifiable matters alone.

The Consultation RIS acknowledges other potential benefits of better managed packaging, including the employment generated by more recycling, reduced use of energy and water, and the provision of infrastructure to support other recycling.

Ministers noted the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) has been peer reviewing the Consultation RIS, and that the Commonwealth Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) has assessed the Consultation RIS as meeting COAG requirements.

Public forums on the Consultation RIS will be held in February 2012 in capital cities around Australia as well as Bunbury WA, Albury NSW and Townsville QLD. Responses are sought by 30 March 2012.

Water market reform

Ministers agreed to the development of a voluntary accreditation scheme to regulate brokers servicing Australian water markets. The scheme will address stakeholder concerns about water market intermediaries operating in the \$3 billion dollar Australian water market through the use of best practice guidelines. Further information is available from the number below.

Ministers approved the 2012-15 Strategic Plan for the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Scheme and agreed to release the joint governments' response to the 2010 independent review of the scheme on the WELS review website (www.environment.gov.au/water/wels-review). The Scheme requires that specified water-using products are registered and sets minimum water efficiency standards. Ministers also agreed that the scheme should recover 80 per cent of its costs from the plumbing and whitegoods industry sectors.

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

The Council incorporates the National Environment Protection Council and replaces the Environment Protection and Heritage Council.

The Consultation RIS will be available from 7 December 2011. All documents will be available at: www.ephc.gov.au or from the Standing Council on Environment and Water Secretariat (SCEW.Secretariat@environment.gov.au).

For general information:

(02 6275 9880)

For information on the Packaging Consultation RIS:

Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (07 3339 5802)

For information on the Water Intermediaries:

Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
(02 6274 2223)