New Guidelines Help Meet National Environmental Laws

Important information is now available to help anyone planning developments that could affect nationally protected environments or species.

Under national environment legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC), any proposal likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance needs to be assessed by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

The Department’s Manager of Strategic Approvals and Legislation Mark Flanagan, said a range of new threatened species and ecological communities policy statements were designed to help developers and consultants determine whether their activities are likely to have a significant impact and need to be referred to the Department. “These policy statements provide information on a diverse range of protected species, including the growling grass frog, black-throated finch, golden sun moth, and spiny riceflower,” Mr Flanagan said. “They document species biology, ecology and threats gathered from the latest scientific literature, and expert opinion.

The development of species specific advice is an initiative of the Australian Government, designed to help provide increased certainty to the administration of the EPBC Act. “Making the basis for our decisions more transparent is good for both developers and the environment,” he said. “This is a work in progress and over time we will produce more policy statements covering a range of species.”

More policy statements are under preparation, including striped legless lizard, water mouse, Murray cod, Macquarie perch, northern quoll, and swift parrot. Environmental Scientist at Aurecon Canberra, Cormac Farrell, said the guidelines are invaluable in project planning. The company conducts environmental assessments for a range of projects including roads and infrastructure, and routinely use the guidelines. “They provide detailed information on the environmental values we need to focus on, not only saving us time and effort, but also ensuring better results by enabling us to tailor environmental solutions to each project,” he said.

Matters of national environmental significance are: world and national heritage sites, wetlands of international importance, nationally threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species, Commonwealth marine areas, and nuclear actions.

Help at Hand to Prevent Pollution From Building Sites

Help is available to Tasmanian builders, homeowners and local councils to prevent pollution from building sites.

The Director of the Derwent Estuary Program, Christine Coughanowr, said that an estimated 8,000 tonnes of sediment reaches the Derwent estuary each year via stormwater runoff; and a large percentage comes from soil erosion from building sites.

“Soil erosion from building sites is a major source of pollution in southern Tasmanian waterways and a single building site can lose up to four truckloads of soil in a single storm,” Ms Coughanowr said.

“While soil erosion occurs naturally, it can be intensified by building. The soil that moves off building sites can clog the stormwater system and transport pollutants including oils, heavy metals and nutrients into local waterways. Excessive amounts of sediment can also kill fish and aquatic plants, silt up streams, and block stormwater pipes, which can cause flooding,” she said.

To address the problem, the Derwent Estuary Program has produced a series of fact sheets on soil and water management and provided sediment control kits to councils, with funding from NRM South. The fact sheets are designed for use by builders, homeowners and councils to minimise soil erosion and control sediment run-off.

The sheets provide useful information from the planning stage through to the hand-over to the property owner. They can help builders to save money by providing information on legal obligations, as well as advice on how to improve wet weather working conditions. Currently, on-the-spot fines of $600 can be issued for discharging pollutants including sediment, with a maximum penalty of $36,000 if taken to court.

The sediment control kits contain filter socks and filter bales filled with compost, to capture and treat sediment and pollutants that would otherwise end up in the stormwater system or urban waterways. They also provide better treatment than sand bags and hay bales. More than 1,000 sediment control kits have been provided to over 100 council staff at the six councils that border the Derwent Estuary, along with training to explain how they work.

It is anticipated that reduction in the annual sediment load to the Derwent will be reduced as a result.

The fact sheets on soil and water management can be downloaded from the Derwent Estuary program website at www.derwentestuary.org.au.

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PO Box 627, Kingston 7050
Mobile: 0409 163 311  Fax: 03 6229 9281
Email: paul@revegtasmania.com.au
Green Corps Involvement Pays off

The effort and hard work of a group of young Tasmanians paid off recently when they officially graduated from a six-month Green Corps program. The Green Corps team has been working throughout the Huon Valley on various community projects, helping to restore and preserve the area’s natural environment.

The graduation ceremony was held at the site of the group’s latest project, assisting with the rejuvenation of a patch of forest on Flood Road, near Huonville. Long used as a dumping ground for rubbish and garden waste, the area has undergone an extensive two-year restoration. The Huonville Greencorps team worked at the site for the three months along with the Huonville Landcare group and the Huon Valley Council, helping to remove blackberries and other weeds. Work included constructing a public walking track and a viewing platform to allow the community to experience a native forest close to Huonville’s town centre.

Green Corps is an Australian Government youth development initiative that provides development opportunities for young people. The aim is to improve employment and educational opportunities for team members and get them more involved in their communities. Since the Green Corps program began, more than 20,000 young Australians have joined projects across Australia; more than 15 million trees have been planted; 8,500 km of fencing has been built; and more than 6,000 km of walking track has been constructed or maintained.

Anyone interested in assisting with the Landcare group at the Flood Road site, or with any other Landcare group working in the Huon Valley, can contact the Huon Valley Council’s NRM unit on (03) 6264 0357.

Schools Join the Fight for a Fox Free Tasmania

They are cunning and elusive, and have the potential to devastate Tasmania’s wildlife and agriculture. But foxes watch out, the fight to make Tasmania FOX FREE has now moved from the countryside to the classroom!

As part of the effort to promote awareness and understanding of the fox issue in Tasmania, DPIPWE’s Fox Eradication Program (FEP) has developed a schools program for students from grades 3-10. This free program is linked to the Tasmanian curriculum and offers students the opportunity to participate in informative multimedia presentations with hands-on activities. The program also offers a wide range of resources to support integration of the issue into teaching programs, and curriculum links and lesson ideas are provided for teachers. Professional development workshops are available for teachers and all presentations, both for teachers and students, are available to schools statewide.

To help promote the launch of the program, a statewide competition will run until late 2010 for all Tasmanian students in grades 3-10. Students are asked to design a poster promoting a “Fox Free Tasmania”. Posters should be aimed at the general public and group entries are welcome. All entries received will be displayed on the DPIPWE website with the names of the school and student. Merit prizes will be awarded for students who display originality and creativity in their entries.

For further information about the FOX FREE schools program, visit www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/fox, or contact Yvette Causon, Education Officer on (03) 6336 4498, or email yvette.causon@dpipwe.tas.gov.au.
Preparing Biodiversity for Climate Change

A new report, *Australia’s Biodiversity and Climate Change: a strategic assessment of the vulnerability of Australia’s biodiversity to climate change*, was released in August by Environment Minister Peter Garrett and Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong.

Mr Garrett said the report provided more compelling evidence of the need to protect Australia’s natural environment for future generations, not only from climate change, but from such other stressors as vegetation clearing and the impact of invasive species.

The report confirmed that Australia’s iconic natural areas such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Kakadu Wetlands were particularly at risk. It also shows Australia has a high proportion of species - about 85% of terrestrial mammals, 91% of flowering plants and 90% of reptiles and frogs found only in Australia that will potentially be at risk from climate change.

Senator Wong said to protect these iconic sites and unique species, we need to commit to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. “Australia also needs to adapt to the changes already occurring due to climate change.”

To access a copy of the report, visit www.climatechange.gov.au/impacts/biodiversity_vulnerability.html.

Tracking Tasmania’s Litter Trends

A national litter monitoring system has revealed an increase in the amount of litter in Tasmania over the past year. The recently released annual *Keep Australia Beautiful National Litter Index* also confirmed that industrial locations are the most littered sites in Tasmania.

The Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage, Michelle O’Byrne, said the index provides an insight into the volume and location of litter across the nation and it is disappointing to see a rise in the local littering trend.

The report found industrial locations were significantly above all other sites in the number of litter items and the total estimated volume. Beach and highway sites were the second and third ranked locations. “This finding, coupled with an increasing overall long-term trend for littering, is not a good result for Tasmania and shows more work needs to be done with industry and Local Government,” Ms O’Byrne said.

The *Keep Australia Beautiful National Litter Index* found cigarette butts were the most frequently identified item across all surveyed sites in Tasmania but paper and plastic objects also contributed large amounts to the state’s litter stream. This trend is supported by data from public reporting to the Tasmanian Litter Hotline, with littering of cigarette butts from motor vehicles the most frequently reported offence.

Ms O’Byrne said the number of reports to the Litter Hotline has steadily increased since it was introduced in Tasmania early last year. “As well, a public education campaign entitled *Look Who’s Littering - on the Road*, funded by the National Packaging Covenant, promotes the litter laws and has been supported by the Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources with roadside signs at 92 locations throughout the state.”

National Litter Index counts are conducted in November and May each year, and cover 983 sites across Australia. The sites are divided into different types, including beaches, car parks, highways, industrial sites, recreational parks and residential and retail areas. Full details of the National Litter Index can be found at www.kab.org.au.
Helping Tassie Councils Know Where to put Bins

How do you know which type of recycling bin to use to maximise collection for recycling, reduce contamination and minimise costs?

The National Packaging Covenant helped fund a study analysing the best type and location of recycling bin systems to assist council waste officers, or those hoping to install a waste system identify the best options to minimise contamination and costs.

Following the study, two easy-to-use excel calculators were developed. The study showed there was a need to take a systematic and national approach when installing recycling bins to reduce confusion as to which bin to put waste in, unite key messages and maximise education and participation.

Covenant CEO, Ed Cordner, said the study showed that when the optimal bin system was applied to say a pub or club, it could recover a significant amount of glass.

“When used in the commercial and industrial sector or retail area, it could recover a large amount of paper, cardboard and plastics, thus potentially adding significantly to the Covenant’s recycling target of 65% by 2010,” he said. “We now hope to promote this information to all those in Australia who will benefit from this work.”

The study divided the away from home sector into streetscapes, events and commercial and industrial waste streams. “The tool is really a guiding hand for councils, event organisers and venues managers to identify the best system, position, education, signage, bin type etc for their particular circumstances,” Mr Cordner said.

To read the study and use the calculators please go to www.packagingcovenant.org.au, click on ‘projects’, ‘data collection’ and ‘public place recycling’.

Funding Brings Glass Waste to a Crushing End

To help Tasmania address its glass waste, Veolia recently applied for National Packaging Covenant project funding to help build a new glass crushing plant in Hobart. The Tasmanian project is one of 14 new and exciting projects recently awarded project funding in the Covenant’s latest funding round for 2009, with a total project value of $29.6 million.

Veolia currently operates a materials recovery facility in Hobart. The plant processes 10,000 tonnes of glass per annum from kerbside and commercial collections. About 6,000 tonnes is suitable for reprocessing and is shipped to Visy in Melbourne and re-used by ACI glass manufacturing. However, due to the high shipping costs across Bass Strait, this process is both expensive and impractical. The remaining 4,000 tonnes of glass is disposed of to landfill.

The new glass crushing plant will be able to re-process most of the recovered glass and glass fines currently sent to landfill and this recyclate will be re-used locally - and sold as an aggregate for concrete, road asphalt, decorative landscaping material, or sandblasting abrasive.

Covenant CEO, Ed Cordner, said this new Tasmanian glass project is helping the National Packaging Covenant work towards a packaging recycling rate of 65% by 2010. “I am confident that in addition to the fantastic efforts by signatories to make their packaging sustainable - we can achieve this.”

The Local Government Association of Tasmania signed the Covenant on 21 September 2005, which means, through association, all Tasmanian councils are Covenant signatories. As a signatory, your council has committed to good practice for recycling packaging, kerbside collection and community education. When an organisation signs, they make a financial contribution which is matched by governments, and this helps fund 77 projects around Australia worth $94 million.
World’s Youth Seal the Deal on Climate Change

Kingborough Council’s Senior Environmental Health Officer and Tasmanian Girl Guide leader, Abyilene McGuire, was recently selected to represent Australia at a United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) conference on climate change on 20 August.

The conference was held in Daejeon, South Korea but the ‘Global Town Hall’ meeting used state-of-the-art technology to virtually link the gathering with hundreds of other young environmental leaders in 15 other cities across the world. Other participating countries included Kenya, England, Canada, India, China, Mexico and Brazil. The Global Town Hall identified the priorities of the world’s youth for ‘sealing the deal’ on global climate change prior to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in December.

Abyilene linked into the conference from a temporary webcast studio at the Kingborough Civic Centre. The Kingborough Council was one of only two sites in Australia; the other in Canberra. As the facilitator and moderator for the site, Abyilene reviewed and provided feedback on a draft declaration of climate change priorities. The draft document was developed through an online process in the weeks leading up to the event. Participants at the remote sites were able to view the conference and took part in the same discussions as participants in South Korea. They were then able to submit the results of discussions over the internet so that they could be combined with ideas from around the world. In real time, the teams in South Korea reported back to the entire group about the strongest themes that were heard from all sites.

Abyilene’s involvement was initiated by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) through her involvement with Girl Guides Australia. In her capacity as an environmental health practitioner and Local Government employee, it provided a rare opportunity to participate in this unprecedented world first event.

The Global Town Hall was facilitated by the Washington-based non-profit organisation Global Voices, who have pioneered the use of technology to convene large scale deliberations to impact policy-making.

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- strategic planning for land use and organisational purposes;
- master plans;
- outline development plans;
- frameworks and/or design of urban settings, open space and landscaping plans;
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