

Victoria's First Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Appointed

The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 provides for the appointment and objectives, functions and powers of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability. The Office of the Commissioner is independent and reports directly to the Minister for the Environment. The role of the Commissioner involves:

- preparing State of the Environment reports;
- annual audits of government departments' implementation of environmental management systems; and
- auditing public education programs on ecologically sustainable development.

In late 2003 Dr Ian McPhail began a five-year appointment as Victoria's first Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability. Dr Ian McPhail has previous experience working in a variety of education and environment roles within local, state and federal government. Dr McPhail was previously the Deputy Secretary of the Environmental Protection Agency in Queensland. He has also served as Chair of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Chief Executive Officer of the South Australian Education Department, and a member of the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

For further information, refer to the Department of Sustainability and Environment's (DSE's) website: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>.

Securing our Water Future – Green Paper for Discussion

In late 2003, the Victorian Government released its Green Paper 'Securing Our Water Future' on water reform. The purpose of the Green Paper is to promote community discussion regarding optimal use of Victoria's water resources.

In summary, the Green Paper examines the following issues:

- balancing the allocation of water between human needs and those of the environment;
- increasing the use of recycled water;
- developing water trading schemes;
- improving the efficiency of irrigation;
- strengthening environmental flows regulation;
- developing a pricing framework that takes into account the environmental costs of water use to ultimately increase water use efficiency; and
- reviewing and improving the legislative framework.

Over 660 public submissions were received from metropolitan and regional Victoria in response to the Green Paper. The Government is now considering all submissions in preparation for the White Paper which is due for release in the first half of 2004.

For further information, refer to the Department of Sustainability and Environment's (DSE's) website: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>.

Goulburn River Fish Kill – January 2004

In January 2004 approximately 1,000 native fish including the endangered Murray Cod and Trout Cod were killed in the Goulburn River near Nagambie, northern Victoria. The cause of the kill is not known. Following inquiries from local environmental groups and recreational anglers, Minister Thwaites recently announced an independent audit to investigate the source of the fish kill.

Point Nepean National Park

In December 2003, the Commonwealth Government announced that it would hand 90 hectares at Point Nepean (south-east of Melbourne) to the Victorian Government for inclusion in the existing National Park in five years. Under the conditions of the Point Nepean Community Trust, the buildings in the heritage precinct will be available to not-for-profit and community groups and the 55 hectares of bush land will be protected in perpetuity by the Trust.

Hazardous and Prescribed Wastes - Long Term Containment Facilities

In Victoria, hazardous wastes and wastes that can have an adverse effect on amenity (for example odour) are referred to legally as 'prescribed wastes' and are currently sent to prescribed waste landfills. These facilities are being phased out and will be replaced with long-term containment facilities.

Long-term containment will provide safe final storage for wastes that cannot be avoided or diverted to productive purposes. These wastes are also referred to as residual wastes. The key features of containment facilities include:

- No emissions to the maximum extent achievable;
- Design to safely contain waste for hundreds of years; and
- A systems based approach which incorporates a high level of waste treatment, engineering, management and community assurance.

Long-term containment is a commitment to the long-term management and after-care of hazardous wastes as outlined in the industrial waste management policy (Prescribed Industrial Waste). Long-term containment of hazardous waste is not about redesigning current processes for landfill disposal and presents an opportunity for innovative design to ensure hazardous wastes are contained and monitored rather than disposed and forgotten.

For further information, refer to EPA's website: www.epa.vic.gov.au.