



South Australia

Climate Change

The EPA's role in supporting
South Australia's response
to climate change

2021–25


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Challenge and context

Challenge

Climate change is a change in weather patterns over long periods of time.

The Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO reported in the *State of the Climate 2020* that average temperatures across Australia are now warmer than in the past, are projected to increase and that in the coming decades Australia will continue to experience 'ongoing, long-term climate change interacting with underlying natural variability'.

Projected trends for climate-related changes in South Australia (Green & Pannell 2020) indicate that South Australia will become hotter and drier with more frequent and intense extreme weather events. There will be more heat extremes, a decrease in average annual rainfall, more time in drought, a longer fire season, rising sea levels and more intense heavy rainfall events. These changes will have impacts on not just the environment but also communities, business, industries and infrastructure.

Context

Taking action to mitigate and adapt to climate change is shared responsibility between government, business, the education sector and the community.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) supports the *Directions for a Climate Smart South Australia* and implementation of the *South Australian Government Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025* (Climate Change Action Plan).

The EPA is committed to several actions within the Climate Change Action Plan.

The 2021 EPA Board Summit, *Climate change: risks, liabilities and remedies*, brought business leaders and experts together to share their knowledge and raise awareness of risks and opportunities for small to medium businesses. Event polling indicated that while some small to medium businesses have started to adapt, or are likely to take adaptation action, they would benefit from tools and information to support their responses.



The *Directions for a Climate Smart South Australia*, released in 2019, is a policy statement that sets the government's agenda for practical, on-ground action to address climate-related impacts.



The Climate Change Action Plan, released December 2020, implements the Directions for a Climate Smart South Australia. It describes the government-led objectives and actions to help to build a strong, climate smart economy, further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and support South Australia to adapt to a changing climate. Its development was led by the Department for Environment and Water.






EPA role

The EPA is South Australia's independent environment protection regulator, and is established by the *Environment Protection Act 1993* (EP Act). This Act provides the EPA with a mandate and set of powers to protect, restore, and enhance the quality of the environment having regard to principles of ecologically sustainable development, requiring progressive environmental improvements and promoting the circulation of materials, among many others.

The EPA fulfils this mandate predominantly through the risk-based regulation of pollution and waste management activities, and implementing policies that promote the circulation of materials.

In administering the EP Act, the EPA:

-  provides regulatory and co-regulatory services
-  shares its science and trends on environmental quality
-  provides information and advice.

In the coming years, the focus for the EPA in relation to climate change will be on adaptive responses, strengthening the regulatory framework for the circulation of materials and sharing science and trends. This will be driven predominantly through the Climate Change Action Plan.

The opportunity – links between EPA role and approach for 2021–25



The EPA is a risk-based regulator experienced in responding to emerging risks. The evidence is clear – the climate of South Australia is changing and will continue to change.

Exposure to climate-related changes, such as coastal inundation, flooding from extreme rainfall, heat, bushfire and dust, can alter the risk of environmental harm from pollution or waste management activities. Design, location, and operational controls that reduce exposure to climate-related changes or improve resilience to such changes, will become increasingly important.


By adapting to the changing climate, individuals, communities, businesses and the environment can become more resilient to the consequences of more frequent and extreme weather events.



A circular economy that keeps material resources in use or 'circulating' for as long as possible can maximise the use of existing material, reduce dependence on new raw materials, reduce waste, and importantly also contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Driving initiatives that promote and extend the circulation of materials will contribute to greenhouse gas emission reductions and realise further sustainable economic growth and development opportunities.

Approach for 2021–25

The EPA's approach for years 2021–25 is set out below via a series of statements. The examples provide more detail on how it intends to deliver on its approach.

Statements marked with an asterisk (*) denotes a link to an action that the EPA has committed to, or will contribute to, in the Climate Change Action Plan.

Aspect of role	EPA approach	Examples
 <p data-bbox="161 1285 331 1406">Regulatory and co-regulatory services</p>	<p data-bbox="379 600 831 768">1. Work with <i>Environment Protection Act 1993</i> licensees to understand climate-change risk and liabilities and enable adoption of risk management strategies*.</p>	<ul data-bbox="866 600 1422 992" style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an adaptive management project to develop risk assessment criteria and a methodology for prioritising licences exposed to climate related changes for review/support. • Provide information to licensees about climate-change risk and liabilities to encourage voluntary responses to improve arrangements for dealing with more frequent and extreme weather events (dependency with #1 above). • Review conditions of prioritised licences against risks of more frequent, or extreme weather events.
	<p data-bbox="379 1025 831 1261">2. Assess how climate-related changes such as sea level rise and more frequent and extreme weather events, increase risk to, or alter the environmental impact of the proposed development, referred for direction or advice*.</p>	<ul data-bbox="866 1025 1422 1193" style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop (and implement) a process that sets out when and how consideration of climate-related changes will be given and potential outcomes when giving direction or advice on development applications referred to the EPA.
	<p data-bbox="379 1294 831 1429">3. Deliver a stronger regulatory framework to reduce waste and encourage greater reuse of materials to support a circular economy*.</p>	<ul data-bbox="866 1294 1422 1675" style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and implement a range of new and enhanced regulatory measures such as material flow reporting, stockpile controls and review of the container deposit scheme to encourage business and industries to reduce waste, improve resource recovery and keep materials in use for longer. • Work with Green Industries SA on implementation of the South Australian Waste Strategy 2020–2025, South Australian Food Waste Strategy and supporting business and communities to adopt circular economy practices*.
	<p data-bbox="379 1720 831 1888">4. Work collaboratively across government and with co-regulators, where necessary, to consider risks of new and emerging technology and our regulatory approach.</p>	<ul data-bbox="866 1720 1422 1821" style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Department for Energy and Mining on assessment and management of environmental risks of, and carbon capture and storage projects.

Aspect of role	EPA approach	Examples
 <p data-bbox="177 539 317 600">Science and trends</p>	<p data-bbox="379 264 826 465">5. Build on science and information capability to better understand the potential impacts of climate change and to provide information to support government, community, and licensees.</p>	<ul data-bbox="869 264 1433 539" style="list-style-type: none"> Progressively build the South Australian air quality monitoring network to provide better information, trends and forecasting of bushfire smoke, dust and other air quality issues exacerbated by climate change. Contribute to implementation of the Blue Carbon Strategy for South Australia (<i>led by Department for Environment and Water</i>)*.
	<p data-bbox="379 577 826 674">6. Contribute to knowledge about the condition of our natural resources and trends in environmental quality.</p>	<ul data-bbox="869 577 1358 636" style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare the 2023 State of the Environment Report.
 <p data-bbox="165 1458 331 1518">Information and advice</p>	<p data-bbox="379 712 826 837">7. Encourage licensees to adapt and build resilience to climate-change risks, including responses that maintain or gain social licence.</p>	<ul data-bbox="869 712 1433 949" style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of climate-change risks, liabilities and remedies to small-medium businesses at the 2021 EPA Board Summit and publish event material. Engage with licensees or key stakeholders on the information, tools, guidance or support that would encourage licensees to adapt and build resilience.
	<p data-bbox="379 987 826 1084">8. Contribute, where required, to South Australian Government initiatives in the Climate Change Action Plan*.</p>	<ul data-bbox="869 987 1433 1106" style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to development of policies to facilitate investment in large-scale carbon capture and storage (<i>led by Department for Energy and Mining</i>)*.
	<p data-bbox="379 1151 826 1240">9. Consider climate change when providing legislation and policy advice.</p>	<ul data-bbox="869 1151 1437 2063" style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to delivery of low emissions infrastructure and operations (<i>led by Department for Infrastructure and Transport</i>)*. Contribute to addressing climate change risk in government infrastructure decisions, risk assessment and audit process (<i>all agencies with Infrastructure SA</i>)*. Contribute to addressing climate risk and opportunity across government policy and practice (<i>led by Department for Environment and Water with all agencies</i>)*. Contribute to the exploration and implementation of government climate smart procurement reforms (<i>led by Department for Environment and Water and Department of Treasury and Finance</i>)*. Contribute to the government's cross-agency greenhouse gas emission reduction program (<i>led by Department for Environment and Water</i>)*. Contribute to development and implementation of a government waste strategy (<i>led by Green Industries SA</i>)*. Provide advice and/or support to government in the implementation of South Australia's Electric Vehicle Action Plan (<i>led by the Department for Energy and Mining</i>).

Further information, references and review

Further information

For more information about climate change including potential impacts for South Australia and the *South Australian Government Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025*, go to <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/climate-change>.

For copies of South Australian State of the Environment Reports, go to https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/environmental_info/state_of_the_environment_reporting

For information about the 2021 EPA Board Summit, go to http://www.epa.sa.gov.au/about_us/corporate_reporting/2021-epa-board-summit

For information about South Australia's air quality, go to https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/environmental_info/air_quality

For copies of the latest version of legislation mentioned in this document, go to www.legislation.sa.gov.au, and search for the name of the Act.

References

CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology 2020, *State of the Climate 2020*, Australian Government, viewed 26 July 2021, <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/documents/State-of-the-Climite-2020.pdf>

Environment Protection Act 1993
<https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/ENVIRONMENT%20PROTECTION%20ACT%201993.aspx>

Government of South Australia 2020, *Directions for a Climate Smart South Australia*, Adelaide, viewed 26 July 2021, <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/climate-change/climate-smart-sa>

Government of South Australia 2020, *South Australian Government Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025*, Adelaide, viewed 26 July 2021, <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/climate-change/climate-change-action-plan-2021-2025>

Green G and Pannell A 2020, *Guide to Climate Projections for Risk Assessment and Planning in South Australia*, Adelaide, Department for Environment and Water, Adelaide.

Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 <https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/PLANNING%20DEVELOPMENT%20AND%20INFRASTRUCTURE%20ACT%202016.aspx>

Review

A review of this statement will occur every two years, with the first review to commence 2023.

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