

Wednesday, 26 November 2008

EPA REPORT DETAILS STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Environment and Conservation Minister Jay Weatherill has tabled in Parliament South Australia's fifth State of the Environment Report – which outlines significant stresses to our environment, areas of improvement and where more work needs to be done.

The comprehensive audit of the challenges facing our environment is produced by the Environment Protection Authority every five years.

“This report is further evidence that tackling climate change and sustainability must remain at the forefront of government, business and community decision making,” Mr Weatherill said.

“There are a number of concerning trends illustrating an environment under stress.”

The report shows:

HEALTH of the rivers, streams and wetlands of the River Murray floodplain is declining.
THE COORONG and Lower Lakes are in the poorest condition ever recorded.
SEAGRASS populations along the metropolitan coast are continuing to decline.
THE number of vulnerable and endangered plants, animals and ecological communities is increasing.

“But there are some more encouraging trends as well,” Mr Weatherill said.

NET greenhouse emissions have decreased by 7 per cent since 1990, while gross greenhouse emissions sources have been stable since 2001.

THE PROPORTION of energy from renewable energy sources has increased ten-fold since 2002, with the expectation that in 2008-09 it will rise to 20 per cent of our total energy generation.

SOLID waste going to landfill is decreasing, with SA the national recycling leader per capita.

EROSION and salinity on the land are declining.

“The report also flags issues that are on the horizon,” Mr Weatherill said.

“The continued control of greenhouse emissions will be challenged by likely increases in population and mining activity.

“The effects of climate change will pose challenges for ecological protection, prevention of fires, water scarcity and agricultural productivity.”

The report highlights good work being done by Government and the community, in areas including those where the trends are adverse.

“The report identifies that greater volumes of wastewater and stormwater are being recycled and re-used in Adelaide than anywhere else in urban Australia,” Mr Weatherill said.

“Our development of massive landscape-scale corridors is noted as good work being done to combat biodiversity risks.

“Significant investment is being made in renewable energy, including geothermal energy, where SA leads the nation.

“To reign in greenhouse emission, SA enacted the nation’s first climate change legislation, committing us to fixed emissions targets.

“But as you’d expect, the report clearly identifies that more work is needed – some of it urgently.”

There are 41 recommendations, with nine identified as priorities. These include:

DOUBLING the capture and re-use of wastewater and stormwater by 2012.

USING a combination of water allocation planning, pricing, incentives and water rights to ensure sustainable water use by 2012.

DEVELOPING adaptation strategies to deal with climate change effects.

INCLUDING environmental representation in strategic decision making to ensure consideration of interactions between economic, social and environmental objectives.

“Given the nature of this report, the complexity of the issues and its’ across-Government application, the legislation gives the Government time to provide a response, which will be released next year,” Mr Weatherill said.