



## MIA HANDSHIN | Welcome Speech

### 2015 EPA Regional Forum, Whyalla

### Tuesday 30 June 2015

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I wish to acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands of the Barngala people. We respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

On behalf of EPA Board members Linda Bowes, Rob Fowler, Helen MacDonald, Ros De Garis, CE of the EPA Tony Circelli, thank you for making the time to be here with us this afternoon. The Board is joined by senior EPA staff Ros, Andrew, Keith, Dave and Hannah.

As part of the Board's engagement program, we are committed to making a visit to a different part of regional South Australia each year in addition to conducting an annual summit with business and industry delegates from across the state, a forum with members of community and environment Groups as well as a roundtable with representatives of local government.

Regional South Australia is very important to the EPA.

Now, you would be forgiven for thinking that it seems that we city folk 'blow in' dish out the pleasantries, do a whole lot of talking and then we're 'out of here'. Firstly, I want to reassure you from the outset, that aside from these brief remarks on behalf of the Board, we are genuinely here to listen, to you.

Secondly, among the current EPA leadership we are really fortunate to have two people who have lived experience of your context and who keep regional realities high on our radar. We have a Chief Executive in Tony who hails from one of the largest regional towns in the state and, in Helen MacDonald, a board member who is the current Chief Executive of a local council in the South East.

However, we understand how essential it is to make time to come and engage with you, on your turf, in order to hear directly from you about what's happening in this region.

This region of SA, the Upper Spencer Gulf and Eyre Peninsula, in particular is very important to the EPA and to the state's future. Two of the EPA's largest licensees operate in this region. There are some exciting opportunities for change on the horizon, in part driven by tough global economic circumstances, and with it, some significant challenges for your communities too. And there are some key environmental challenges here that are high on the EPA's radar; protecting the marine ecosystem of the Spencer Gulf, continued pressures to drive air quality improvements and the impacts of mining.

The EPA exists to ensure a better environment for the wellbeing and prosperity of all South Australians. As the state's independent environment protection regulator our goal is to ensure good quality land, water and air, safe use of radiation, protection from unacceptable noise and sustainable use of resources. We license more than 2,200 businesses across the state. Our role is to pursue both short and long-term environmental outcomes while providing for

economic and social well-being. Getting this balance right requires ongoing engagement between industry, the community and the EPA.

It's worth noting that some of our most compelling examples of such successful partnerships have come out of regional SA.

In fact, we recently put together *Good for Environment, Good for Business*, a booklet to highlight how successful, innovative businesses can co-exist with the expectations of local community, deliver environmental improvements and secure jobs for the wellbeing and prosperity of our state. Of the four case studies that we've used in the booklet, three are stories of regionally based licensees.

Following my own visit to Whyalla in 2013, including a tour of the Arrium/One Steel site and a meeting with members of the Whyalla Red Dust Action group, I found myself regularly and enthusiastically re-telling the story of the 'red dust' partnership that resulted in an excellent outcome for all. It wasn't all smooth sailing. But despite a tough and tense beginning and moments of resistance encountered along the way, the relationship between the EPA, industry and community here continues to be a powerful example of what can be achieved when all parties are prepared to invest time, energy and resources in constructive engagement.

To demonstrate the importance of the regions and ongoing engagement, the EPA has invested resources at a time when we are all having to do more with less. We are hearing excellent feedback about the work of the EPA's Peter Scott, Principal Advisor, Regions, and how he is making a difference in this region by his exceptional networking, good strategic nous, preparedness to get in and roll his sleeves up to tackle issues and find practical solutions. This sounds to us like a good return on the investment. But we will continue to seek new ways to ensure engagement with the regions across our state, is prioritised.

In May the EPA launched our Strategic Directions for the coming three years. We will be focused on three key objectives;

- Support wellbeing and prosperity.
- Keep people informed and engaged.
- And, as an effective and trusted regulator, we will build trust and confidence.

It's clear that we need to continue our efforts to generate fresh understanding about the role of the EPA, its contribution and benefit to our state, so that we can strengthen support for and confidence in what we do. We are keen to understand what you believe will be the best way to do this here in this region and how you can help us to achieve this.

To some extent, and of significance to you here in the regions, this is about providing better online communication and services. I encourage you to check out the EPA's new website, also launched in May, and let us know what you think.

In conclusion, we're looking forward to hearing how you think the EPA can add value to your region by carrying out our role in protecting the environment while also facilitating efficient, effective pathways to sustainable development. And in turn, we invite you to consider how you, your organisation and community, can add value to the EPA's function and role. How we can work even more effectively together to ensure a better environment for the wellbeing and prosperity of your region.