

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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EPA PRESENTS 2013 STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Today, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) presented the 2013 South Australian State of the Environment Report to the Hon Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation.

The report, presented by the EPA Chief Executive Dr Campbell Gemmell and the EPA Board Presiding Member Mia Handshin, is the sixth report of its kind to be made public.

This comprehensive audit of the challenges facing our environment is produced by the EPA every five years, and is a legislative requirement under the *Environment Protection Act 1993*. This latest report represents the cumulative product of broad agency consultation and effort.

Five central themes characterise this report – people and places, climate change, water, biodiversity, and the coastal and marine environment.

In reviewing the report, Dr Gemmell made reference to the significant amount of work undertaken to accumulate the data which paints a true picture of our environment, as it exists today.

This report provides further evidence that environmental sustainability must remain at the forefront of government, business, council and community decision-making to ensure the long-term prosperity of the state.

“Importantly, this report is most relevant for the Government’s priority objectives of premium food and wine from our clean environment and the protection of the health and wellbeing of our communities,” Dr Gemmell explained.

“South Australia’s environment is delicately balanced, and susceptible to human impact. It is this environmental vulnerability which is the catalyst for our urgent attention.”

Ms Handshin added: “The future custodianship and sustainability of the South Australian environment is our responsibility. It is your responsibility too.”

The path to a sustainable South Australia runs the gauntlet of a steady increase in population, changes in landuse, continued economic growth, and the prospect of a resurgence in responsible mining activity. In the long term, a shift is expected from primary and secondary industries towards service industries, with less pressure on natural resources.

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Key findings

On the positive side:

- Good air quality through identifying national standards, with a few exceptions
- Increased global concentration of greenhouse gases, but a noticeable decline in per capita state greenhouse gas emissions
- Increased state renewable energy installations, supply and use
- Increased water availability through diversification of supply
- Improved environmental water supply and quality due to increased rainfall
- Improved soil protection and land management.

One particular highlight within the report is the dramatic flooding of Lake Eyre. Despite being in one of the few unregulated dryland river systems in the world, and the largest system of its kind in Australia, an assessment of its rivers found them to be in near-natural condition.

The report also draws attention to areas which need to be addressed such as:

- Natural resources impacted by state population and economic growth
- Increased variability and extremes of rainfall and temperature
- Decline in the condition of native vegetation and biodiversity, both terrestrial and marine
- Higher incidence of pest plants and animals
- Increased sea temperatures and acidity
- Increase in number of noise complaints.

Dr Gemmell elaborated: "Of particular importance is that while we have identified areas where specific pressures apply to our environment, we are also the first generation to do so and the first to be taking action to rectify activities of the past. This is an important milestone in our state's history."

The report's key recommendation is to develop an environmental information strategy/plan to better drive co-ordinated and integrated environmental information, and knowledge management.

In a nutshell, improved information management processes are the key to successful environmental management.

Businesses and the public are to be congratulated on their individual contributions towards improving environmental sustainability in the state. This incremental progress is not sufficient, however, given the magnitude and scale of the environmental challenges which lie ahead.

Ms Handshin said: "The publication of this authoritative report is an important reference tool for South Australians at large, business and government. Together, we have the opportunity and the obligation to recognise and address the environmental deficiencies and to make South Australia the most liveable State that it is purported to be."

The Government's response to the report will be released early next year.

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