

Government's Response to the State of the Environment Report for South Australia 2018



Minister's foreword



The *South Australian State of the Environment Report 2018* is the seventh produced for South Australia. It draws on a range of important information sources, including South Australia's latest environmental trend and condition report cards, to interpret and communicate key environmental changes over time.

The 2018 report benchmarks for measuring how well we are managing our environment, and identifies key challenges and priorities for environmental protection and recovery in the future. It has stimulated discussion in our community about our unique and precious environment, and highlighted how we must work together to meet the complex challenges we face.

The summary report includes six recommendations to help safeguard South Australia's environment with a strong focus on climate change, and biodiversity, waste, water and land management. These areas of focus are not unique to South Australia. Indeed, most are national and global problems.

In this response to the 2018 report, the State Government supports each of the recommendations and provides an outline of what is proposed to address them.

The South Australian Government's ongoing proactive environmental agenda and actions will help to deliver, on-the-ground measures to sustain and protect our precious natural environment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Speirs', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Hon David Speirs
Minister for Environment and Water

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Introduction

The [Environment Protection Act 1993](#) (the Act) requires “reporting on the state of the environment on a periodic basis”. Section 112 of the Act sets out how this objective is to be met and requires the South Australian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to, at least every five years:

- Prepare and publish a report that includes an assessment of the state and condition of major environmental resources.
- Identify significant trends in environmental quality, including a specific assessment of the state of the River Murray.
- Review significant programs, activities and achievements of public authorities relating to the protection, restoration and enhancement of the environment.
- Identify significant issues and make recommendations to the Minister.

The [South Australian State of the Environment Report 2018](#) (the 2018 report) is the seventh such report produced by the EPA, with previous reports released in 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013.

This report provides the South Australian government’s response to the 2018 report, as required by Part 15 Clause 112(5)-(6) of the Act.

The previous State of the Environment Report (2013)

The [South Australian State of the Environment Report 2013](#) made one recommendation, which was to develop:

"...an environmental information strategy and plan for South Australia. This would identify key environmental information needs; prioritise, coordinate and integrate the collection of environmental data; and improve access and communication of available environmental information" (page xvi).

The [South Australian government's response to the 2013 report](#) supported the recommendation for an environmental information strategy to 'drive better coordinated and integrated environmental information management, and to improve public access to good quality environmental information'. In providing this support, the South Australian government recognised that "... environmental information provides the environment portfolio agencies and Ministers with important tools to communicate more effectively with South Australians about the state of our natural resources, their value to the community and to be able to inform strategic investments in environmental issues ..." (page 5).

The 2013 South Australian government response identified ten initiative areas that, taken together, would be progressed to implement the strategy:

1. Trialling the [2012 South Australian Natural Resource Management State and Condition Reporting Framework](#) (NRM Reporting Framework) (including to deliver state-wide environmental trend and condition report cards)
2. Location SA – improving access to spatial data and services
3. Air Quality Framework for South Australia
4. Water for Good Plan and Goyder Institute for Water Research
5. Implementation of marine parks
6. Accessibility and utility of soils information in South Australia
7. Monitoring and management of pest animals and weeds
8. Improving the accessibility of the register of Aboriginal sites
9. Integrated approach to land use planning
10. Australia's Virtual Herbarium and the Atlas of Living Australia.

The response also noted the existence of an EPA 'State of the Environment [Reporting] Improvement Plan' [sic] (Improvement Plan), and that many of the objectives of the Improvement Plan align with those of the NRM Reporting Framework (Initiative Area 1, above).

A brief overview of progress against each of the ten initiative areas is provided below.

- **Initiative Area 1: Trialling the NRM Reporting Framework:** Implementing the NRM Reporting Framework has resulted in the publication of environmental trend and condition report cards in 2014, 2017 and [2018](#). The 2018 report cards coordinate South Australian government information from four agencies, on 41 environmental measures — covering South Australia's climate, rivers and streams (including the River Murray), land, coast and marine environment, as well as air quality.

Each one-page report is in a format that is simple and easy to read and understand. They track changes in the condition of each environmental measure and make publically-accessible the South Australian government's evidence-base. In this way, they aim to spur discussion and policy development on environmental matters of state significance.

Implementation of the Improvement Plan has established new governance arrangements for overseeing the development of the 2018 report and, for the first time, the use of the 2018 report cards as a key line of evidence of coordinated environmental information for the 2018 report to draw from and build upon.

- **Initiative Area 2: [Location SA](#)** is a collaborative state-wide initiative to deliver a spatial platform that facilitates the sharing of more than 500 authoritative location-based datasets with the South Australian community, including in relation to the environment, water, landscapes and climate. The available datasets can be viewed using an online [Map Viewer](#) and downloaded (where available) from [Data.SA](#).
- **Initiative Area 3: Air quality framework for South Australia:** The EPA now provides hourly online air quality data through [Data.SA](#) and has developed an [Environment Protection \(Air Quality\) Policy 2016](#). The Policy aims to protect human health and the environment by providing a modernised and consolidated legislative framework. It takes into account new research on air quality impacts from human activities, and provides clear criteria used by the EPA to manage air quality, improving certainty to industry and the community. It also takes a '[whole-of-air-shed](#)' approach to managing air quality, including by regulating the sale and installation of wood heaters and sale of firewood, and ensuring streamlined council management of burning in the open through consistent and coherent regulation across South Australia.
- **Initiative Area 4: Water for Good Plan and Goyder Institute for Water Research.** The Goyder Institute has established and supported key water research initiatives, focusing on: economic development, diversifying urban water sources, environmental water and agricultural practices. Examples are [Water Sensitive Urban Design](#) and advice to the state government about the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. All [Goyder Institute Technical Reports](#) are publicly available.
- **Initiative Area 5: Implementation of Marine Parks.** Management plans for each of South Australia's 19 marine parks provide for biodiversity conservation, ecologically sustainable development and use of marine resources. Reports, survey data and video footage are [publicly available](#). The [South Australia's Marine Parks: 5-Year Status Report 2012-2017](#) was released in January 2018 and includes marine parks, program activities, trends and early outcomes from ecological and socio-economic monitoring.
- **Initiative Area 6: Accessibility and utility of soils information in South Australia:** The South Australian Department for Environment and Water (DEW) launched [Soil Sites SA](#) in January 2018, an online platform making soil profile information publicly accessible. Regional-scale soil mapping and selected soil profile reports can also be directly viewed on [NatureMaps](#). These, together with public information about erosion, acidification and soil fertility assist investment decisions and crop potential assessments.
- **Initiative Area 7: Monitoring and management of pest animals and weeds:** Guidelines for members of the public about pest animals and weeds are more accessible with [helpful information](#) about identification and management, including an online [Weed Control App](#) for landholders. A number of Natural Resource Management regional teams log pest and weed sightings on the [Biological Databases of SA](#). Work is continuing to align arrangements for consolidated state-wide reporting of pest animals and weeds.
- **Initiative Area 8: Improving the accessibility of the Register of Aboriginal sites and objects:** The Department of Premier and Cabinet has launched an online portal, '[Taa wika](#)' that improves access to the Register of Aboriginal sites and objects, the Register of Recognised Aboriginal Representative Bodies, and the Register of Agreements. Secure logins restrict access in line with legislated cultural protocols.
- **Initiative Area 9: Integrated approach to land use planning:** The [30 year plan for Greater Adelaide](#) and [Plans for regional South Australia](#) are key parts of the major strategic and collaborative approach to planning that is being implemented across the state. Through the [SA Planning Portal](#) members of the public can now access development applications online and browse property locations to assist commercial decisions.
- **Initiative Area 10: Australia's virtual herbarium and the Atlas of Living Australia:** As part of the [Atlas of Living Australia](#), [Australia's Virtual Herbarium](#) links databases relating to millions of plant specimens, native and introduced, in Australia's major herbaria. Information from the State Herbarium of South Australia is made available online through this portal. In a 12-month period to end June 2018, SA Herbarium information was accessed about 86,000 times and more than 55 million records were downloaded.

The South Australian State of the Environment Report 2018

The 2018 report covers six themes:

1. Climate change
2. Land and biodiversity
3. Waste management
4. Inland waters
5. Coast and marine
6. Air quality.

The South Australian State of the Environment Report 2018 (the 2018 report) revealed mixed results for the condition of the state's natural assets and environmental trends. For example, air quality across most of the state is good most of the time, our inland water quality is generally stable, and the state's coast and marine environment is generally quite good. Conversely, many of South Australia's native plant and animal species are in trouble and at risk of extinction due to habitat loss and fragmentation; our waste continues to increase at a higher rate than population growth (and is increasing in complexity) and our state is facing significant environmental and socio-economic impacts from climate change.

Recommendations of the 2018 report

The [South Australia State of the Environment Report 2018 – Summary Report](#) includes six recommendations to help safeguard South Australia's environment, with a strong focus on the key challenges identified by the report including climate change, and biodiversity, waste, water and land management. These areas of focus are not unique to South Australia. Indeed, most are national, if not global problems.

The six recommendations are for the South Australian government to:

1. Review the state's **climate change** response to ensure that climate risks are adequately embedded into planning and investment by government agencies.
2. Develop a **biodiversity** action plan to prioritise conservation efforts across the landscape that takes into account climate change and the findings of recent reviews, and is informed by broad public consultation.
3. Review the monitoring of the South Australian coast and sea levels, and assess how it informs policy to ensure planning for development, infrastructure and beach management adequately accounts for risks from **climate change**.
4. Advocate for coordinated national action to reduce **waste**, including through regulation of packaging, providing leadership in the strengthening of the local resource recovery industry, including through green procurement, and strengthening education and behaviour change initiatives aimed at reducing waste.
5. Prioritise **water management** and on-ground **land stewardship** initiatives based on the risks to the sustainability of significant aquatic ecosystems.
6. Review **environmental reporting** in the state, including the environmental themes and measures that are assessed and reported by the trend and condition report cards, to further improve reporting and strengthen links between reporting and environmental management.

Government's response to the recommendations

Recommendation 1: South Australian government review the state's climate change response to ensure that climate risks are adequately embedded into planning and investment by government agencies.

South Australian government response to Recommendation 1: support

The South Australian government has requested the Premier's Climate Change Council work with South Australian government agencies to develop a new state-wide climate change strategy to reduce emissions and help South Australia to adapt to a changing climate. The development of the strategy is being undertaken in 2019.

In addition, the South Australian government has engaged in a number of practical activities including better coastal management, the Greener Neighbourhoods program, developing a blue carbon strategy, carbon farming and urban water initiatives, and the creation of Green Adelaide as part of the [Landscape SA reform](#).

The Department for Environment and Water plays a crucial role in helping South Australia prepare for a changing climate and is responsible for state-wide policy and programs and the administration of climate change legislation. One of the department's priorities is to ensure that the impacts and risks of climate change are considered in the development of public policy across the South Australian government.

Recommendation 2: South Australian government develop a biodiversity action plan to prioritise conservation efforts across the landscape that takes into account climate change and the findings of recent reviews, and is informed by broad public consultation.

South Australian government response to Recommendation 2: support

The South Australian government recognises the importance of biodiversity to the economy and well-being of all South Australians, and is committed to its conservation for current and future generations. The South Australian government recognises successful biodiversity conservation requires a collaborative approach across all land tenures that is adaptive and resilient to future changes, particularly climate change.

In order to address this recommendation, the Department for Environment and Water is undertaking state-wide analytical work to identify and define priority actions to:

- conserve biodiversity values, encompassing species, ecosystems and landscapes
- maintain the ecosystem services that underpin South Australia's economy and well-being
- support the adaptation of biodiversity and ecosystem services provision, particularly in response to climate change.

This analytical work will be made publicly available through the state's online data access tools and will be used to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services by improving:

- The operation and effectiveness of the state's regulatory and policy framework, in particular the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*; the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*; and the *Native Vegetation Act 1991*.
- On-ground delivery and community involvement under the proposed Landscape SA legislation (which includes the State Landscape Strategy, Regional Landscape Plans, and the Landscape Priorities Fund), as well as through the development of a Nature Conservation Strategy for South Australia, and existing park and fire management programs.

- South Australia's ability to track changes over time in biodiversity values and ecosystem services provision across the state, and use this as a basis for evaluation, reporting and adaptation.

Recommendation 3: South Australian government review the monitoring of the South Australian coast and sea levels, and assess how it informs policy to ensure planning for development, infrastructure and beach management adequately accounts for risks from climate change.

South Australian government response to Recommendation 3: support

A major priority for the South Australian government is to secure the state's coastline with better management and protection, to prepare for impacts of sea level rise. The SA Government and the Coast Protection Board are monitoring sea level rise measurements and projections. This work will be used to inform the planning system and the development of adaptation and protection strategies for coastal settlements and infrastructure, and coastal ecosystems.

In 2018/19, the South Australian government invested an extra \$5.2 million to help better manage, conserve and protect the state's coasts. The commitment included funding for beach replenishment as well as for research and development.

In the 2019/20 State Budget, the South Australian government allocated a further \$52.4 million over four years to protect and secure the state's metropolitan beaches and regional coastal works. This includes \$48.4 million for immediate sand carting and critical sand replenishment along the metropolitan coastline and the construction of a pipeline from Semaphore South to West Beach. A grants program of \$4 million is to assist local councils with a range of regional coastal protection works.

Recommendation 4: South Australian government advocate for coordinated national action to reduce waste, including through regulation of packaging, providing leadership in the strengthening of the local resource recovery industry, including through green procurement, and strengthening education and behaviour change initiatives aimed at reducing waste.

South Australian government to Recommendation 4: support

South Australia has a dedicated agency – Green Industries SA (formerly Zero Waste SA) – focused on reducing waste, increasing resource recovery and maximising the benefits of a circular economy. The agency prepares a state waste strategy every five years, currently 2015-20, and will be developing a new strategy in 2019 for 2020-25.

South Australia has led the nation in waste management measures such as its container deposit scheme and ban on lightweight plastic bags, and will continue to advocate for national action to reduce waste. South Australia has supported national actions on waste and recycling through the Meeting of Environment Ministers and actively participated in the development of the 2018 National Waste Policy. South Australia will continue to engage in developing the implementation plan for the policy, including advocating for coordinated national action led by the Australian Government where appropriate. Implementation of the Policy will be supported by South Australia's Waste Strategy for 2020-25.

The South Australian government has invested in the resource recovery sector to maximise diversion from landfill and facilitate domestic reprocessing capabilities. In May 2018, the South Australian government announced a \$12.4 million support package to help South Australia's resource recovery industry respond to international recycling market challenges and opportunities. The support package included funding for the Which Bin state-wide recycling education campaign, launched in May 2019, to inform and educate the community on recycling behaviours. In June 2019, the South Australian government committed a further \$12 million support package to boost recycling and resource recovery through investment in infrastructure, education and modernisation of council and industry collection services.

The South Australian government has established a working group comprising South Australian government, industry and local government representatives to investigate measures to increase procurement of recycled content products and

materials. We are also supporting the new Cooperative Research Centre on Fighting Food Waste (headquartered in Adelaide) and are preparing a state food waste strategy to align with the National Food Waste Strategy to achieve the targets set both at a national and state level.

The South Australian government is seeking to help realise the economic potential from innovation in waste and resource recovery technologies, while at the same time protecting the environment. As part of this, the EPA is pursuing a suite of reforms to provide the right regulatory settings to support the sustainable operation of the sector and maintain South Australia's position as leader in resource recovery.

On 13 January 2019, the South Australian government released two discussion papers seeking views from the community on measures to address single-use plastic products and improving the container deposit scheme.

Recommendation 5: South Australian government prioritise water management and on-ground land stewardship initiatives based on the risks to the sustainability of significant aquatic ecosystems.

South Australian government response to Recommendation 5: support

The South Australian government is reforming the management of natural resources to empower local communities and focus on core priorities such as water, soils and pest plants and animals. Under the new Landscape South Australia Act, the proposed new Regional Landscape Boards and Green Adelaide Board will be required to prioritise investment towards water management and on-ground land stewardship actions. For example, water allocation planning must ensure that an assessment is undertaken of the quantity and quality of water needed by the ecosystems that depend on the water resource. In doing so, water allocation plans must balance social, economic and environmental requirements for water.

This is an important way to enable protection and enhanced management of significant aquatic ecosystems identified at the local level through community consultation, as well as those identified through international obligations (e.g. Ramsar wetlands) or national legislation (e.g. *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*). Furthermore, the Landscape South Australia legislation facilitates greater consistency between planning instruments, which should drive coordination of investment in water and on-ground land stewardship initiatives at regional level. It also establishes the state level Landscape Priorities Fund to invest in large, integrated landscape-scale initiatives.

Recommendation 6: South Australian government review environmental reporting in the state, including the environmental themes and measures that are assessed and reported by the trend and condition report cards, to further improve reporting and strengthen links between reporting and environmental management.

South Australian government to Recommendation 6: support

The [2018 report cards](#) are the third release since 2014, and are the first release to be used as a key line of evidence for the five-yearly State of the Environment Report to draw from and build upon. Together, the report cards and the [South Australian State of the Environment Report 2018](#) have been embraced by the state government as the most complete picture we have ever had on the successes and challenges South Australia faces in managing our natural resources. Importantly, they provide a sound evidence-base for decision-making.

In 2019, the South Australian government will undertake reviews of the report cards and the 2018 report, to identify opportunities to continue to improve the themes and indicators that are assessed by the report cards and the value and impact of the next the State of the Environment Report.

The new Landscape South Australia Act is part of the South Australian government's commitment to reform natural resources management. Some of the functions of the Minister under the Landscape South Australia Act are to monitor, evaluate, audit and report on the state and condition of the state's natural resources, coasts and seas; and to promote the integration and co-ordination of policies, programs, plans and projects insofar as they are relevant to the proper

management, use or protection of the state's natural resources. These functions provide opportunities to review environmental reporting in South Australia with the aim to strengthen the links between reporting and management.

Pending the implementation of this legislation, options to improve linkages between the 2018 report, the environmental trend and condition report cards, and environmental management planning and reporting required under the proposed Landscapes South Australia legislation will be explored through the development of regional landscape plans and the State Landscape Strategy.

Conclusion

The State of the Environment reporting is how the South Australian government informs South Australians about the current state of their environment, to provide an assessment of efforts to deal with significant environmental issues, and to identify priority recommendations for environmental protection going forward.

The 2018 report recommended a range of initiatives to improve the management, co-ordination, transparency, accessibility and public value of South Australia's environmental information. Overall, significant progress has been made and substantial new environmental information is now available on modernised electronic platforms that make it easier for the community to access, understand, and make decisions.

The 2018 report has identified six new recommendations that link to broader environmental challenges identified by South Australia's environmental trend and condition report cards. The South Australian government supports each of the recommendations of the 2018 report, and acknowledges the significance of the programs of work required. As identified in this report, we have already identified opportunities to progress the recommendations as strategic priorities within South Australia's current policy and reform agenda. Lead agencies will work with their partners and the community in progressing this important work.



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The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) prepared this report in consultation with the EPA, Green Industries South Australia, PIRSA, DPTI, and the Local Government Association of South Australia.

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