



CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES

Cross-cutting activities

The department provides other services that contribute to all of the outputs under outcome 1 and outcome 2.

Main responsibilities for this work

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International policy advice• Support for environment and heritage organisations• Environmental information• Public affairs	Policy Coordination Division
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online information• Environmental education	Corporate Strategies Division

International policy advice

The department represents Australia's interests on environment, heritage and sustainable development issues in the region, and in broader international forums.

This work includes formulating policy and providing briefing material for the minister and officials attending international meetings and events.

This year the department contributed to policy decisions at meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The department also engaged in bilateral forums with selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Many specific activities are detailed in other chapters of the report.

Commission on Sustainable Development

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development is a multilateral forum that promotes dialogue on issues relating to sustainable development and builds partnerships between governments and stakeholders.

The 14th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development was held in May 2006. The main themes under discussion were energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution and the atmosphere, and climate change. The Minister for the Environment and Heritage

participated in the high level segment of the meeting. The minister emphasised the need for improved national level governance and for economic growth to foster sustainable development. The meeting gave impetus to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation by sharing experiences and case studies about the main themes. Australian case studies were well received, particularly studies on the Greenhouse Friendly Programme and on Bushlight—Indigenous Renewable Energy Services.

United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme is the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment. Its role is to provide leadership and promote partnerships for environmental protection.

A meeting of the programme's governing council was held in February 2006. Major themes were international chemicals management, energy, tourism, international environmental governance, environmental assessment and reporting, capacity building, and water policy and strategy. The department actively represented Australia's interests and the final decisions of the meeting reflected Australian objectives.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

The department represented Australia's interests at meetings of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Environment Policy Committee held in November 2005 and March 2006. The committee continued to direct OECD studies on issues linking economic and environmental policy formulation. At the March 2006 meeting an officer of the department was appointed chair of the committee. The department was active in meetings of the committee's working groups and an expert group on climate change.

OECD Environment Performance Review of Australia

The department is coordinating the OECD's Environment Performance Review of Australia. The review focuses on Australia's environmental progress since the last review (published in 1998) and will provide recommendations for future action. The major themes of the review are environmental effectiveness, economic efficiency and sustainable development.

During 2005–06 the department completed the first stage of the review by providing environmental information and data to the OECD and completing the OECD questionnaire. The department managed the coordination of these tasks across Australian, state and territory governments. The final report will be published in late 2007.





Bilateral activities

Papua New Guinea: The department continued to assist Papua New Guinea's Department of Environment and Conservation in the areas of governance and natural resource management, forestry and forest biodiversity conservation, and partnership building. The department is supporting a national capacity self assessment to help Papua New Guinea meet its international environment obligations and improve environmental governance at the national level.

Indonesia: The department collaborated closely with Indonesia on environment and heritage issues. A successful meeting of the Joint Working Group on the Environment held in October 2005 identified a number of areas for collaboration including sustainability education, hazardous waste and illegal trade in ozone depleting substances. Other areas for bilateral cooperation with Indonesia included climate change, illegal fishing and management of the traditional fishing area near Ashmore Reef, migratory marine species and waterbirds, management of world heritage areas and meteorological issues.

Japan: The department continued to work with Japan on a range of issues and engaged with Japanese counterparts at international meetings. Discussions covered topics such as sustainability education, migratory waterbird conservation, climate change, joint polar research activities and international whaling.

New Zealand: The department held bilateral environment policy discussions with New Zealand covering climate change and whales, chemicals management, biodiversity issues, sustainable forest management and engagement with Pacific island countries.

Pacific islands: Engagement with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme continued through Australia's involvement in the 16th annual meeting of officials in September 2005. Australia was commended by Pacific island countries for its assistance in pollution prevention.

Australia has assisted Pacific island countries to manage the threat posed by persistent organic pollutants to the environment and human health. Pacific countries have stockpiles of persistent organic pollutants in the form of agricultural pesticides, waste chemicals and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). The persistent organic pollutants are identified, collected and shipped to Australia for safe destruction. The department has made a large contribution to this project by arranging all transportation permits and approvals.

The department continued to assist Pacific Island countries in ratifying treaties, meeting obligations or building capacity to implement environment treaties. The department also provided specific advice and assistance on environmental governance, climate monitoring and prediction, chemicals and waste management, wetlands and biodiversity conservation, and the conservation of marine and migratory species.

Support for environment and heritage organisations

Taxation concessions

The Register of Environmental Organisations is a list of approved environmental organisations to which donations of money or property for the conservation of the natural environment are tax deductible. Statistics for 2004–05, which are the most recent available, show that the public donated more than \$69 million to environmental tax-deductible organisations to protect and enhance the natural environment. This is down by around \$4 million from the previous year, possibly as a result of the massive public response to fund-raising appeals following the 26 December 2004 tsunami.

During 2005–06 the department assisted 76 organisations interested in applying to join the register. The Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Assistant Treasurer approved the entry of 45 organisations on the register, and 11 organisations were removed at their own request. At 30 June 2006 the register contained 357 organisations, compared to 323 organisations at 30 June 2005.

Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations

The programme of Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations assists community-based environment and heritage groups to meet the administrative costs of their activities. In this year's funding round 144 organisations received a total of \$413 200. Twenty of these groups were offered multi-year grants for up to three years. In addition 28 voluntary organisations that were awarded multi-year funding in the previous year received their second year of support, totalling \$354 000 in 2005–06.



Environmental information

The department collects information and data to inform policy advice and to monitor progress on environmental protection.

2006 State of the Environment Report

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* requires that a report on the *State of the Environment* is released every five years.

The *State of the Environment Report* assesses the Australian environment under eight themes: atmosphere, coasts and oceans, inland waters, biodiversity, human settlements, natural and cultural heritage, land, and Australia's Antarctic Territories.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage appointed an independent State of the Environment Committee in early 2004 to prepare the 2006 *State of the Environment Report*. During 2005–06, the committee compiled its report, tested it with a group of experts and considered the comments from a number of peer reviewers. The department supported the committee's work by commissioning commentaries and papers. The committee expects to deliver the final report to the minister later in 2006.

Environmental Resources Information Network

The department's Environmental Resources Information Network develops new information products and improves existing products to support the department's core functions, and for use by other government agencies and the public.

The department updated the Species Profile and Threats database and the National Vegetation Information System, and developed a spatial analysis tool to help assess Community Water Grant applications.

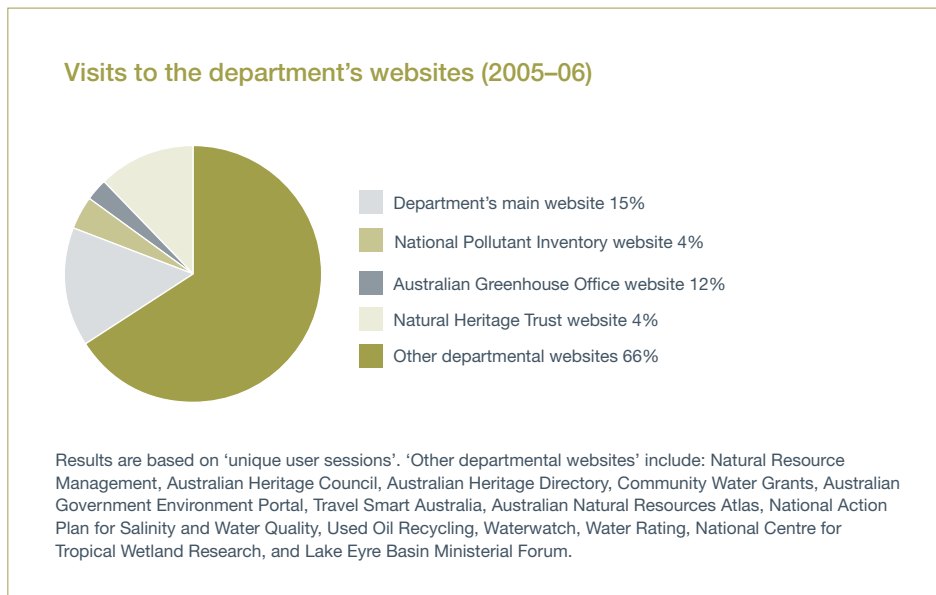
The department's biodiversity analysis tool allows users to produce maps of the distribution of species in terms of their diversity, endemism and taxonomic distinctiveness. The department presented the tool to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility Governing Board in Stockholm, Sweden, and at an international workshop on biodiversity information resources in Japan. It is also being used by the National Institute of Genetics in Mishima, Japan.

The department began work on the first stage of Australia's Resources Online which will allow users to access information on Australia's natural resources, including the monitoring and evaluation of management programmes.



The department has been developing *My Environment*, a web-based tool that enables people to generate a personal environment and heritage report for their home, school or property by entering their address details. *My Environment* allows people to search the department's national environmental databases to find information specific to their needs. It is expected to be available later in the year.

Online information



The department's websites provide public access to substantial holdings of information and knowledge. The websites meet the Australian Government's online accessibility standards.

During 2005–06 there were over 11 million visits to the department's websites, up by more than three million from last year. The most popular site was the department's main website (www.deh.gov.au) with over seven million visits. This was an increase of about two million from 2004–05 and was followed by the Australian Greenhouse Office site with nearly 1.7 million visits.



Public affairs

The department aims to communicate clearly, consistently and effectively with the Australian public, other agencies and governments, industry, community groups and non-government organisations. Community awareness of, and engagement with, the government's programmes and policies to protect the environment and heritage is central to their success.

Priorities for communications were to engage Australians more actively in:

- on-ground work and regional planning across Australia's 56 natural resource management regions
- encouraging wise use of water with the uptake of Community Water Grants
- participating in the government's campaign for whale conservation
- raising awareness of climate change and Australia's efforts to combat climate change and adapt to global warming
- raising awareness of the National Heritage List and of Australia's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Environmental education

The goal of the department's sustainability education activities is to develop the skills, knowledge and values that the Australian community needs to protect the environment.

The department continued to work with the Australian Government's advisory body on environmental education, the National Environmental Education Council, to implement the National Action Plan for Environmental Education. In conjunction with the council, the department began work on a new national action plan. The revised plan will take into account Australia's response to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014).

The department helped to prepare and disseminate the first National Environmental Education Statement for Australian Schools. The statement provides a model of good practice for delivering sustainability education. Sustainability education is being delivered in schools in all states and territories through the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative and other programmes.

The Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative helps schools to improve management of their resources and grounds (including energy, waste, water, biodiversity, landscape design, products and materials) and to integrate the principles of sustainable development into the curriculum and daily running of the school. For more information on sustainability education see www.deh.gov.au/education.

The department continued to support the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability at Macquarie University to carry out research on applied sustainability education. Under the national component of the Natural Heritage Trust, the department is commissioning \$1.7 million of research over two years (2006–2008). In 2005–06 the institute completed five research projects including a national review of environmental education and its contribution to sustainability in Australia, the effectiveness of air quality and coastal management education, whole-school approaches to sustainability, and models for professional development in the education of new teachers (for more information see www.aries.mq.edu.au).



