

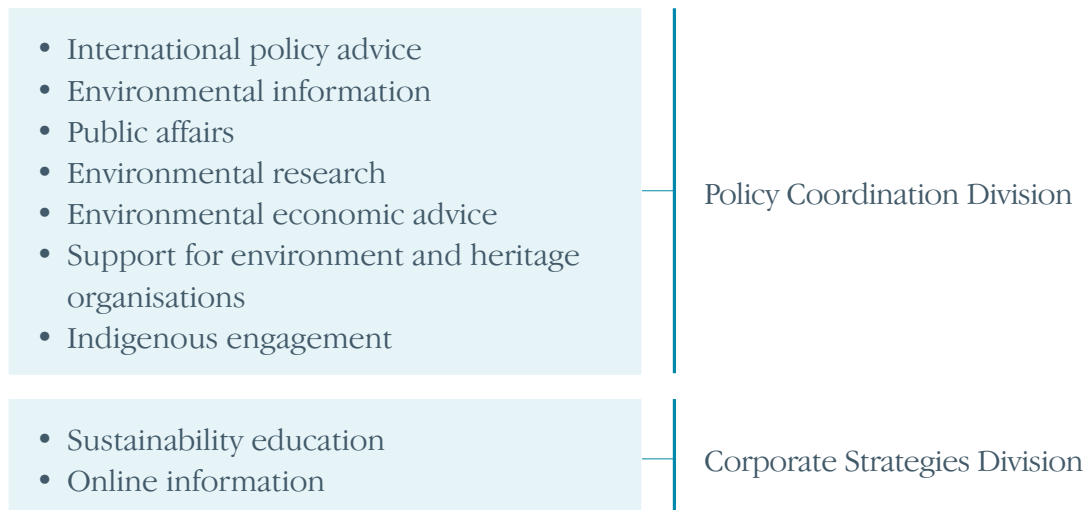


## Cross-cutting activities

# 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



## Objectives

- Represent Australia's international interests on environment, water, heritage and sustainable development issues
- Formulate policy and provide advice for the minister and officials attending international meetings and events
- Collect and store environmental information and data to inform policy advice and to monitor progress on environmental protection
- Communicate information to the public about the government's environment, climate change, water resources and heritage programmes and policies
- Carry out research to improve the capacity to understand and respond to current and emerging challenges facing Australia's environmental assets
- Provide economic advice and analysis to the department to inform policy and programme development
- Support community-based environment and heritage organisations to conserve and enhance the natural environment and Australia's heritage
- Support Indigenous people to manage their land and sea to protect environmental values
- Promote and support education for sustainable development



## International policy advice

The department represents Australia's interests on environment, water resources, heritage and sustainable development issues in the region, and in broader international forums. This work includes formulating policy and providing advice to the minister and officials attending international meetings and events.

In addition to active involvement in the range of issue-specific international forums detailed in earlier chapters of this report, 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 Co-operation and Development. The department also engaged in bilateral forums with selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

### Commission on Sustainable Development

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

In May 2003 at its 11<sup>th</sup> session, the commission agreed a work programme up to 2016–17. The work programme addresses issues related to specific themes over two-year cycles. In the most recent cycle, 2005–06 and 2006–07, the themes were energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution and the atmosphere, and climate change.

The 15<sup>th</sup> session of the commission was held in May 2007. The department provided case studies for the session which shared Australia's experience in implementing best practice initiatives covering the 2005–06 and 2006–07 themes. The meeting concluded without an agreed outcome, after the negotiated document was not supported by a few countries. In the absence of an agreed negotiated outcome, the chair of the commission prepared a summary of the meeting. The chair's summary is at [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd15/documents/chair\\_summary.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd15/documents/chair_summary.pdf).

Summaries of the Australian case studies are at <http://www.environment.gov.au/commitments/uncsd/index.html#case>.

### United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme's role is to provide leadership and promote partnerships for environmental protection.

The programme's 25<sup>th</sup> governing council meeting was held in February 2007. The major themes were globalisation and the environment, and international



environmental governance within the framework of United Nations reform measures. The department represented Australia's interests and the final decisions of the meeting reflected Australian objectives.

Sixteen draft decisions were adopted on issues such as the role of developing countries' cooperation in the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan, environmental management and protection in Africa, chemicals management, waste management, international environmental governance, the world environmental situation, environmental education, small-island developing states and gender equality. The 2008–2009 budget and programme of work, and the 2007–2012 water policy and strategy, were also adopted.

## Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The department represented Australia's interests at meetings of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Environment Policy Committee, which were held in October 2006 and March 2007. An officer of the department currently chairs this committee. The committee continued to direct studies on the OECD environmental outlook report, which includes scenario modelling to 2030. The report is scheduled to be finalised in late 2007. The committee also considered a draft report on the costs of inaction on key environmental challenges, which will continue to be developed. Aside from its work on the committee, the department participated in meetings of OECD environmental working groups and an expert group on climate change.

### OECD Environmental Performance Review of Australia

The department prepared Australia's contribution to the second OECD Environmental Performance Review of Australia. The review charts environmental progress since the first OECD review of Australia, published in 1998. Its major themes are environmental management, sustainable development and international cooperation.

In 2006–07 the department hosted a mission of OECD review members to meet with Australian Government departments, state, territory and local governments, Indigenous representatives and representatives from industry and research organisations. The department also coordinated field visits to key sites across the country.

The department prepared Australia's response to the first draft of the review, in consultation with other Australian Government departments and agencies, and all state and territory governments. An Australian delegation, led by the secretary, also participated in a major peer review of the Environmental Performance Review of Australia by international experts from other OECD member countries. The final review will be published in late 2007.



## Bilateral activities

The department works bilaterally on environment, water, heritage and sustainable development issues with government agencies in other countries, especially in the Asia–Pacific region.

**Indonesia:** The department collaborated with Indonesia on environment, climate change and heritage issues. A successful meeting of the Joint Working Group on the Environment held in April 2007 identified areas for increasing cooperation, including sustainability education, hazardous waste, environmental management of mining activities, climate change, air quality issues and water resource management.

**New Zealand:** The department held bilateral environment policy discussions with New Zealand in November and December 2006 covering climate change, 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 17<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of officials in September 2006. Chemicals management, climate change, biodiversity, marine resource management and phasing out ozone depleting substances were discussed.

The department continued to assist Pacific Island countries in meeting their obligations and 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.

In October 2006 a departmental officer commenced a two-year posting to the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. The officer will work with the programme’s executive to develop and implement a performance assessment framework.



## Environmental economics advice

The Environmental Economics Unit provides economic analysis and advice to divisions and work groups in the department to help them develop policies, programmes and advice that take into account environmental, economic and social considerations.

The unit assisted in preparing the government's response to the Productivity Commission inquiries into heritage and waste management. The unit also contributed to management of the \$10 million National Market Based Instruments Pilot Programme under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Ten of the 11 pilot projects approved under round 1 of the programme are now complete. A further nine pilot projects have been selected for funding under round 2.

The unit also provided advice to the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, the OECD Environmental Performance Review and the Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility. It provided advice on the use of market-based instruments in programme development for the Tasmanian Forests Conservation Fund, advice for projects associated with the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, and consulted on economic aspects of the National Plan for Water Security.

The establishment in May 2007 of the Environmental Economics research hub under the Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities programme will allow the unit to access broad environmental economics research to support policy and programme development. The hub will focus on four themes: establishing markets, climate change impacts, analytical enhancement, and environmental valuation. (See the section on environmental research in this chapter.)



## Environmental information

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

### 2006 State of the Environment report

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* requires that an independent report on the state of the Australian environment is provided to the federal environment minister every five years.

The third State of the Environment report was tabled in parliament in December 2006. The report assessed the Australian environment under eight themes: atmosphere, coasts and oceans, inland waters, biodiversity, human settlements, natural and cultural heritage, land, and the Australian Antarctic Territory. The report found mixed results, with big improvements in the condition of some aspects of the environment over the past five to 10 years, and significant declines in others.

Australia's urban air quality has improved and there has been a reduction in ozone depleting substances in the atmosphere. These improvements have come about because of legislation such as the *Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989* and the *Fuel Quality Standards Act 2000* and through efforts by governments and industry to reduce air emissions of major pollutants. (More information on air quality and ozone can be found in the chapter on human settlements and in the second volume of this set of annual reports.)

Biodiversity continues to be in decline in many parts of Australia despite the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and Australian Government investments to protect biodiversity through the Natural Heritage Trust, the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the National Reserve System and other programmes. The decline in biodiversity reflects habitat loss through past actions and is likely to continue for some time before remedial action can halt or reverse the decline.

Much of Australia's ocean appears to be in good condition, particularly the offshore waters. The coasts, estuaries and some nearshore waters adjacent to urban areas are degraded, and nationally, a number of Australia's fish stocks are at alarmingly low levels. The impacts on Australia's coastline have intensified due to increasing population and urbanisation. Per capita consumption of energy has increased and Australia's per capita greenhouse gas emissions remain high by global standards, but growth in net emissions has reduced over the last five years. Australia's cities, lands, biodiversity and irrigation-based industries are vulnerable to climate variability.

The full report is available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/index.html>.



## 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 develops products for other government agencies for public distribution.

This year the department embarked on a major exercise with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to develop a spatial information system to assist the Australian Government to set priorities for natural resource management funding.

The department upgraded its marine data and information holdings to underpin the negotiations on developing marine protected areas in Australian waters. It also increased its inland waters related data holdings and analysis capability to strengthen its capacity in water management issues.

Further improvements were made to the Species Profile and Threats database, the National Vegetation Information System, and the spatial analysis tools that help in assessing Community Water Grant applications.

The department is continuing to improve its spatial information delivery products and puts considerable effort into keeping its web geographic information system infrastructure and web mapping applications up to best practice standard.

The department has increased its use of audiovisual products to support information delivery, and this trend is expected to continue. The audiovisual unit has reorganised its work practices to cope with digital as opposed to analogue photographs and video.

*My Environment* was launched this year by the department as a web-based tool to enable 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. *My Environment* is at <http://www.environment.gov.au/erin/myenvironment/index.html>.

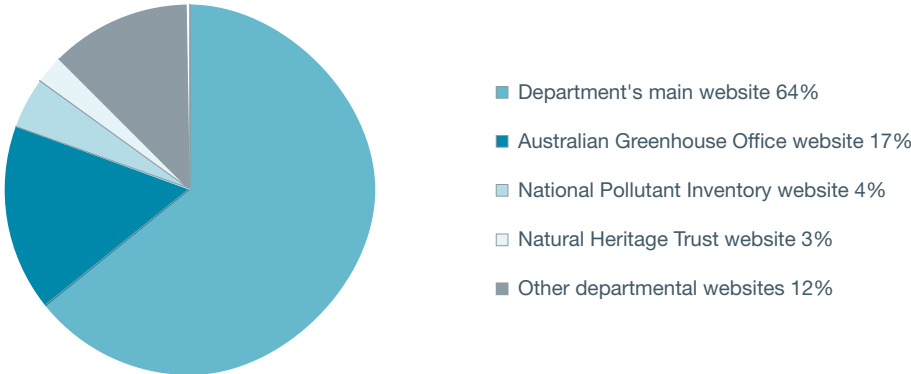
## Online information

The department's websites provide public access to substantial holdings of information. Throughout 2006–07 the department restructured, redesigned, and rewrote its websites to improve public access to online information. These upgrades cumulated in the launch by the minister of three completely redeveloped websites: the natural resource management website ([www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au)), the Natural Heritage Trust website ([www.nht.gov.au](http://www.nht.gov.au)) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality website ([www.napswq.gov.au](http://www.napswq.gov.au)).



In 2006–07 there were over 13 million visits to the department’s websites. The most popular websites were the department’s main website ([www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)) with over eight million visits and the Australian Greenhouse Office website ([www.greenhouse.gov.au](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au)) with over two million visits.

**Visits to the department’s websites (2006–07)**



Results are based on 'unique user sessions'. 'Other departmental websites' include Australian Alps National Parks, Australian Government Environment Portal, Australian Heritage Council, Australian Heritage Directory, Community Water Grants, Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum, National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research, Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme, Natural Resource Management, Sustainability in Government, Travel Smart Australia, Used Oil Recycling, Water Rating, Waterwatch.



Cross-cutting activities

## 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 environment, climate change, water resources and heritage programmes and policies is central to their success.

Priorities for communications in 2006–07 were to:

- raise awareness of Australia's efforts to combat climate change; and promote behavioural change across the community to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the inevitable changes associated with global warming
- raise awareness of the \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security
- encourage wise use of water with the uptake and promotion of Community Water Grants
- continue the domestic and international campaign for whale conservation
- raise awareness of the National Heritage List and of Australia's rich natural and cultural heritage
- raise awareness of amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and their ramifications.



## Environmental research

The department supports environmental research and data collection to inform the Australian Government's environment, climate change, water resources and heritage policy.

### Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities

This is a \$100 million, five-year programme to address critical gaps in knowledge and understanding of the pressures facing Australia's unique environment. It was launched in 2005.

#### Research hubs

In 2006–07, seven contracts totalling \$47.3 million for collaborative, multi-institutional research hubs or networks were signed. The research hubs are designed to foster professional partnerships between researchers, end users and policy makers. The hubs are:

- **Applied Environmental Decision Analysis:** (University of Queensland, \$7.6 million) to improve Australia's environmental planning, decision-making and policy approaches
- **Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge:** (Land and Water Australia, \$8.8 million) to improve management information for northern Australia's catchments
- **Landscape Logic—Linking Land and Water Management to Resource Condition Targets:** (University of Tasmania, \$8.8 million) to develop tools to improve the sustainability of natural resource management practices
- **Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science:** (Australian Antarctic Division, \$2.5 million) to address critical gaps in understanding about the conservation of Australia's 40 species of whales and dolphins, as well as dugongs and 10 seal species
- **Prediction and Management of Australia's Marine Biodiversity:** (University of Tasmania, \$6.6 million) to improve knowledge and management of marine diversity and develop tools to predict changes to biodiversity at both regional and national levels
- **Taxonomy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:** (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, \$6 million) to close the knowledge gaps in key Australian taxonomic groups which are important for environmental management
- **Environmental Economics:** (Australian National University, \$7 million) to bring together leading economic and social scientists to look at new and improved ways of valuing environmental assets, and determining the benefits and costs of different actions. The hub will work with other research hubs to coordinate environmental economics research being undertaken by the Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities programme generally.



## Fellowships and Significant Projects

Early in 2007 the department sought applications for funding under the Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities Fellowships and Significant Projects component and received 31 applications for fellowships and 233 applications for significant projects. The department and the Scientific Reference Group are assessing these applications and will make a decision on the successful applicants in 2007–08.

In 2006–07 one fellowship was approved—for an autonomous (acoustic) biodiversity monitoring system hosted by the University of Queensland. This project will develop a new bio-acoustic monitoring system to record and categorise a broad range of sounds including birds, bats, insects and other acoustically active animals. It will develop software that will allow users to identify and label sounds easily and efficiently.

## Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility

For five years from July 2005, \$40 million has been allocated for the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility to address research into environmental challenges facing north Queensland, particularly the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments, including tropical rainforests, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Torres Strait.

Scientific outputs are starting to flow from the facility's \$7.6 million 2006–07 annual research plan. There are 50 research projects under five research themes: status of ecosystems, risks and threats to ecosystems, halting and reversing decline of water quality, sustainable use and management, and enhancing delivery. Research institutions participating in the facility are James Cook University, the CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the University of Queensland, Griffith University, Central Queensland University, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Torres Strait Regional Authority and Yorke Island Council.

A conference was held in April 2007 to allow researchers and stakeholders to discuss research progress and information needs and to foster communication and cross-disciplinary cooperation.

## Results for performance indicators

Performance indicator	2006–07 results
<b>Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities (administered item) <sup>1</sup></b>	
Extent to which projects successfully contribute to furthering Australia's understanding of critical areas of environmental research	Research outputs will be delivered primarily in later years. The first of a series of departmental seminars by hub researchers was held on 14 March 2007
Percentage of projects delivered to a satisfactory standard in accordance with the terms and conditions of the project contract (Target: 100%)	100%. All progress reports due during 2006–07 were received and indicated satisfactory progress
Number of projects funded	Contracts to establish all 7 research hubs approved for funding have been signed

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities is an administered item under output 1.5; resources are reported in the chapter on human settlements.



## Support for environment and heritage organisations

The department helps community-based environment and heritage organisations to conserve and enhance the natural environment and Australia's heritage by providing assistance to join the Register of Environmental Organisations and through grants to meet their administrative costs.

### 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. In 2006–07 the department assisted 142 organisations interested in applying to join the register. The minister and the Assistant Treasurer approved the entry of 41 organisations on the register, and five organisations were removed at their own request. At 30 June 2007 the register contained 393 organisations, compared to 357 at 30 June 2006.

Statistics for 2005–06, which are the most recent available, show that the public donated more than \$106 million to environmental tax deductible organisations to protect and enhance the natural environment. In 2004–05 the public donated \$69 million.

### Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations

This programme assists community-based environment and heritage groups to meet their administrative costs. In this year's funding round 143 organisations received a total of \$363,316. Six of these organisations were offered multi-year grants for up to three years. In addition 48 organisations that were awarded multi-year funding in previous years received \$451,600 in 2006–07.



## Indigenous policy and engagement

The department implements Indigenous specific and mainstream programmes to support Indigenous engagement in land and sea management. These programmes align to the Australian Government's Blueprint for Action in Indigenous Affairs. The department spent approximately \$12.1 million in 2006–07 on these programmes. The department focused its efforts on contracting Indigenous groups to provide environment and heritage services to the department and on streamlining contractual and reporting demands on communities.

### Northern Territory Healthy Country, Healthy People Schedule

In September 2006 the Prime Minister and the Northern Territory Chief Minister signed the Northern Territory Healthy Country, Healthy People Schedule. The schedule supports Indigenous engagement in the sustainable management of land and seas in the Northern Territory.

The schedule sets out how to improve coordination and cooperation between the governments so that communities can engage in the sustainable management of land and sea. In the first year of the schedule, the department has taken a lead role in streamlining contracts with communities that draw together funding across agencies and years. Indigenous communities have valued the reduced administrative burden and the increased access to funding to achieve environmental outcomes on their land and seas. The contracts include multi-year, multi-programme single funding agreements and the opportunity to establish partnerships with other government organisations (such as with the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Indigenous Land Corporation, and the Aboriginal Benefit Account) to invest together.

### Working on Country

The department manages the Australian Government's new \$47.6 million over four years national Working on Country programme. This programme is providing job opportunities for Indigenous people to do environmental work across Australia. The programme aims to provide employment for up to 100 Indigenous people nationally in 2007–08, increasing to about 200 people in its fourth year (2010–11).

The Working on Country programme is providing funds for wages and equipment to implement environment management plans including in Indigenous Protected Areas, such as the desert environment in the Ngaanyatjarra Indigenous Protected Area, and the land and coastline in the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area, managed by the Yirralka ranger group.

The department works with Indigenous Coordination Centres to develop Shared Responsibility Agreements and Regional Partnership Agreements with environment



outcomes. The department has committed funding to eight Shared Responsibility Agreements to promote, protect and preserve Indigenous environment and heritage values. For example, in 2006–07 funding has been provided for the development of a visitor information/arts/interpretation centre in the old power station at Kalkaringi in the Northern Territory and for an interpretive walking trail for school children and tourists.

## Sustainability education

The department promotes and supports education for sustainable development. The department began developing a new National Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in December 2006. The plan aims to contribute to the achievement of a more sustainable Australia through community education and learning. The plan is being developed in the context of the government's strategy for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It will identify a range of actions for which the Australian Government will take responsibility, and will provide national leadership in encouraging actions by others. A discussion paper was released in April 2007 and was followed by extensive community consultation. The plan is scheduled to be completed in August 2007.

The new plan will supersede the existing National Action Plan for Environmental Education, released in July 2000. The existing plan has made significant improvements in the ability of Australia's education systems to contribute to sustainable development.

A range of initiatives including the establishment of the National Environmental Education Council, National Environmental Education Network and Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability have strengthened the role of education in promoting sustainable development nationally. The Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative, and the measurable educational, social and environmental improvements it continues to deliver, demonstrate the practical impact of the first plan. The first ever National Environmental Education Statement for Australian Schools, released in 2005, also shows the impact the plan has had within Australia's education system.

