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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

**Launch of the OECD Environmental Performance Review of Australia
Mural Hall, Parliament House**

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[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Good Morning parliamentary colleagues, your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people.

It gives me real pleasure to be here today to receive the OECD's Environmental Performance Review of Australia.

I would particularly like to thank Mr Lorents Lorentsen, the Director of the OECD Environment Directorate, for travelling from Paris to present this very important document.

Australia holds the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the highest regard. We are an active contributor, and we place a high value on their analytical expertise. We welcome this comprehensive review of Australia's environmental management policies. It's fair to say that it is a no-holds-barred examination of the environmental issues that have confronted Australia over the last 10 years.

My thanks to everyone who worked so hard on this review because it really is a very impressive effort to produce a report that examines such a range of environment issues across all levels of government in Australia.

Environmental management in Australia is the responsibility of all levels of government. I am pleased that this report addresses management issues that span the federal, state and territory, and local levels. It confirms the role we share in managing the environment.

Senator Wong and I will continue to work closely on a platform of co-operative federalism with the states and territories, and with the broad community, to meet the challenges and to make the most of our opportunities.

I also commend the OECD for seeking the views of industry, the non-government sector, the Indigenous community and research organisations in preparing this report and I extend a warm welcome to representatives from these sectors here today, it's good you can be here.

This report is timely as it covers most of the term of the previous Government, and provides Labor as a new Government with something of a blueprint for the future.

I am pleased that many of the report's 45 recommendations align with the new policy directions that this Government is pursuing. Many of the shortcomings the report identifies are those that we highlighted in Opposition.

I would like to focus on some examples.

The report places a high value on biodiversity, recommending that it be better protected by expanding the National Reserve System, considered in regional natural resource management activities and protected on private land. These are all themes that Labor is progressing.

Last Friday, I announced jointly with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry a new \$2.25 billion program called 'Caring for our Country', to restore the health of Australia's environment and build on improved land management practices.

The program focuses on six national priorities, and these align with much of the focus of the OECD report. The priorities are:

- the national reserve system;
- biodiversity and natural icons – including weed and feral animal control, threatened species;
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats;
- sustainable farm practices – including Landcare;
- natural resource management in remote and northern Australia; and importantly
- community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The previous system was not working efficiently, funding was scattered across the country to individual projects, often working in isolation from each other, it wasn't delivering for the tax payer or the environment.

Under Caring for our Country, regional natural resource bodies will remain key agents in delivery of the program. In fact, it will offer many regional bodies significant new opportunities. This is consistent with the report's recommendation to build the capacity of the 56 regional natural resource bodies so they can better deliver.

Caring for our Country will be backed by an annual business plan to ensure the investment is targeted to deliver the best results for the environment. It will also cut excessive administration costs and instead allow more funding to be provided directly to land managers.

And it's no coincidence that the report calls for the continued protection of the key natural assets such as the Great Barrier Reef. Like the Rudd Government, this report has recognised that to protect the economic value of assets like the Great Barrier Reef, we need to protect their ecological value. This is the approach that underpins Caring for our Country.

The OECD Environmental Performance Review also recommends that we strengthen policies and measures to enhance energy efficiency. Australia had definitely lagged behind other nations in the efficiency of our homes, businesses and industries. Between 1990 and 2004 we harnessed new opportunities at a rate of one-third of the OECD average.

Improving our energy efficiency is a major priority for this Government, and we're introducing many new initiatives to assist consumers become more energy efficient. These include:

- Driving efficiency gains in the built environment, including through more efficient housing design, and the Green Building Fund, which will help Australian businesses refurbish and recommission existing commercial office buildings.
- 10 Star Appliance Labelling and strengthening and accelerating standards for electrical appliances, helping households and businesses reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and save on energy bills through the latest cost-saving technologies.

- Low-interest Green Loans for household energy and water efficiency improvements, along with customised home energy audits.
- Rebates to install energy efficient insulation in rental properties, tackling the split incentive between tenants and landlords; and
- Grants of up to \$50,000 to make every school in Australia a solar school, providing every school student in Australia with working examples of solar power and energy and water efficiency.

And there still are other areas where we acknowledge that more work needs to be done. The report rightly points to the need to better incorporate sustainability considerations into the design and planning of our urban areas to optimise their multiple environmental, social and economic functions.

This is an extremely complex task, and I won't pretend we have all the answers. But we are committed to progressing this critical issue, and working with all levels of government to ensure long-term integrated urban planning for all major and regional cities, major industries and rural communities.

There are many other areas where work is progressing on recommendations as we speak. For example, I am aware that this morning the National Taxonomy Forum is launching a report outlining the key steps that need to be taken to improve our taxonomic capacity. I look forward to this work progressing.

Our response to this report will be genuinely 'whole-of-government' because environmental issues don't rest with one or two portfolios and these issues certainly don't stop at borders either – it's a whole-of-planet challenge that requires a whole-of-government response.

Once again, thank you all for attending and thank you to the OECD for this comprehensive review of Australia's environmental performance.

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