

International Year of freshwater

2003

factsheet

Managing Australia's Freshwater Resources

The Commonwealth Government plays a fundamental role in promoting the sustainable use, management and protection of Australia's freshwater resources, and in helping to address the widespread degradation of our precious land and water resources.

The Commonwealth plays a major role in managing Australia's water resources through a combination of water policy development and program implementation.

Water Reform Framework

In 1994, the Council of Australian Governments, consisting of the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association, agreed to implement a strategic framework to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry.

The Australian water reform framework recognises action is needed to halt the widespread degradation of our natural resources and minimise unsustainable use of our precious water resources.

The framework takes into account the unique characteristics of Australia's water resources and their contribution to the economic, social and environmental life of Australia. The reforms comprise diverse but interrelated requirements to generate an economically viable and environmentally sustainable urban and rural water industry.

National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

Much of Australia's landscape has critical salinity and water quality problems that require urgent action. Large areas and entire ecosystems are under serious threat.

Dryland salinity is ruining an estimated 2.5 million hectares. That is five per cent of Australia's cultivated land. This could expand to an area twice the size of Tasmania in the years ahead.

Australia's water quality is also deteriorating. About one third of our rivers need help to stay alive. Within 20 years, Adelaide's drinking water could exceed World Health Organisation standards on two out of every five days.

The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is a strategy for tackling salinity and improving water quality in 21 of Australia's worst affected regions.

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments have committed \$1.4 billion over seven years from 2001/2002 to implement the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The idea is for all levels of government to work together with local and regional communities in developing and applying solutions.

The National Action Plan focuses on regional plans developed by the local community. Investments are made in regional outcomes rather than in individual projects.

Regional plans vary from catchment to catchment, but all will include actions to manage regional water quality, salinity and biodiversity. Actions may include:

- Protection and rehabilitation of waterways, floodplains and wetlands;
- Engineered water quality improvements such as salt interception technologies and removal of some weirs and disused structures;
- Salinity prevention measures and drainage improvements; and
- Land use change or amalgamation of properties, where current operations are no longer available.

For further information on the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality please visit www.napswq.gov.au.

The Natural Heritage Trust

The Natural Heritage Trust was set up in 1997 to help to restore and conserve Australia's environment and natural resources. Since then, thousands of community groups have received funding for environmental and natural resource management projects.

As the largest environmental rescue plan ever undertaken in Australia, the Federal Government recognises the importance of this on-ground work and the need to continue to support it.



Natural Heritage Trust
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In the 2001 Federal Budget, the Government announced an additional \$1 billion for the Trust, extending the funding for five more years and ensuring the future of many important ongoing activities. Of this additional \$1 billion, the Government expects to spend at least \$350 million on measures to improve Australia's water quality.

Based on feedback from the Trust community, there is a fundamental shift in the Trust towards a more targeted approach to environmental and natural resource management in Australia. The Trust will deliver important resource condition outcomes including improved water quality, less erosion, improved estuarine health, improved vegetation management and improved soil condition.

Associated benefits will include skilled resource managers, communities playing a key role in their future direction, improved productivity and profitability, and enhanced protection and restoration of biodiversity. More people will take an active role in improving the management of natural resources, including those who are not directly involved in natural resource management activities.

While strongly supportive of existing community efforts, the Trust continues to take a long term, coordinated approach to tackling the major environmental challenges facing our nation. It does this by providing funding for environmental activities at a community level, a regional level, and a National/State level.

For further information on the Natural Heritage Trust please visit www.nht.gov.au.

Commonwealth Government involvement in other freshwater programs and links

The development and implementation of the National Water Quality Management Strategy:

www.affa.gov.au/nwqms

Support for activities under the Murray Darling Basin Initiative: www.mdbc.gov.au

Management of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative: www.gab.org.au

The Commonwealth Government also supports the sustainable use of Australia's freshwater resources through support for the Natural Resource Management, Murray-Darling Basin and Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Councils.

For further information on the Commonwealth Government Water Initiatives please visit the Environment Australia website at www.ea.gov.au and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia website at www.affa.gov.au.



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