

action 12: increased water, energy and materials efficiency

Significant amounts of natural resources are used in the creation of goods and services. Victoria needs to move towards an economy that uses resources more efficiently, just as we do with our time and money. Smarter and more efficient means of production, and the development of more durable and reliable consumer goods, can preserve limited resources, reduce the environmental impacts of resource use, and deliver economic benefits through lower costs to businesses and households.

What we will do

12.1 Recognising business leaders

We will develop a voluntary 5 Star certification program to recognise the sustainability and resource efficiency performance of Victorian businesses.

We recognise the importance of acknowledging market leaders and supporting companies that are taking a lead in the sustainability challenge. Businesses have indicated that accreditation systems would encourage more action to be taken.

This new program will be on the use of materials, energy and water, rather than just the solid waste focus of the Waste Wise Business Program. The certification to five different levels will recognise the different levels of excellence achieved by Victorian businesses, enable sustainable performance to be measured and better managed and demonstrate where Victorian businesses are leading the world in sustainable practices.

12.2 Recognising sustainable products

We will lead the process of engaging national stakeholders, brand owners and interested parties to develop an agreed, easily identifiable, accreditation system for products.

We will work towards the development of a product accreditation system that identifies company performance in the management of life cycle impacts, particularly covering materials efficiency of products over their full life cycle as well as end-of-life management. This may incorporate producer/retailer product stewardship and Design for Environment considerations, and aims to provide consumers with information at the purchase stage that enables them to consider the product's life cycle and prioritise products which can be reprocessed.

12.3 Sustainability in SMEs

We will make environmental sustainability a key focus in government workshop and grant programs to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The Government's Office of Small Business offers a number of workshops across Victoria aimed at informing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on issues relating to starting and growing a small business. These workshops focus on issues ranging from accessing finance to effective business planning. Over 200 workshops are scheduled for 2006, and these workshops will include an increased focus on the potential for environmental sustainability and resource efficiency initiatives to deliver cost savings and increased productivity to SMEs.

The Government will use its existing Business Victoria website to improve targeting of information about environmental sustainability programs and grants to SMEs (www.business.vic.gov.au/sustainability).

12.4 Eco-innovation hub

We will invest \$1.5 million in an Eco-Innovation Hub to link the smartest brains in our universities with real-world applications for large sustainability improvements.

Innovation can also be about more than developing new technologies – many of the technologies that will enable vast improvements in sustainability already exist. Major opportunities exist in applying these technologies to sustainability and using them to reduce environmental impact, for example using information technology to improve monitoring of environmental quality and production efficiency.

By investing \$1.5 million in the establishment of an Eco-Innovation Hub in Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Centre for Science Innovation and Society, we will strengthen the vital link between research and the real-world applications for large sustainability improvements.

We will do this by linking university students across a range of design disciplines to sustainability projects with industry, government, communities and a sustainable cities network. Student research in key areas will be focused on sustainable outcomes.

12.5 Science and technology for environmental sustainability

Victoria's capabilities and needs in emerging technologies and innovation present opportunities to develop effective responses to environmental challenges that also increase jobs, private sector investment and export opportunities. Environmental sustainability will become a key consideration in science, technology and innovation across the spectrum of Victoria's capabilities. For example, Victoria will participate in, and promote the development and adoption of, exciting technological advances in areas such as biofuels, nanotechnology and agricultural biotechnology to secure the environmental benefits that they are expected to yield.

I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use our natural resources, but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.

Theodore Roosevelt, speech,
Washington, D.C., 1900

12.6 Enhanced sustainability in new investment

We will invest \$3.5 million to encourage companies investing in Victoria to adopt sustainability best practice.

This program will encourage companies considering investment or expansion in Victoria to adopt technologies and processes that deliver enhanced sustainability outcomes. This action will expand the successful greenhouse-specific investment facilitation program, with \$3.5 million in funding to provide matched incentives for investment in water saving and waste management as well as greenhouse friendly technologies. It will encourage companies establishing new business or premises in Victoria to exceed the sustainability standards required by the EPA or other regulatory regimes.

12.7 Responding to community expectations of mining

We will invest \$2.7 million in Victoria's earth resource sectors to achieve better environmental outcomes and more community involvement.

A major boom in the resources sector is underway, with over \$2.5 billion in new resource development projects coming on line in provincial Victoria in the last year alone. That is bringing new pressures and new issues for communities and the environment.

This initiative will minimise conflict by ensuring the resources sector talks with communities at an early stage and consults on how it will improve environmental and social outcomes and protect rural amenity through sustainable development practices.

12.8 Reducing emissions from the agriculture sector

We will invest \$400,000 to support research into greenhouse emissions from Victorian agricultural activities, with a particular focus on the dairy industry.

Victorian agriculture accounts for 13.5 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions each year (the third largest contributor after stationary generation and transport). Methane and nitrous oxide make up 1 per cent of emissions but they are more than 300 times more powerful pollutants than carbon dioxide. These emissions can be reduced through more efficient use of resources such as fertiliser and water (through changed irrigation practices), as well as being affected by animal treatment (inc immunisation). These areas are priorities for research and changed practice.

This is the next phase in the partnership work with Primary Industries Research Victoria to work to reduce methane emissions from cows and nitrous oxide emissions from fertiliser use.