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## 3 Government approaches to ESD

This chapter describes Australian governments' roles and approaches in implementing ESD. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and its relationships to other governments. Further, it discusses whole of government approaches for incorporating ESD into decision making. The chapter concludes with the Commission's assessment of government approaches to ESD.

### 3.1 The Commonwealth's ESD responsibilities

The Commonwealth's responsibilities are to develop policies and programs that are ESD consistent and provide leadership to others in the application of ESD principles. The National Farmers' Federation (sub. 22, p. 3) argued that the Commonwealth's major roles are to:

... ensure that the principles of [ESD] ... are reflected in national policies and measures [and] ... coordinate development of and ... present consistent and strategic national policy. Implementation and delivery is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments.

Activities undertaken by governments are shared between the Commonwealth and the State, Territory and Local Governments. The Australian Constitution is the starting point for determining at which level of government different ESD responsibilities lie. Under the Constitution, the Commonwealth has powers over defence, foreign affairs, trade and commerce, taxation, customs and excise duties, pensions, immigration and postal services. Other powers are left to the States, but federal law prevails where there is a conflict over coexisting powers. Clearly, the Commonwealth has significant economic and social management responsibilities embodied in such areas as the federal budget, and tax and industry policy formulation.

The situation is less clear for the Commonwealth's ecological and environmental management responsibility. Currently, sustainable development and environmental responsibilities are derived indirectly from constitutional obligations. In addition, the Commonwealth has a duty, as have all governments, to act as a custodian of the environment for future generations. This duty is implicit in the activities undertaken by governments although it is not enshrined in legislation. It is also reflected in the inter-generational equity components of the National Strategy for Ecologically

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Sustainable Development (NSED) and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE).

At present the Commonwealth's sustainable development and environmental responsibilities are largely related to international commitments (box 3.1), nature protection and biological diversity, environmental impact assessment, marine issues, trade in hazardous wastes and Antarctic issues (OECD 1998). Even the existing legislative framework for Commonwealth environmental management does not make explicit reference to ESD principles (although this will change under the proposed Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill) (see below).

In some cases, the market mechanism is able to ensure that all economic, environmental and social values are included in the decision set. In these cases, government is not required to ensure that ESD issues are considered. An example was provided by the Department of Communications and the Arts (resp. 5) which suggested that, although not always required by legislation, it is in the best interests of telecommunication carriers to consult with land owners and affected communities in relation to environmental impact, as part of good business, when undertaking infrastructure projects.

**Box 3.1      Australia's commitment to international sustainable development efforts**

Australia is a member of several international organisations that promote sustainable development (for example, the United Nations and World Trade Organization) and participates in a number of significant multilateral environment agreements integral to sustainable development. Amongst these are the:

- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Kyoto Protocol for greenhouse gas emission reductions;
- Convention on Biological Diversity and the Biosafety Protocol;
- Prior Informed Consent Convention governing trade in hazardous chemicals;
- Montreal Protocol on ozone depleting substances; and
- Basel Convention on transboundary movement of hazardous wastes.

In view of the increased profile of international environmental and sustainable development issues, Australia has also appointed an Ambassador for the Environment to represent Australian interests internationally.

*Source:* DFAT (sub. 37).

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## **Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill**

The Commonwealth Government has sought to incorporate ESD principles in the proposed Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Bill which is currently before Parliament. The proposed legislation is one of the Commonwealth's major attempts to address ESD issues. Arising from an in-principle agreement by the Council of Australian Governments on Commonwealth/State roles and responsibilities for the environment, the proposed Bill will replace five pieces of existing environmental legislation. Among other things, it seeks to define more clearly the Commonwealth's ecological management role. It focuses Commonwealth involvement on matters of national environmental significance and provides a mechanism to strengthen intergovernmental cooperation and minimise duplication (Hill 1998a) (box 3.2).

The Minerals Council of Australia (sub. 16, p. 2) welcomes the reforms associated with the proposed Bill. It stated that it is an:

... opportunity to implement the principles of sustainable development. There is significant potential within the framework proposed in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill to reduce duplication between the Commonwealth and States and streamline project approvals. The proposed accreditation of State processes and the codification of matters of national environmental significance could be a substantial step forward in the implementation of the IGAE and move towards sustainable development.

However, the Council is also cautious. For example:

... a large range of actions and decisions, including the decision on final project approval, are taken by the Commonwealth Environment Minister, alone and without appeal. The Council considers that the focus of environmental assessment should be to assess the environmental implications of proposals, identify alternatives/options to minimise environmental impacts and provide the basis for setting environmental conditions. Accordingly, environmental assessment and decisions on environmental acceptability are but one of a large number of relevant impacts that require assessment in decisions relating to approval of development proposals. ... A whole-of-government approach to such decision making should be adopted to accommodate environmental, economic, social and other factors, and thereby contribute to implementation of the principles of sustainable development. (sub. 16, p. 3)

However, it is the case that under the Bill the Environment Minister is required to invite other relevant ministers to comment on a proposed action. The Bill also requires the Minister to consider social and economic factors, as well as environmental issues, and to take the principles of ESD into account.

Other participants also expressed some reservations with the proposed Bill in its current form. For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation (sub. 27, p. 2)

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stated that the Bill, in terms of ESD, is regressive in many regards. It considers that this is because the Bill sets up:

**Box 3.2      Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conversation Bill**

The proposed Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998 (the Bill) is a significant attempt to incorporate ESD principles into all Commonwealth agency decision making processes. Once passed it will repeal five pieces of current legislation, better define the Commonwealth's role as an environmental manager, and improve coordination in management between the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

Specifically the Bill aims to:

- promote protection of the environment, especially those areas of national significance;
- promote ESD through the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
- promote the conservation of biodiversity;
- promote a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment; and
- assist in the cooperative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities.

The Bill will limit the Commonwealth's involvement to situations when an action is likely to, or will, have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance. Matters of national environmental significance covered by the Bill are:

- world heritage properties;
- Ramsar wetlands of international importance;
- nationally threatened species and communities;
- migratory species protected under international agreements;
- nuclear actions;
- the Commonwealth marine environment; and
- and any additional matter specified by regulation.

Importantly, under the Bill, the Minister for Environment may enter into bilateral agreements with the States or Territories which allow the Commonwealth to accredit or rely on state or territory approval processes for actions impacting on matters of environmental significance.

*Source:* Hill (1998a).

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... a framework for devolving environmental powers to the states, and even possibly to corporations and individuals, through bilateral agreements, conservation agreements and other mechanisms, without specifying standards and other than the broadest benchmarks and principles. It directly contradicts ESD by requiring the Environment Minister to take all social and economic factors into account in regards to decisions on environmental impact, but limits environmental factors to a narrow range of defined issues. This uses the guise of integration, but makes a mockery of it ...

However, Environment Australia (sub. DR68) submitted that the application of bilateral agreements is subject to a number of requirements in the Bill. For example, the Minister can enter into a bilateral agreement relating to listed threatened species and ecological communities only if satisfied that the agreement:

- accords with the objects of the Bill;
- is not inconsistent with Australia's international obligations (such as the Biodiversity Convention);
- will promote the survival and/or enhance the conservation status of each species or community to which it relates; and
- is not inconsistent with any recovery plan for the species or community or a threat abatement plan.

The Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet in Western Australia (sub. 20) argued that one consequence of the Bill was increased involvement by the Commonwealth in state environmental matters, which could potentially duplicate and override state government processes for assessment, approval, monitoring and enforcement.

However, Environment Australia (sub. DR68) noted that the trigger for Commonwealth assessment and approval was the matters that have national environmental significance. Environment Australia also noted that the Bill includes mechanisms for minimising duplication, such as accreditation of state systems and processes through bilateral agreements.

## **Commonwealth's role in ESD implementation by other governments**

All governments are responsible for the implementation of ESD principles. As the national government, the Commonwealth has an added responsibility to provide leadership to other governments in the implementation of ESD principles by requiring its own agencies to adopt such principles. In doing so, the Commonwealth can demonstrate processes that work effectively, facilitate application and, in some cases, provide incentives for the adoption of ESD principles.

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### Box 3.3      **Difficulties in applying ESD principles — the case of Hurstville City Council**

Hurstville City Council considers that there are several factors hindering its incorporation of ESD principles, including:

- a lack of understanding of what ESD means;
- concern about economic impacts as 'development' is viewed as representing progress while 'lack of development' is viewed as stagnation;
- conflicting information and actions through state government policies, such as building motorways while extolling the virtues of public transport;
- town planning systems which are not outcome based and not holistic;
- focus on the natural environment and not the urban environment so that ESD is seen as a 'parks and gardens' exercise;
- absence of common performance indicators, set within an overall strategic plan, to enable timely and relevant feedback for comparison and evaluation; and
- division of the city into small uncoordinated units.

*Source:* Hurstville City Council (sub. 25)

The Commonwealth is responsible for national policy issues. Many of the activities requiring national coordination are implemented by State, Territory and, in some cases, Local Governments. Examples include aspects of environmental conservation, education, health and some aspects of transport. The Commonwealth and other levels of government have already developed mechanisms designed to deal with these issues which are discussed in chapter 7.

In terms of their roles and responsibilities, the State and Territory Governments currently administer just under 150 separate pieces of environmental legislation. These are broad ranging and cover areas such as:

- land, water and air pollution;
- waste disposal;
- environmental planning and protection; protection of endangered species;
- forestry, wildlife, water and catchment management;
- and natural resource usage (OECD 1998).

Furthermore, local governments have a considerable influence on environmental management - particularly with respect to implementation. They are responsible for many of the day to day government decisions affecting many aspects of the environment. Local governments undertake the majority of planning, land use and

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development decisions, delivery of services such as waste management, pollution and noise control, and management of parks and gardens.

There are examples where institutional and policy frameworks for local government have changed to incorporate ESD principles. In New South Wales, for example, the *Local Government Amendment (Ecologically Sustainable Development) Act 1997* includes provisions relating to ESD principles. Among other things, it expressly requires local councils, councillors and council employees to have regard to ESD principles.

However, some city councils experience difficulties in implementing ESD principles. For example, the Hurstville City Council (box 3.3) listed several factors that hinder its incorporation of ESD principles (sub. 25, p. 1).

On the other hand, Greening Australia (sub. 6, p. 3) alluded to several examples, from a number of regional centres in different states, where considerable gains have been made in the practical application of sustainable development principles at the local or regional level:

... there are a couple of dozen efforts around Australia that we found (or were directed to) which to a greater or lesser extent fit the bill as SRD [sustainable regional development] initiatives ie. an explicit or evolving focus on 'sustainability' at the regional scale ...

Noone is claiming that any of the above are perfect, however, collectively they represent a huge public/private/community/government investment in a 'sustainable quest' where the stakes are obviously high. Helping the players involved learn from their experiences and share their suggestions/challenges etc ... pays tribute to their efforts and makes economic, social and environmental sense!

This suggests that there could be significant potential gains from more collaboration or sharing of experience and expertise in ESD implementation between, as well as within, different levels of government.

## **3.2 Whole of government approaches for incorporating ESD**

Implementing ESD is a shared responsibility. Implementing effective ESD consistent programs requires extensive consultation, information exchange and partnerships. Its application is undertaken through complex relationships between levels of government (as discussed above), industry and the community. It also requires explicit recognition of intertemporal impacts.

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So far Australian governments have implemented several initiatives designed to improve the coordination of decision making processes within and between different levels of government. The Commonwealth is prominent in these initiatives. The effect of such initiatives is to reduce the possibility of duplicating policy decisions, promote consistent application of ESD principles (where relevant and appropriate) and eliminate inconsistent decision making processes. To date such initiatives include:

- the IGAE;
- the NSESD;
- ministerial councils;
- statutory authorities (with ESD objectives enshrined in their legislation);
- joint agency ventures; and
- regional organisations.

Although the Commonwealth has set in place a number of initiatives, further work may be required to develop relationships and links to improve the application of ESD principles. For example, environmental health is one area where the Department of Health and Aged Care (sub. 10, p. 3) believes that lack of cooperation is an impediment to producing better outcomes:

... environment protection legislation often offers a stronger and wider range of controls and penalties than does public health legislation. However, health's ability to access and use environment legislation is hampered by the lack of cooperation between the sectors and by the lack of explicit acknowledgment of health in environment legislation.

Further, the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet in Western Australia (sub. 20, p. 2) stated:

The Commonwealth's role in intergovernment co-ordination is not clearly defined and its role tends to vary depending on the nature of the intergovernmental committee or issue involved.

Finally, the Australian Industry Group considered (sub. 12, p. 2) that:

One of the key areas of concern ... with respect to the implementation of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) is the range of Government Departments which have active ESD policies and the apparent lack of coordination between these entities and the lack of a clear set of priorities among the various programs and policies.

There is also a lack of coordination between the Commonwealth and other levels of Government. This is of particular concern as a large proportion of environmental regulation which directly impacts on business is implemented at the State and local Government levels.

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Coordination issues are discussed further in chapter 7.

## **Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment**

The IGAE was signed by the Commonwealth, States and Territories and a representative of local government in 1992. It aims to facilitate a coordinated approach to the environment. The agreement also provides a mechanism to:

- define the roles of each level of government;
- reduce intergovernmental environmental disputes;
- provide greater certainty in government and business decision making; and
- provide better environmental protection (COAG 1992).

To achieve its objective, the IGAE sets out four main principles to inform government policy making and program implementation:

- the precautionary principle - where the threat of environmental damage is serious or irreversible, a lack of scientific proof of damage is not a defence against action to prevent the degradation;
- inter-generational equity - the health of the environment should not be eroded for the benefit of the present generation at the expense of future generations;
- conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity; and
- improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms - such as including environmental factors in valuation of assets and services, introducing polluter pays principles, and introducing market mechanisms to maximise benefits (COAG 1992).

Further, the agreement outlines three ways that governments have agreed to incorporate environmental issues into their decision making processes. First, ensure that environmental issues are considered when formulating policies. Second, ensure that matters which significantly affect the environment are properly examined. Finally, ensure that measures adopted are cost effective and not disproportionate to the significance of the environmental problem.

However, the Ministry of Premier and Cabinet in Western Australia (sub. 20, p. 1) considered that the IGAE has failed to meet some of its objectives:

Under the terms of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) ratified in 1992, the States and Territories were to be accredited for environmental assessment and heritage matters. This has not happened.

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As discussed earlier, accreditation of state/territory processes is an issue covered in the proposed Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill.

## **National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development**

The NSESD is a voluntary code which proposes a number of strategies for Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Governments to address sustainable development issues. As discussed earlier, the goal of the strategy is to ensure that all development improves quality of life, both now and in the future, without compromising sustainable ecological processes.

The NSESD covers a number of key industry sectors that rely on natural resources including agriculture, manufacturing, mining, tourism, and energy. It also identifies strategies for a range of intersectoral issues such as biological diversity, environmental impact assessment, pricing and taxation, and changes to government institutions and machinery. These are relevant to actions in several of the key industry sectors (CoA 1992b).

The strategy is designed to apply not only to governments but also to business, community organisations and individuals. It also outlines a number of challenges for government. One particular challenge refers to institutional changes designed to alter government processes. A number of objectives to meet the challenge are listed subsequently (box 3.4). Specifically, governments are required to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the development, implementation and integration of ESD related policies, clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each level of government, avoid duplication of functions, and establish effective processes for cooperation between governments.

Despite these objectives, some believe that the NSESD has failed to have a significant impact. For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation (sub. 27, p. 7) stated:

There is little evidence that the National Strategy is reflected in the integration of a commitment to sustainability into all decision-making.

Until 1997, the Intergovernmental Committee for Ecologically Sustainable Development was responsible for reviewing progress in implementing the NSESD and reporting to the Council of Australian Governments. It reported once, in 1996, for the period 1993–95, but was disbanded in 1997. Currently, no organisation is filling this role.

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**Box 3.4      Challenges for government institutions and machinery in the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development****Challenge**

To establish appropriate institutional arrangements for the inclusion of ESD principles in policy formulation and policy making processes.

**Objective 16.1**

To ensure Cabinet processes facilitate the integration of economic, environmental and social considerations into decision making.

**Objective 16.2**

To incorporate ESD principles as fundamental guidance for relevant government authorities involved in economic, environmental and social decision making.

**Objective 16.3**

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the development, implementation and integration of ESD related policies, clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each level of government, avoid duplication of functions and establish effective processes for cooperation between governments.

**Objective 16.4**

To improve the level of consideration given to ESD principles in government purchasing policies and practices.

*Source: CoA (1992b, pp. 66–68).*

## **Ministerial councils**

Ministerial councils typically comprise ministers from similar areas across Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. As such these councils are able to facilitate cooperative and integrated policy and program strategies in relation to various issues. A number of existing councils are required to apply ESD principles so that competing stakeholder values can be taken into account. These include the:

- Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC);
- National Environment Protection Council (NEPC);
- Agricultural and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ);
- Australian and New Zealand Minerals and Energy Council (ANZMEC); and
- Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

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ANZECC is the main ministerial coordination committee related to the environment. It consists of Commonwealth, State, Territory, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea ministers responsible for the environment and conservation. The Commonwealth provides the secretariat through Environment Australia. The ministerial council's aim is to provide a forum for the exchange of information and experience, and to develop coordinated policies on national and international environment and conservation issues (ANZECC 1997).

However, according to the Australian Industry Group (sub. 12, p. 2), ANZECC could be used far more effectively to:

... ensure coordination and consistency in the application of the principles of ESD. Instead this body generates its own approach, as evidenced by its recent deliberations on a National Strategy for Cleaner Production, a process which appeared to take little account of other Intergovernmental processes and appeared to repeat many of the efforts of State-based environmental agencies.

The NEPC was established under the IGAE and is a statutory body comprising ministers from each jurisdiction. It has the power to establish, monitor and report on national environmental protection measures (NEPMs) dealing with a number of specific environmental issues such as air quality, noise, hazardous wastes and vehicle emissions.

The Minerals Council of Australia (sub. 16, p. 2, *italics in original*) argued that while it supports NEPM goals to provide equivalent standards of environmental amenity for all Australians, to date the processes have not:

- integrated economic and environmental considerations in impact assessments;
- considered impacts on international competitiveness;
- provided sufficient technical analysis to constitute a “*proper examination of matters which significantly affect the environment*”; and
- used a risk-based approach to balance economic and environmental objectives in the most cost-effective way.

These weaknesses are, in part, due to a failure to recognise the full breadth of environmental, economic and social considerations associated with NEPMs. To date, NEPM development has focussed strongly on environmental issues. This is reflected through the inclusion only of Ministers from environment portfolios on the NEPC which does not represent a sufficiently broad decision-making platform to ensure that principles of sustainable development are properly implemented in NEPMs.

The Australian Industry Group (sub. 12, p. 2) expressed similar concerns stating that:

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[although the] National Environment Protection Council is charged with the responsibility of implementing ESD in Australia, this is not happening.

ARMCANZ aims to develop integrated and sustainable agricultural and land and water management policies, strategies and practices for the benefit of the Australian community. Ministers from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments responsible for agriculture, soil, water (both rural and urban) and rural adjustment policy are members along with the relevant minister(s) from New Zealand.

ANZMEC aims to promote the general welfare and progressive development of the Australian minerals industry and to consult on the nation's energy needs, resources and policies. It consists of State and Territory, Commonwealth and New Zealand ministers with responsibilities for minerals and energy related matters. More specifically, ANZMEC's (sub. 11, p. 1) objectives include:

- suggesting constructive and compatible changes to the basic legislative and policy framework for the sustainable development of mineral and energy resources;
- improving coordination and, where appropriate, the consistency of policy regimes; and
- providing an opportunity for information and policy exchange.

The Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture aims to provide a forum for consultation and the development of policies which are consistent with the objectives of all represented governments on aspects of fisheries, aquaculture and forestry and, where appropriate, to develop integrated strategies and policies. Ministers from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are members along with the relevant minister(s) from New Zealand.

Other ministerial councils which must apply ESD principles in considering competing stakeholder values include the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council, the New South Wales World Heritage Properties Ministerial Council, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Ministerial Council, the Wet Tropics Ministerial Council and the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council.

## **Statutory authorities**

The Commonwealth has helped create several organisations with responsibilities for providing integrated policy solutions for the efficient and sustainable use of particular natural resources. This approach tends to cover several portfolios in multiple jurisdictions, bringing together the key stakeholders to produce integrated

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ESD outcomes. Examples of this approach include establishment of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission helps promote and coordinate effective planning and management of natural resources in the whole Murray-Darling basin. It comprises representatives from environmental and natural resource use departments and agencies of the Commonwealth, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland (MDBC 1997).

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority aims to promote protection, wise use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef in perpetuity. Activities managed by the authority cover wide ranging areas. Over 20 government agencies and other key stakeholders are listed as lead agencies in the authority's 25 year strategic plan (GBRMPA 1994).

### **Joint agency ventures**

A number of initiatives undertaken by the Commonwealth combine the efforts of several agencies to produce ESD consistent policies or programs. Some major initiatives in this regard include the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), Australian Greenhouse Office, regional forest agreements (RFAs) and the National Environmental Health Strategy.

The NHT is a Commonwealth program established under the *Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act 1997*. The Commonwealth Government is committed to spending \$1.25 billion between 1996–97 and 2000–01 under the NHT. The overall aim of the NHT is to achieve the conservation, sustainable use and repair of Australia's natural environment. The program, to run for five years, is administered in partnership by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Australian Greenhouse Office is the Commonwealth Government's primary agency on greenhouse gas matters and is responsible for coordination of national climate change policy (see appendix D). The office was formed from representatives of the then Departments of the Environment; Industry, Science and Tourism; and Primary Industries and Energy.

The RFA process provides the framework for forest conservation and sustainable forest management for particular regions for a period of 20 years. Four RFAs have been finalised to date and a further eight are expected to be completed by the end of 1999. RFAs are developed and implemented jointly by the relevant State/Territory Government and Commonwealth agencies (including the Department

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of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Environment Australia), following extensive consultation with local stakeholders.

Human health and environment are interdependent. Currently, responsibility in this area rests across the three levels of government. The Department of Health and Aged Care argued in its submission that the management of environmental health issues is fragmented. A National Environmental Health Strategy is being developed to address environmental health management issues. The Department of Health and Aged Care considers that an important objective of this approach will be to integrate the efforts of the Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local Government agencies, industries and business, the non government sector, the health and scientific communities and the general public (sub. 10).

## **Regional organisations**

Several initiatives have been undertaken at the regional level to pursue sustainable development objectives and to further the community, economic or environmental aspirations of people in specific regions. According to Greening Australia (sub. 6, p. 5), examples of regional organisations include:

- Commonwealth &/or State/Territory &/or Local government supported Regional Development Boards;
- Regional natural resources management organisations. For example, SA Catchment Water Management Boards, Vic Catchment Management Authorities, NSW Catchment Management Trusts and Catchment Management Committees;
- Regional coalitions of Local governments;
- Regional employment and training organisations;
- Regional organisations created to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;

[There are a number of] ... [h]ybrids of the previously mentioned organisations, or new organisations with a specific focus on multi-dimensional SRD [sustainable regional development]. For example, Cape York Regional Advisory Group (Qld), Dawson Valley Development Association (Qld), Shepparton Sustainable Regional Development Board (Vic), Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group (Qld/NT/SA/NSW), TeamWest Steering Group in Western Sydney (NSW).

The preceding discussion highlights a range of mechanisms available to facilitate ESD implementation at different levels of government and at community and industry level. These mechanisms have emerged largely in response to the recognition that ESD requires cooperation between all levels of government and with other key stakeholders, including industry and the broader community.

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### 3.3 The Commission's assessment

ESD represents an extremely broad policy agenda, one which transcends portfolios and levels of government. Sound application of ESD principles in policy formulation involves sharing environmental and sustainable development responsibilities between Commonwealth agencies and all levels of government. However, in some instances markets create incentives that automatically account for ESD principles, particularly when economic activity will significantly impact on a community or the environment. In others government, through legislation, is required to consider the interests of different dimensions of ESD. One participant, Smart Futures Group (sub. 31, p. 1), described the ESD task as:

ESD is not a major discrete policy area. Rather it is a fundamental platform on which all decisions are based. ESD has to be incorporated into our criteria for policy setting, planning, funding, and evaluating outcomes. It is a long term commitment and appropriate measures must be set up ...

The Commonwealth cannot achieve ESD goals and objectives alone. Partnerships with other levels of government, the private sector and the wider community are essential as the effective implementation of ESD is a shared responsibility. However, a prerequisite for effective and efficient consultation and cooperation in promoting ESD is to ensure that roles and responsibilities of the participants, including governments, are clearly defined.

To date the Commonwealth has accepted significant management responsibility for facilitating and implementing ESD. In addition, the Commonwealth has a responsibility to provide leadership to other governments in the implementation of ESD. In conjunction with other Australian governments the Commonwealth has implemented several initiatives. The NSESD is one such initiative. As discussed earlier, it is a voluntary code designed to address ESD implementation not only by governments but also by business and the wider community. Continuing gains can be made through more collaboration or sharing of experience and expertise in ESD implementation between, as well as within, different levels of government.