

EPA BOARD'S RECOMMENDATIONS ACCEPTED

The EPA Board was today heartened to learn the Northern Territory Government had accepted its report and recommendations on the form and function of an Environment Protection Authority.

EPA Board Chair, Professor Gordon Duff, said the Government's acceptance of the report laid a foundation for greater environmental protection and ecologically sustainable development for the Territory.

Professor Duff said the report *Towards an Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for the Northern Territory*, reflected the sentiments of the extensive community consultation held last year.

"The report puts the Environment Protection Authority in a strategic role, rather than duplicating the operational responsibilities of existing agencies," Prof Duff said.

"It recommends legislating to establish an independent Environment Protection Authority, which would provide high level advice to Government about protecting the environment, in consultation with the community.

"This advice will enable Government and business to make better decisions about ecologically sustainable development in the Territory.

"This approach is what the Board heard from industry and the community during extensive community consultation sessions across the Territory last year, and will fill a significant gap in the protection framework for our environment."

Professor Duff said the report had recommended an EPA model that is tailored to suit the Northern Territory's special conditions; that is a largely intact natural environment, wide social diversity and relatively small, yet growing economy.

"The EPA Board is convinced this model will make the most significant possible impact on raising our environmental performance in the Territory, for a given, realistic level of budget outlay," he said.

“Under this model, the Environment Protection Authority has significant independent powers to develop legislative and policy frameworks and to scrutinise the operations of Government agencies in undertaking regulatory work.

“The independent EPA cannot be directed by the Government in terms of its investigative methods, scope and findings, and its recommendations to Government will be made public, unless there are reasonable grounds not to, such as privacy.”

Professor Duff said it is anticipated the independent EPA would commence a review of existing environmental legislation such as the *Environmental Assessment Act* and *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act* as soon as possible.

“Initially the EPAs focus will be on legislative review and high priority standard setting,” he said.

“We envisage that priorities will be determined in consultation with the community and the Northern Territory Government.”

Other recommendations of the EPA Board’s report include:

- Powers to scrutinise government processes in order to provide advice on their adequacy
- Powers to initiate its own investigations and/or inquiries to accept third party references
- The composition of the EPA would be a small group of people with relevant expert knowledge
- The need to establish frameworks and policies that enhance integration across Government and build business and community confidence

The EPA Board is holding an information session regarding their report to Government on Friday 22 June for interested members of the community, from 2.30pm at the Billabong Room, Novotel Atrium Esplanade, Darwin.

To view the EPA Board’s report in full go to www.nt.gov.au/epaboard

Ends.