

PROACTIVE RELEASE COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Eugenie Sage	Portfolio	Associate Environment
Name of package		Date of issue	

List of documents that have been proactively released		
Date	Title	Author
15 April 2019	<i>Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage</i>	<i>Office of Associate Minister for the Environment, Hon Eugenie Sage</i>
15 April 2019	<i>CAB-19-MIN-0157 Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage</i>	<i>Michael Webster, Secretary of the Cabinet</i>

Information withheld

Some parts of this information release are not appropriate to be released and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the Act that would apply have been identified and are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Section of the Act	Reason for withholding
6(a)	if the making available of that information would be likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand.

Office of the Associate Minister for the Environment

Chair

Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage

1. I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Canberra over the period 6-7 December 2018 to attend the 8th Meeting of Environment Ministers (MEM) and conduct bilateral meetings.

Report

2. I travelled to Canberra during 6-7 December 2018 to attend the 8th Meeting of Environment Ministers (MEM). New Zealand was also represented by officials from Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
3. At the invitation of the Chair I spoke briefly to the meeting. My statement emphasised New Zealand’s ambition to work with stakeholders to move away from our current ‘take, make and dispose’ economic model to design waste out of the system through a circular economy. I noted increasing calls from the community for effective action on single use packaging and other products causing harm at end of life, and emphasised the value of collaborating with our Australian colleagues.
4. The issues of greatest debate at the meeting were Australia’s national waste and climate change policies,

Section 6(a)

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Section 6(a)

6. The Australian Local Government Association also has a seat at the MEM table. They noted that 90% of the estimated 3 million tonnes a year of post-consumer plastic in Australia is not recycled. Their recent survey found that communities are “very aspirational” – 91% support a national waste plan, 89% want recycled content in government procurement, and 96% say they regularly recycle. The Association advocated use of waste plastic and glass in modified asphalt and rubber crumb bitumen and suitable roading procurement from state and national governments,


Section 6(a)

7. Also of interest was the Australian states’ leadership in product stewardship for a range of products which we do not have systems for here including batteries,

photo-voltaic panels, and woven polypropylene sacks. New Zealand officials made valuable contacts in this regard.

8. In relation to Australian state bans on plastic shopping bags, the states' desire to remedy issues associated with heavier 'boutique' plastic shopping bags was discussed. We had earlier learned from their experience, and included such heavier bags in our phase-out starting on 1 July 2019.
9. I had six bi-lateral meetings arranged outside the MEM while in Canberra, which were useful for my Environment and Conservation portfolios.
10. I met separately with Hon Melissa Price, Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Chair of the MEM, who also has conservation issues in her portfolio.

Section 6(a)

-  The Commonwealth has conducted a nationwide stocktake of domestic recycling capability as part of their national waste strategy development process.
- Minister Price also advised me on their Indigenous Rangers programme for biodiversity protection areas. This has connected indigenous knowledge with modern science to support positive social change; especially for the women who run the programme, and for young people. Minister Price advised that Canada has now started a scheme based on the Australian model.
- I was interested to learn more about Australia's new national-level Threatened Species Commissioner. This is a senior science staff role within an agency with advocacy rather than decision-making power. New Zealand has a Threatened Species Ambassador who is a Department of Conservation official.
- Minister Price mentioned the prospect of "Blue Carbon" initiatives – protecting seafront carbon adsorption ecosystems (marshlands, seabeds, onshore trees) through their Emission Reduction Fund. This fund is distributed to projects via an annual auction at the current carbon price \$11/tonne.

11. My trip included a visit to the Mulligan's Flat Woodlands Sanctuary. This is managed by the Woodland Wetlands Trust for ACT, and preserves the best stand of "box-gum grassy woodlands" left in the country.

- It is a sister reserve of Wellington's Zealandia, and the Sanctuary team have frequent exchanges with a number of New Zealand sanctuaries and pest control organisations.
- Their fence is designed to keep out foxes, cats and rabbits. The adjacent suburb is designated as a "cat containment area" which has good support from local residents.
- There are a number of Sanctuary-based experiments underway to understand how to successfully nurture rare species and their ecosystems.

12. I also met with Shane Rattenbury, ACT Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. He is very focused on fostering sustainable low-carbon energy for ACT.

- The state is driving practical innovation through local procurement and partnerships with the Australian National University and power companies. Their initiatives include developing hydrogen as a 'battery' to store surplus solar or wind energy which can both be used domestically and exported; 20 new hydrogen vehicles for the city fleet; phasing out natural gas and using the gas network to store surplus hydrogen; a target for 600-700 electric vehicles by 2020 in ACT; lengthening the turnover for ACT government electric vehicles to five years so that the savings in petrol purchase can be better realised; and requirements that all new multi-apartment units in ACT install electric vehicle chargers for the residents.
- ACT's Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme requires energy companies to reduce emissions by a certain percent, or face a penalty. This drives energy-efficient technology rollouts to customers that can benefit them through savings of around \$250 each per year. In the waste to energy area, they are keen to make a clear distinction between biogas (good) and incineration (pollution and resource loss issues).

13. In Canberra I met with Brooke Donnelly, CEO of the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO). This was an opportunity to learn about Australia's national co-regulation scheme for packaging.

- Liable packaging entities must join the Covenant and engage in reporting or be subject to State regulation. APCO is now fully funded by industry, with over 1,400 members (representing 153 Australian Industry Codes). Membership fees are set by assessing total annual turnover in 12 categories. They find best value in working with their 'Tier 1' (larger) companies, as other companies tend to follow.
- Members report on 13 criteria, to create a 'spider diagram' depicting their strengths and weaknesses. APCO offers members advice on how to improve. They aggregate data by sector, and then report back to government. There is much competition between members, which helps drive innovation. APCO also offer two tools free to members; a voluntary recycling label, and a packaging design tool – these aim to improve material circularity.

14. Unfortunately two scheduled meetings were cancelled due to urgency being taken in the Australian Parliament. These meetings would have been with Senator Di Natale, Leader of the Australian Greens; and Hon Tony Burke MP, Shadow Minister for Environment and Water.

15. I wish to acknowledge the support provided by officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Ministry for the Environment.

Proactive release

I propose to release the paper within the required 30 business days.

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement.

Hon Eugenie Sage
Associate Minister for the Environment

Proactively released



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage

Portfolio **Associate Environment**

On 15 April 2019, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Eugenie Sage under CAB-19-SUB-0157 on her travel, from 6 to 7 December 2018, to Canberra, Australia, to attend the 8th Meeting of Environment Ministers, and conduct bilateral meetings.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Hard-copy distribution:

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister
Hon Eugenie Sage