

[In confidence]

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 Adelaide over the period 6th – 8th November 2019 to attend the 9th Meeting of Environment Ministers (MEM) and conduct meetings and site visits.

Report

2. I travelled to Adelaide during 6th – 8th November 2019 to attend the 9th Meeting of Environment Ministers, accompanied by Associate Environment Private Secretary Penny Race. New Zealand was also represented by officials from Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
3. During my visit to Adelaide I also met with South Australia's Environment Protection Authority and Green Industries SA, several non-government organisations on the circular economy, and visited several waste recycling facilities.

Meeting of Environment Ministers (MEM)

4. Australia's waste export ban was the main focus at the MEM, with Australian Ministers (federal, state and territory) agreeing that waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres that have not been processed into a value-added material should be subject to an export ban to be phased in over time: Withheld under s6(b) of the Official Information Act 1982

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9. Federal Environment Minister Susan Ley issued a joint Environment Ministers' media release stating that "it is time for us to take care of our own waste... As well as helping the environment, every 10,000 tonnes of waste that we recycle will help our economy by creating 9.2 Australian jobs."

Withheld under s6(b) of the Official Information Act 1982

Minister Ley said Australia was on track to meet its 2030 emissions reduction target under the Paris Agreement, and agreed that the federal government would provide a briefing on this at the next MEM. I provided an update on the passage of the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill through the New Zealand Parliament by consensus, and tabled a copy.

11. Ministers agreed on the threat feral cats posed to native species with NSW Environment Minister Matthew Kean championing the need for more national coordination in developing new feral cat control strategies (including a gene solution) to protect species. I noted the threat feral cats posed to New Zealand species including the transmission of disease, and registered our interest in developing feral cat baits and contributing to feral cats strategies where New Zealand could.

Meetings and site visits

12. I met with Loop CE Platform and Circular Economy Alliance Australia, two NGOs who both emphasised that a recycling strategy did not amount to a circular economy strategy. The circular economy was a deeper notion involving a paradigm shift of viewing waste as "resource in the wrong place". Loop CE

Platform referred to the circular economy as potentially having an international dimension.

13. My discussions with the Chief Executives of South Australia's Environment Protection Authority and 'Green Industries SA' (established to support the South Australian government in developing the green economy) provided valuable insights on the development of South Australia's waste management and recycling capability. Highlights for me were:

- Key elements to designing a container deposit scheme are to accept a broad range of containers and minimise restrictions, work with the wine industry to develop consensus to include wine bottles, accept containers irrespective of content, and have convenient collection points. Scotland's scheme was identified as a good international example. NSW was said to have the best Australian scheme.
- Developing a sound waste strategy is important. A key component is focusing on source separation by offering strong kerbside collection to residents - three bins per household is sufficient – a yellow bin for recycling, green bin for organics, and a blue bin for landfill. This can be combined with drop off points, additional collection days, and restrictions on residents taking their own waste to landfills.
- A high landfill levy (\$120 in South Australia) is effective in acting as a disincentive for using landfills. In South Australia it is combined with alternative disposal/recycling options and regulatory enforcement to prevent illicit dumping (which Victoria has experienced). In South Australia levy funds are split between the Environment Protection Authority and Green Industries SA.
- The South Australian government is about to start work on developing a procurement strategy for recycled product. This is the "holy grail", and there is now momentum for development of procurement policy "from the Prime Minister down".
- The circular economy is a new way of referring to a range of concepts advanced over the last 30 years. It is effective at capturing the economic perspective in addition to the environmental perspective.
- A notable feature of Green Industries SA investment programme (in projects to build and improve waste, recycling and resource recovery equipment and infrastructure) is the speed at which it can process an application - 12 weeks.
- Waste to energy plants were seen to have limited appeal because they lock up capital investments over 25-30 year time horizons, produce limited numbers of jobs, run the risk of being rendered obsolete due to recycling technology breakthroughs in other areas, inevitably involve release of gasses into the atmosphere, and produce limited energy.

14. 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

15. 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 under the provisions
of the Official Information Act 1982