

Overhaul For WA Environment Regulators

The Western Australian government has merged the Department of Environment and the Department of Conservation and Land Management to streamline regulatory and approval processes.

Environment Minister, Mark McGowan, said the new department, which will commence operations on 1st July, would address frustration from a range of industries concerned that resources were not being channelled efficiently into environmental protection and conservation management under the previous departmental structures.

McGowan said there had been areas of duplication between the agencies and regulatory and approval processes were not consistent across the agencies, which added to what he said were unacceptable delays.

"The merger will combine the strengths of the two agencies, which will enable the new department to provide whole-of-government leadership on key issues, particularly greenhouse and sustainability, with improved co-ordination and advice to government", he said. "Regulatory and approval processes

will be streamlined and there will be a single contact point for the community, industry, tourism operators, farmers and pastoralists, and conservation groups alike."

McGowan said the new Department of Environment and Conservation would largely bring WA into line with the Commonwealth, New South Wales and Queensland, which already had a single agency for environmental protection, land and marine management, and biodiversity conservation.

APPEA Chief Executive Officer, Belinda Robinson, welcomed the move and said that the association had lobbied for a reduction in duplication and delays in the environmental approvals process. "The petroleum industry's environmental record has been excellent throughout its 50 year history in Australia and the industry supports the ongoing protection of the environment in which it operates", Robinson said.

"However, duplication in government agencies causes delays to development without improved environmental benefit. As a result of this merger of the Department of Environment

and the Department of Conservation and Land Management, APPEA hopes to see a whole-of-government approach to a more streamlined environmental approvals process."

Robinson said APPEA looked forward to working with the director of the new agency, Keiran McNamara, and building on the industry's strong relationships established over many years with the two merging government departments. "Such structural changes often result in substantial improvements and APPEA believes the creation of a single-focused agency has the potential to deliver in a much more efficient manner on matters which impact on Western Australia's upstream oil and gas sector", she said.

Meanwhile, the WA Environmental Protection Authority will continue in its present form with chairman Wally Cox appointed for a further three-year term by State Cabinet in May. McGowan said the government was also preparing plans to merge the Conservation Commission and Marine Parks and Reserves Authority to create a new Biodiversity Commission, in line with a 2005 election commitment. ■