



Senator the Hon Murray Watt
Minister for the Environment and Water

Ministerial Statement of Expectations to the National Environmental Protection Agency

Issued by Senator the Hon Murray Watt on 20 September 2026

This Statement of Expectations sets out my expectations, as Minister for the Environment and Water, of the National Environmental Protection Agency (National EPA), and its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in accordance with section 16 of the *National Environmental Protection Agency Act 2025*.

This Statement supports the Government's broader regulatory reform agenda, including strengthening trust in environmental regulation and ensuring regulatory systems are fit for purpose, efficient and proportionate, while maintaining strong environmental safeguards.

An independent, robust and trusted national environmental regulator is central to protecting and restoring Australia's environment, improving accountability and promoting ecologically sustainable development. The National EPA will be instrumental in sustainably managing our land, air and water, regenerating ecosystems, reducing pollution and waste, and protecting species and habitats.

I expect the National EPA to operate as a modern, best practice regulator, with a culture of continuous improvement.

I expect the National EPA to work with Australia's Traditional Owners and First Nations communities to protect and manage our unique, shared environment.

I expect the National EPA to have due regard to the Government's broader social and economic policy objectives, including those relating to environmental protection, the clean energy transition and renewables, housing, productivity and the Future Made in Australia agenda.

My expectations are elaborated below.

1. Regulatory functions

This Statement of Expectations relates to the National EPA's delivery of regulatory functions defined under the *National Environmental Protection Agency Act 2025*, and per Commonwealth-wide governing legislation.

In exercising its functions, I expect the National EPA to:

- administer regulatory schemes fairly, consistently and transparently;

- undertake assessment and decision-making in accordance with legislative requirements, policies and instruments for delegated decision-making;
- issue and manage permits, licences and approvals in a timely and robust manner; and
- collaborate with states and territories and relevant Commonwealth government departments in the administration of its functions.

I expect the National EPA to deliver efficient and robust assessments that are proportionate to environmental risk, informed by high quality evidence and science, while maintaining strong protections for the environment.

2. Independence and decision-making

Consistent with the *National Environmental Protection Agency Act 2025*, the National EPA and its CEO operate independently in the exercise of their vested statutory functions and powers. The CEO of the National EPA must not be directed in relation to the exercise of vested statutory powers, including enforcement actions and permitting. Maintaining the independence of those functions is integral to maintaining public trust in federal environmental law.

3. Compliance and enforcement

I expect the National EPA to make effective use of the strengthened powers provided under the Government's environmental law reforms. The National EPA's approach to enforcement should reinforce regulatory integrity and ensure laws are applied consistently, fairly and without favour.

In executing its compliance functions, I expect the National EPA to:

- target regulatory effort where environmental risk, harm or non-compliance is greatest, including unlawful land clearing in areas that are important for restoring and preserving habitat and water quality, such as within specified limits of a catchment area of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park;
- use compliance and enforcement powers decisively to stop, prevent and deter unlawful activities, with a clear focus on protecting environmental values and maintaining confidence in the regulatory system;
- maintain a visible and credible compliance presence through monitoring, audits and targeted enforcement activities to promote compliance and deter misconduct; and
- support voluntary compliance through clear guidance, early engagement and practical assistance, enabling regulated entities to understand and meet their obligations.

Furthermore, I expect the National EPA to support high and sustained levels of compliance through education, monitoring, assurance, accreditation, and enforcement activities. This extends to undertaking active monitoring and assurance activities for

accredited arrangements and landscape scale approvals, in particular bilateral agreements with states and territories.

4. Prioritising productivity

In delivering its functions, I expect the National EPA to take a proportionate, risk aware approach to regulation to achieve its outcomes while maximising efficiency, growth and dynamism. The National EPA should:

- improve regulatory approaches to create an environment that enables productivity growth while maintaining environmental outcomes;
- proactively reduce unnecessary regulatory burden, including by supporting innovation in digitising and streamlining processes;
- adopt suitable risk assessments, standards and procedures to assist in lowering barriers to trade and development, and supporting small businesses and new market entrants; and
- play a proactive role in clarifying the regulatory framework it administers to the regulated community and all stakeholders, with clear guidance, communication and engagement.

5. Regulator performance best practice

In alignment with the Regulator Performance Resource Management Guide (RMG 128), I expect the National EPA to:

- establish appropriate performance and service standard measures for its regulatory activities, including in relation to reform proposals;
- align its regulatory approach and implementation with the principles of the Regulatory Policy, Practice and Performance Framework, having regard to its legislative objectives, functions, role and operating environment; and
- identify and engage with relevant international regulatory frameworks and bodies where appropriate.

The National EPA should integrate regulatory performance reporting into its Corporate Plan and Annual Report in accordance with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

I expect the National EPA to be a cost-efficient and cost-effective regulator that manages its fees, levies and charges in an appropriate and sound long-term manner.

Collaboration, engagement and advice

The National EPA should be a transparent, responsive and collaborative regulator with a problem-solving posture. Effective collaboration supports shared understanding and stewardship. This creates a foundation for identifying and advancing practical solutions.

I expect the National EPA to engage constructively and proactively with regulated entities, state and territory governments, local governments, First Nations organisations and communities, industry, environmental groups and the broader community.

I expect the National EPA to work closely with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and with state and territory departments and agencies regarding accredited arrangements and landscape-scale approval pathways, in addition to fulfilling its statutory roles in the assessment, audit, monitoring and assurance of bilateral agreements and bioregional plans.

The National EPA should seek and appropriately consider advice, including from any advisory group established by the CEO under section 55 of the *National Environmental Protection Agency Act 2025*.

Continuous improvement and building trust

I expect the National EPA to adopt a whole of system perspective and demonstrate a culture of continuous improvement in its governance, capability, regulatory practice and organisational culture.

This should include learning from experience, training and professional development for staff, and improving systems and processes. I expect the National EPA to ensure that it meets its obligations under the *Public Service Act 1999* and APS values.

I expect the National EPA to build trust among governments, industry and the community through timely, consistent and transparent decision-making.

Risk aware and data driven

I expect the National EPA to manage regulatory risks in a proportionate and evidence-based manner, maintain essential environmental safeguards, and minimise unnecessary regulatory burden. This should include prioritising resources to strategically manage areas of highest risk, and continually monitoring the changes in technology, industry practice and community expectations.

The National EPA should leverage high quality data, science, digital systems and contemporary regulatory tools to support timely decision-making, consistent regulatory outcomes, and effective compliance and enforcement.

6. Relationship with the Portfolio Department and Minister

I expect the National EPA to work constructively with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and with other Commonwealth departments and agencies where appropriate, to advise on, implement and report on policy proposals. The National EPA's engagement should build on established relationships, including continuing to progress implementation of the environmental reforms.

Information and advice-sharing arrangements may be formalised through Memoranda of Understanding, which I expect the National EPA to enter in good faith.

I expect the National EPA to:

- keep me informed, in a proactive and accurate manner, of significant regulatory issues, risks and emerging trends;
- provide prompt, accurate and well-evidenced information and advice when requested;
- notify me of matters of high public interest or significant reputational risk; and
- engage constructively with my office and the Department, while maintaining appropriate statutory independence, particularly in relation to non-delegated functions.

As Minister, I will provide an enabling environment for the National EPA to deliver on these expectations including by ensuring clarity about the Government's policy direction and priorities.

7. Transparency and accountability

I expect the National EPA to respond to this Statement of Expectations with a corresponding Statement of Intent outlining how it will meet these expectations. This Statement of Expectations and the National EPA's Statement of Intent will be published on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and National EPA's websites in line with legislative requirements.

The National EPA should integrate these statements into its planning, performance and reporting frameworks, including its Corporate Plan and Annual Report, and assess its performance against them as part of its ongoing accountability arrangements.