

SoE What?

Has ten years or more of SoE reporting across Australia created or contributed to any environmental improvements or outcomes?

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ABSTRACT

State of the Environment (SoE) Reporting has been carried out in Australia in various forms and across different levels of government for more than a decade. Under statutory and non statutory reporting provisions, SoE reports are intended to provide a “snapshot” or statement of environmental status at the national, regional or local levels, and provide an early notification of deteriorating resource conditions in time for policy- and decision-makers to proactively respond through relevant policies, strategies or other programs.

With more than a decade of practical experience in SoE reporting at various levels of government, stakeholders are entitled to ask what, if anything, has SoE reporting achieved, what has been learned as a result of preparing these reports and, has the investment in time and resources contributed toward or made any significant difference in improved outcomes for the natural and urban environment?

NSW is the only State where local councils have a statutory requirement to prepare annual state of the environment reports, although in other jurisdictions voluntary reporting has been undertaken by numerous councils in the form of Local Agenda 21 reports, Catchment Management Plans, Local Conservation Plans or similar. In the absence of other forms of sustainability reporting, many users have assumed that SoE reports can also usefully transmit findings related to sustainability status or progress as well.

This presentation attempts to outline practitioner’s experiences in SoE reporting, its success or otherwise in delivering on the interpretations of the statutory and non statutory reporting provisions and on the range of outcomes that make up expectations of an SoE target audience. In the event of shortcomings discussed, the author will also attempt to use the current evaluations or studies to identify changes that could be applied to improve the useful application of SoE reporting and consider the question as to whether SoE reporting has had its day and should be discontinued as a reporting measure.

SUMMARY

Despite the widely acknowledged difficulty in preparing jurisdictional State of the Environment (SoE) reports, a realistic assessment of SoE reporting after more than 10 years of reporting across different levels of government, even following reforms, improvements and various innovations to SoE reporting over this time, is that they have contributed very little, and more probably, nothing at

all, to meet the vast array of expectations and interpretations placed upon them through statutory and non statutory reporting requirements.¹

Such an outcome raises valid questions about the point of continuing SoE reporting in its various forms, the commitment or capacity of governments to prepare and respond to the findings of their own environmental report cards and the level of attention or interest that such an environmental report card may have with the wider community.

Examples across jurisdictions establish a level of indifference bordering on low compliance with statutory reporting requirements. However with little independent scrutiny of completed reports, no sanctions for poor compliance and in other cases, little attention given to final reports and their findings, it is apparent that SoE reports could carry almost the same information from one reporting cycle to the next and very few readers or policy-makers, managers or other decision-makers would be likely to notice.

This is unfortunate as the coverage of issues and the intention behind the preparation of each report appears to be genuinely concerned with preparing a definitive and current statement on the state of the natural and built environment within each of the jurisdictions for which the reporting organisations are responsible. The need for such a status report to guide and usefully inform policy and decision-makers seems obvious. However, after a decade or more of SoE reporting by governments and their agencies across Australia, SoE user groups have the right to question the capacity of these organisations to prepare and respond objectively to reports that are potentially critical or demonstrating deficiencies in the programs of the reporting organisation or wider government agencies. What is becoming increasingly apparent to SoE practitioners and others when such reports are scrutinised or evaluated is the need for an overarching independent Commission or increased role for State and Territory Audit Offices to oversight or respond to completed reports and their findings.

AUSTRALIA'S EXPERIENCE - WHO IS DOING SOE REPORTING?

During the 1990s, legislation requiring SoE reporting was passed in all jurisdictions around the country with the exception of Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Some jurisdictions such as NSW and South Australia produced their first SoE reports by 1988² while Victoria dabbled with sector-specific environmental reporting for a short period by the early 1990's.³ Western Australia (WA) undertook its first formal SoE report in 1998 under policy direction rather than legislation but without any statutory reporting requirement, WA's second SoE report due in 2003, slipped considerably. The Northern Territory is yet to commit to SoE reporting in a form that mirrors other jurisdictions.

See Appendix 1: Summary of SoE Reporting carried out around Australia.

¹ The author was responsible for preparation of the 2000 and 2003 NSW SoE Reports, was the NSW representative on the national SoE Reporting Taskforce from 1998 to 2004, reviewed, facilitated and contributed to local council SoE reporting in NSW and coordinated NSW input into the Australian 2001 SoE report. He has also been involved in indicator development for SoE, TBL and sustainability reporting and improved data management systems for organisational and jurisdictional environmental reporting.

² The first SoE report for NSW, scarcely acknowledged by the former NSW Environment Protection Authority, was completed by the former State Pollution Control Commission (SPCC) in 1987. The experience and lessons learned contributed to the SoE reporting requirements presented in section 10 of the *Protection of the Environment (Administration) (PoEA) Act 1991 (pers. Comm. D.Leece, 2003)*.

³ More than 10 years later and as a result of two Parliamentary inquiries, Victoria's new *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003* has responsibility for Victoria's first SoE report by 1998.

WHAT IS STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING – WHAT SHOULD IT BE ACHIEVING?

An early discussion paper for the former Commonwealth Department of Environment, Sport and Territories (now Department of Environment and Heritage) described State of the Environment (SoE) Reporting as, “*one of the most powerful tools for informing the public about their environment*”.... Providing, “*an opportunity to actively, directly and accountably monitor the performance of government policies against actual environmental outcomes it can in effect act as a ‘report card’ on the condition of the environment and natural resources stocks*” (DEST, 1994).

In an early handbook for the United Nations Environment Program, the main purpose of SoE reporting is described as supporting “*sustainable development decision-making through the provision of credible environmental information*” and that this form of reporting is undertaken by hundreds of nations and cities around the world (UNEP / DEIA, 1996).

In NSW, where it has been mandatory at both the State and Local government levels for more than a decade, SoE reporting is described as “*a process of collecting, analysing and presenting information to help government and communities get a picture of their local environment and provide the necessary foundation for strategic environmental planning and the development of local environmental rehabilitation, restoration and protection initiatives*”.....and that SoE reporting provides “*a valuable tool to enhance environmental accountability to the local community*” (NSW Government, 1997).

These descriptions and the numerous others in the literature create a diverse range of assumptions and expectations associated with each report and the subsequent application of report findings by SoE user groups or target audience. Some of these expectations and assumptions can be summarised as:

- “*informing on the current status of the environment.....*”
- “*monitoring and reporting on changes over time of the natural and urban environments....*”
- “*accounting for the efficacy and outcomes of programs and responses to environmental issues ...*”
- “*presenting credible environmental information*”
- “*contributing to environmental decision-making*”
- “*contributing to wider strategic planning issues.....*”
- “*contributing to improved environmental outcomes.*”

Such a range of all-encompassing expectations and interpretations of the statutory and non statutory reporting requirements sets the SoE reporting bar so high that arguably it is little wonder that such reporting represents a colossal failure, overall.

However, such a conclusion on the application of SoE report findings is not to say that the preparation of SoE reports or the environmental report cards they are said to represent are not vital elements in the set of information necessary to guide decision-making and planning by authorities or their respective communities. On the contrary, this author strongly supports the view that, “*if you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it*”. Key deficiencies currently demonstrated in the low or minimal take-up of report findings by jurisdictions appear to reflect:

- organisational difficulties in retaining corporate memory or continuity across three, four or five year reporting cycles;
- little policy learning from one report to the next; and
- seemingly little formal integration of SoE findings within the plethora of environmental, social or economic policies, plans and strategies that governments are constantly preparing.

In short, organisations appear to be going through the motions of SoE reporting, without genuinely attempting to follow up or respond to the findings and outcomes presented (Harding, 2001). On this basis alone, taxpayers may well be entitled to question the point of SoE reports being prepared by governments and their agencies.

However, from the responses of the few studies and surveys conducted, many SoE practitioners themselves are more likely to express greater reservation in the process of preparing and assembling data and other content for SoE reports than the poor take-up and application of the final reporting product (LGSA, 2004; IPWEA, 2002; Penman, 2001(a)). Not surprisingly, it is the credibility and reliability of this preparation that ultimately produces a credible and accurate document capable of informing and guiding future decisions related to resource use and its ongoing protection for future generations. Without this confidence or high standard of consistent, accurate and up-to-date information and analysis, it is reasonable to argue that SoE reporting represents a substantial waste of financial and organisational resources for little gain.

One might legitimately reflect on how little has been collectively learned or gained from more than 10 years of practical SoE reporting experience. And, if SoE reporting is as useful or as important as earlier descriptions above indicate, it seems difficult to understand why substantial adjustments have not been made to make reporting processes and the final reports more applicable or relevant to environmental and other policy decision-making, their implementation and their review.

Part of the reason appears not to be from a lack of commitment by reporting staff themselves, but the lack of understanding of the target audience and user group for which reports have been prepared and the difficulty of integrating report findings into processes that substantially influence core functions of institutionalised decision-making within government and / or business sectors within our society.¹

Reporting organisations continue to be confused over their target audience, a critical failing if they are expecting others to react or respond or even read SoE reports instead of the reporting organisation itself. Reviews and surveys carried out for State and Local governments within NSW demonstrate that the user group or target audience for SoE reports are assumed to be the general community and students, or other government departments, with little or less recognition of the report informing or guiding the policies and programs of the reporting organisation and the jurisdiction in which the organisation is operating² (Penman et al, 2001b; IPWEA, 2002; LGSA, 2004).

There is often also a failure to internalise report findings in time so that subsequent reports are capable of detecting or capturing incremental changes in either the physical environment or in the management policies and practices of the day. More frequently than not, each subsequent report is reporting on the same policy conditions or practices that influenced or culminated in previous report findings. Harding makes reference to and is particularly critical of the lack of “policy learning” between each SoE report. In this Harding refers to the tendency for each new report to hold up the current policy or program, frequently re-launched or re-packaged within an electoral cycle or during a political term, and promote the re-launched policy or strategy as the major response to address the environmental issues uncovered. But each so-called new policy response within a

¹ CEOs, executive members or senior managers may use the “sustainability” terminology more frequently while still turning the major focus to the financial ‘bottom-line’ and understanding little about the principles of sustainability.

² Local councils in NSW are constantly critical and frustrated that no feedback or response is provided following the dispatch of their mandatory SoE report each year to the Department of Local Government (DLG) or Department of Environment and Conservation (formerly the Environment Protection Authority). Their view has been that the DLG has a huge room or warehouse full of their un-read, annual SoE reports that the DLG should in part be responding to (LGSA, 2004).

reporting cycle fails categorically to acknowledge, evaluate or even identify the raft of previous policy statements, directions, or strategies similarly regarded in previous reports (Harding et al, 2001). Past metropolitan planning or zero-waste policies or strategies are clear cases in point.

An array of additional considerations arise regularly amongst SoE practitioners (LGSA, 2004; IPWEA, 2002), mainly in relation to the difficulties and limitations associated with preparing each report. Interestingly, these have often been found similar in issue to the range of hurdles necessary to overcome problems associated with other forms of performance monitoring and reporting by organisations, whether or not in relation to accounting for corporate social responsibility (CSR), triple-bottom-line (TBL) or sustainability performance. A number of these considerations include:

- the **range of potential data sources** (and paucity of data) (OECD, 1998; NSW EPA, 2000; NSW EPA, 2003) necessary for assembling information across the comprehensive nature of urban and natural environmental themes and issues discussed within each SoE report¹;
- understanding and matching data collected to a corresponding set of environmental indicators that are the basis for informing and analysing the issues represented in each report;
- consistent **time-series** and **spatial data** coverage;
- the **presentation format and quality assurance** of these various data sets and their capacity to reflect either the current environmental situation (*how we are now*), the historic basis of the information (*how did we get to where we are*), and a more recently expected capacity to project forward (*where will we be if we continue as is*);
- the **specialist expertise required to interpret and analyse** with accuracy or certainty how the trends in data (or gaps in available data) reflect on current environmental or social or economic policy and related community, industry or institutional behaviours;
- the **time lag** involved in data collection, design and implementation of monitoring programs and the **lead time** involved that enables data trends to have meaning over time;
- SoE reports generally comprise information on the human **pressures** / environmental **conditions** / policy **responses**. There is often an incorrect assumption that preparing an SoE report means there are tangible responses and actions underway to address the problems identified²;
- **organisational commitment and capacity** to learn from and retain the lessons of previous reporting processes and ensure some form of continuity within the organisation of a timeframe extending over 3 to 5 years³;
- the **de facto application or reference to SoE reports as sustainability reports**, mainly due to the absence of more robust “sustainability” or triple-bottom-line reporting frameworks.

CAN SOE ACHIEVE MORE?

A pattern emerging over early reporting periods and only changing quite slowly is the trend of reports to repeat much of what is already known about the environmental issues under discussion. Within the “*pressure-condition-response*” framework adopted widely for SoE reporting, the final reports generally place a far greater emphasis on “*pressure*” and “*condition*” components of the SoE story than on the “*response*” side and particularly the efficacy of those responses in terms of positive and tangible on-ground changes. Whereas, as reflected in the expectations and

¹ Initiatives such as the National Land and Water Resources Audit (NLWRA) at the Commonwealth level and national datasets and environmental statistic by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) have added considerably to the reliability and credibility of some available data.

² SoE reports do not automatically generate “actions- SoE reports are generally only part of the information tools available.

³ A practical reality for organizations is retaining staff with experience in SoE processes or problem solving. A 3, 4 or 5 year reporting cycle is almost certainly likely to lead to staff turnover and change requiring systems and processes to retain corporate memory on problem-solving, contacts, and preparation processes or a simpler form of producing each SoE report.

interpretations above, it might be argued that the discerning SoE user is now far more interested in whether a measurable rate of positive change can be demonstrated from the responses underway from previous reporting cycles. If such differences cannot be determined, or show a negative trend or lack of progress, then good accountability procedures would demand that changes be instigated to ensure positive progress can begin to show in future reports.

A popular proposal for SoE reporting (and environmental reporting generally) is to track progress (or lack of) more transparently over time by determining appropriate and measurable targets for the indicators selected for reporting (Harding et al, 2001; Yenken, 2001). There is considerable argument given to establishing targets or reference values for environmental or headline indicators used in SoE reporting (Jimenez-Beltran, 2001; Australian Collaboration, 2001). Obtaining agreement on the various kinds of targets necessary for the range of issues reported is problematic for scientific, technical and political reasons, but the same might be said of environmental indicators when the process commenced over 10 years ago to identify consistent and credible environmental indicators for SoE reporting. As with this process, any targets could operate on an interim basis or reflect either aspirational or realistic outcomes that would and should be reviewed and refined regularly over time. Whatever the form, it is an appropriate next step for SoE and environmental reporting in Australia and is clearly waiting on leadership or vision from one or more of the reporting jurisdictions.

Little discussion has occurred in this paper on the importance and relevance of environmental indicators in SoE reporting. The evolution of consistent and credible environmental indicators is a critical component of informing and preparing the SoE report. As far as this presenter is concerned, this is a given for the successful analysis, interpretation and communication of the SoE issues reported through the data provided. With the voluminous array of literature and information on what, why and which environmental indicators to use in SoE reports¹ (UNEP / DEIA, 1996; ANZECC, 2000; DLG, 2000) there is less point in reiterating this need in this brief discussion except to point out that an organisation that redevelops an indicator list from scratch can often find themselves exhausting the time, resources and stamina of the individuals and organisation involved. Then they find themselves facing the equally daunting and exhausting process of attempting to assemble and interpret the available data and information for the indicators they have agreed to with so much less time, resources and stamina remaining.

Major reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, 2002) and the ANZECC publication on core environmental indicators for SoE reporting (ANZECC, 2000)² can help avoid this rather exhausting process for SoE or environmental reporters but not all realise their availability or are willing to use them as a starting point. Another helpful trend in this area is the development and application of 'headline', or higher level indicators (DEHAA, 1999; Environment Australia 2001; ABS, 2003; ABS, 2004; CSIRO, 2005). These are intended to provide a more succinct and sharpened focus of the SoE or environmental reporting "snapshot". An outcome likely to contribute to the usefulness of headline indicators as well as the application of targets to track their progress, is the allocation of time and resources to establish interim targets, in the first place at least, only for these more high profile or high level set of indicators.

In a climate of increasing accountability and transparency, it may be useful to consider the practice of formal follow-up to SoE report outcomes, as demonstrated in previous SoE reporting by Tasmania and Western Australia, and intended in the new process to be administered by Victoria's

¹ The release of the 75 core environmental indicators for SoE reporting approved by the ANZECC group of Ministers during Australia's first SoE Conference in 2000 saw the then Parliamentary Secretary hold up the ANZECC publication in one hand, and the 434 environmental indicators intended to be reported in Australia's first formal State of the Environment report due in 2001.

² Admittedly these core environmental indicators are in need of a major review and update.

recently established Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability. This formal response is one method of ensuring more effective 'closing-of-the-loop' on SoE outcomes and in the cases above, occurs between 6 or 12 months after the public release of the jurisdictional report. A worthwhile but mostly unsuccessful alternative is the example of local council SoE reporting in NSW. Under reforms made to the mandatory SoE reporting for local government, councils are required to integrate the findings of their annual SoE report into the annual business or management plan which is mandatory for each council. There seems little dispute that this has been mostly unsuccessful due in part to the difficulties outlined above in preparing credible and reliable SoE reports and the often poor understanding councils have demonstrated in understanding that the SoE target audience or user group is mostly the council itself.

Another method of strengthening the accountability of and follow-up to SoE reporting is their potential scrutiny or testing by a separate entity such as a jurisdictional Audit Office¹, a Commission or Commissioner eg. as in the recent Victorian entity, the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (Productivity Commission 1999; Rose, 2000; Australian Collaboration, 2001; Harding et al, 2001; PAEC, 2002). The practice of establishing independent advisory bodies answering directly to State or Territory Ministers deserves to be viewed with some cynicism unless they also have a clearly defined role to act independently in the reports preparation such as the process conducted for the Australian SoE reports in 2001 and 2006.

Another important feature of such an entity or Commission would be to ensure the longevity and availability of consistent data from responsible agencies or jurisdictions. The very successful models of the NSW Community Access to Natural Resources Information (CANRI) [<http://www.canri.nsw.gov.au>] and the National Land and Water Resources Audit (NLWRA) [<http://www.nlwra.gov.au>] demonstrates what can be achieved regarding the difficult task of ensuring access to credible data sources, but also how flagging political or agency support can damage these long term monitoring and data collection initiatives.

Another substantial example is the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) established in NSW to monitor and audit the operation of the new 13 Catchment Management Authorities across the State. The NRC has an unprecedented role under its legislation, *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*, not only to audit the implementation of Catchment Action Plans by the CMAs, but to recommend state-wide standards and targets for natural resource management and also to audit the CMAs on their performance in regard to these standards and targets. While the progress of the NRC is slower than first anticipated there appears to be an attempt at sensibly managing their new tasks and responsibilities and avoid the pitfalls of designing, implementing and auditing standards and targets for which there is a poor scientific basis or absence of data. Insufficient time and application of the NRC role and legislation makes it difficult to comment on its success, but the exceptional provisions granted the NRC through the legislation sets a powerful model for others to apply. While it would be a brave move forward for any government to consider, it could be a relatively straightforward step to expand the legislation and establish a wider Sustainability-style Commission.

In a separate program whose results are still to publish, the Planning Research Centre (PRC) of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Sydney has been developing an innovative and creative approach to reporting on potential indicators for Sydney's 30-year Metropolitan Strategy. While the Strategy itself suffers the whims and vagaries of restructured agencies and changing Ministers, the "Metro Metrics" project under the PRC are ready to publish. If they are able to continue the project, the aim is to regionalise the data collected from wide-ranging sources to metropolitan councils by year 2 or 3 of the program (University of Sydney, 2005, unpublished).

¹ It is understood that a proposal for the NSW Audit Office to conduct an audit of SoE reporting has

Many Local Councils across Australia are investing substantially in their own 20 or 30-year plan that attempts to integrate major reporting requirements, such as SoE reporting, with annual reports, management plans, social plans, cultural plans etc. Randwick Council is one of many local councils investing heavily in establishing such a 20-year plan that will integrate the substantive planning and environmental requirements into Council's annual management or business plan. A major part of this project has included the development of indicators which will inform both the 20-year City Plan and Council's Management Plan (Randwick City Council, 2005). Although these developments are new and far from complete and even further from demonstrating the integration intended, the likely outcome is reporting frameworks more along the line of 'Triple-Bottom-Line' (TBL) or sustainability reporting.

CONCLUSION

Harding asserts that SoE reporting across Australia over the past 10 years has not usefully informed or contributed to improved environmental sustainability outcomes and that these outcomes are not integrated into policy and management processes. Harding goes on to reflect that SoE reporting is clearly, "*an end in itself rather than a means to inform better environmental management...*" (Harding et al, 2001).

The independent Advisory Council appointed by the NSW Minister for the Environment and comprising independent scientific experts and stakeholder representatives, noted a similar failing in their Open letter in the NSW SoE 2000 Report, "*our concern that condition monitoring and data collection is less than adequate on some issues*" (NSW EPA, 2000). In their Open letter three years later, the Advisory Council, of which about half the membership remained the same as the previous reporting cycle, stated the same concern almost word for word in the NSW SoE 2003 Report (NSW EPA, 2003).

As recent times have shown, it is no small task for governments to throw themselves open to scrutiny and potential criticism, whether on their environmental performance, performance of their health systems and hospitals, educational attainment levels of students in their schools, public transport performance and much more. There are no doubt numerous examples where governments or their agencies twist and squirm continuously to avoid the announcement or self-evaluation or assessment that their programs are failing or running disappointingly close to poor performance. Nevertheless, their constituents deserve nothing less than transparent accountability or substantial effort to improve on such findings once acknowledgment is made or such a result can be shown.

In an accountability sense, other public and private organisations are increasingly called upon and often imposed upon to demonstrate the results of their own environmental, economic or social performance. The National Pollutant Inventory provides a powerful example of transparency and capacity of organisations to overcome both communications and scientific issues (see <http://www.npi.gov.au>). No doubt this trend can only continue and governments should be seen to demonstrate much stronger leadership and example in this area.

SoE reporting is *not* sustainability reporting and it may be that, subject to appropriate institutional and legislative changes and frameworks, thematic SoE reporting could leapfrog straight into a voluntary or mandatory form of sustainability reporting. However, the failure of governments and agencies to respond positively to SoE reporting and utilise these report finding may not bode well for fast-tracking to the more challenging task of reporting on sustainability performance.

Nevertheless, this may be far more worthwhile to start on than struggle on for 10 more years of SoE reporting the way that it has been conducted previously. Institutions need to respond to or at least acknowledge SoE findings, establish with certainty and longevity consistent data sources and their

respective monitoring programs, as well as ensure staff and organisational capacity to interpret and respond to SoE outcomes. Instead of avoiding, camouflaging, disguising or discarding the findings of their environmental report cards, jurisdictions and their governments should be asking themselves questions and designing a future where the challenges are identified and integrated and applied to inform and guide environmental, economic and social policy accordingly.

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Appendix 1: Summary of SoE Reporting carried out around Australia

	CWLTH	NSW	SA	QLD	TAS	WA	ACT	VIC
Agency with lead responsibility for preparing most recent SoE report	Department of Environment and Heritage www.deh.gov.au/soe	Dept Environment and Conservation www.dec.nsw.gov.au formerly EPA www.epa.nsw.gov.au/soe/	Environment Protection Authority / Dept Environment and Heritage www.environment.sa.gov.au/soe2003/index.html	Environment Protection Authority www.env.qld.gov.au	Resource Planning Development Commission (an independent statutory authority) www.rpdc.tas.gov.au/soe/	Dept Environmental Protection in the past but currently EPA (sep stat body with 5 members). www.epa.wa.gov.au/overview.asp	Office of the Commissioner for the Environment (independent) www.envcomm.act.gov.au	Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (CES)
Legislation - Key Drivers	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (section 516B)	<i>Protection of the Environment Administration Act, 1991</i> (section 10)	<i>Environment Protection Act, 1993</i>	<i>Environmental Protection Act, 1994</i> and <i>Coastal Protection and Management Act, 1995</i>	<i>State Policies and Projects Act, 1993</i> and <i>Resource Planning and Development Commission Act 1997</i>	No legislation	<i>Commissioner for the Environment Act 1993</i>	<i>Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003</i>
Governance of preparation process for most recent SoE report	Independent Advisory Committee established by the Minister.	Ministerial appointed Advisory Council.	Steering Committee included key Government agencies, private sector and local govt reps. Also Technical Working Groups.	Governance by interdepartmental Steering Committee. Also have Technical Review Groups and Chapter Working Groups.	Governance provided through Advisory / Reference Groups for each of the themes.	Six others included on the steering committee.	5 expert panels / advisory committees - one for each of five themes	Proposed that governance will be provided by high level reference groups, and advisory group and technical groups.
Reporting Frequency	5 years	3 years	5 years	4 years	5 years	5 years	3 years	5 years
Last report(s)	1996, 2001	1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003	1988, 1993, 1998, 2003	1999, 2003	1997, 2003	1998	1997, 2000, 2003	1992
Themes (and Issues) used in last report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atmosphere Biodiversity Coasts and Oceans Human Settlements Inland Waters Land Natural & Cultural Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toward Environmental Sustainability Atmosphere Biodiversity Human Settlement Water Land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atmosphere Biodiversity Estuaries and the Sea Human Settlement Inland Waters Land Resources Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towards Sustainability Atmosphere Biodiversity The Coastal Zones Human Settlements Inland Waters Land Natural & Cultural Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atmosphere Biodiversity Coastal, Estuarine & Marine Settlements Inland Waters & Wetlands Land Cultural Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress towards ESD: Agriculture, Energy, Fisheries, Forestry, Mining & Petroleum Production, Tourism, Water Supply Atmosphere Biodiversity Marine Inland Waters Land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towards Sustainability Air Quality, Climate & Greenhouse Conserving Biodiversity Catchment Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable Not applicable Not applicable Not applicable Not applicable Not applicable Not applicable

Appendix 1: Summary of SoE Reporting carried out around Australia

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy Resources 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource Use Community Wellbeing 	<p>Not applicable</p> <p>Not applicable</p>
Comments	Coverage attempted of 434 environmental indicators throughout report.	Thirty-six environmental issues reported within these six key themes using 72 core environmental indicators.	Twenty-two chapters that focus on major environmental issues, including a separate chapter on the River Murray.					
Reporting Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website CD hardcopy - book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website hardcopy - book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website –updated according to monitoring and evaluation cycles hardcopy - book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website (pdf format for various summaries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hardcopy book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website hardcopy - book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website CD hardcopy - book 	Subject to finalisation.
Approvals	First report - sign off by committee.	Sign off via Executive and independent Advisory Council.	Peer review for each chapter, CEO sign off and further signoff by EPA Board.	Sign off by CEO of EPA. Interdepartmental Drafting Committee and peer review.	Sign off by Minister and Commissioner. Reviewed by scientists on Steering Committee.	Sign off by Steering Committee.		Not applicable.
Responding to findings / Outcomes	No recommendations.	Legislation makes reference to recommendations but none provided.	Future reports likely to require formal response to recommendations made.	No requirements in documentation.	No formal govt response.	No recommendations.		Not applicable.