

Centre for Aquatic Pollution Identification & Management (CAPIM), 3052

Organisation details

This submission is made on the behalf of the Centre for Aquatic Pollution Identification & Management (CAPIM). Although this centre is wholly owned by The University of Melbourne, these comments are not made on behalf of The University of Melbourne. Research conducted by CAPIM enables us to understand whether Victorian inland waters, estuaries and marine environments are polluted, what are the priority pollutions impacting values, identify their source and to inform government about these pollutant issues. We therefore work closely with the EPA and other state government agencies to achieve better environmental outcomes.

What do you think are the key environmental challenges which will impact the EPA in the future?

Predicted reduced rainfall and rainfall variability due to climate change and a substantially increased population within Victoria will threaten the health of Victoria's rivers, wetlands and estuaries. The EPA has been pivotal in reducing point source pollution and needs to continue this role given the likely growing importance of this issue. Diffuse pollution is already a major issue and will become a greater source of pollution to the environment unless the EPA can develop better strategies to address it. There are some strategies in place, such as best practice guidelines, education and enforcement that can reduce diffuse pollution. These strategies are generally aimed at reducing pollutants entering the environment. Whilst we believe that these strategies should be continued and improved, we believe that the EPA should take a more active role in screening and regulating new chemicals that are used in the state to ensure that these chemicals do not impact human health or the environment. Deregistration and removal of harmful chemicals is a much more effective way to reaching better outcomes rather than reducing pollution. There are numerous examples where a more active approach to the removal of chemicals would lead to better outcomes for human health, the environment and industry. For example, perfluorinated substances used in flame retardants can pose a threat to human health and therefore their use needs to be carefully managed. Our research at CAPIM also shows that synthetic pyrethroids used for termite control in buildings are having severe impacts on ecosystems in local waterways. Furthermore, many agrochemicals such as imidacloprid and atrazine, can contaminate groundwaters and could be replaced with other pesticides that are still effective but do not contaminate groundwater. The APVMA and NICNAS are federal agencies that have the authority to approve new chemicals in Australia. They also remove chemicals from use if there is evidence that they are detrimental to human health or the environment. However, there appears to be no Victorian Government agency that has responsibility for assessing whether new chemicals are impacting the environment. This is a gap that urgently needs to be addressed by ensuring the EPA takes on responsibility for the environmental aspects of this task. The EPA also needs to continue to undertake adequate monitoring of the environment so that emerging issues, such as the appearance of chemicals of concern, are detected and promptly addressed.

What aspects of the EPA's work do you value and wish to preserve in the future?

The EPA plays an incredibly important role for Victorians in helping to keep our environment clean. The value of this cannot be understated. A major reason why people want to migrate to Victoria is that we have a clean environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle. Our clean beaches and waterways are highly valued by Victorians and tourists alike. Increased pressures on our natural resources from climate change and population growth need to be managed and the EPA clearly needs to continue in its role for minimizing pollution impacts on our environment.

How can the EPA effectively work in partnership with other government agencies to meet the environmental challenges of the future?

No Answer

How can the EPA's role in safeguarding the community against the health impacts of pollution be clarified or strengthened?

No Answer

How could statutory frameworks more effectively prevent future environmental risks and land use conflicts?

No Answer

What role should the EPA play in emergency management?

No Answer

How can the EPA better identify and, where necessary, address problems that are the result of past activity?

This is an issue that revolves around funding. There needs to be adequate funding to support monitoring programs to identify pollution issues. Where necessary, there also needs to be adequate funding to enable the EPA to respond to legacy issues that are impacting the environment.

What role should the EPA play in improving environmental outcomes beyond those necessary to safeguard human health?

The EPA should be the lead agency in protecting the environment. This involves not only considering pollution related issues, but also other factors that lead to environmental degradation. For example, riverine aquatic ecosystems are affected not only by pollution, but also by the condition of riparian and instream habitats, including flows. Currently, environmental flows are managed by DELWP and pollution by EPA. The EPA should have authority to deregulate the use of chemicals in Victoria that are found to cause human or environmental health impacts. There are numerous examples where a more active approach to the removal of chemicals would lead to better outcomes for human health, the environment and industry. For example, perfluorinated substances used in flame retardants can pose a threat to human health and therefore their use needs to be carefully managed. Our research at CAPIM also shows that synthetic pyrethroids used for termite control in buildings are having severe impacts on

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What role should the EPA play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

No Answer

How do you see environmental justice being applied to the work of the EPA?

No Answer

What can we adopt from other regulators and regulatory models to implement best-practice approaches and ensure that the EPA can rise to key future challenges?

No Answer

Are there any other issues relevant to the Terms of Reference that you would like to raise?

No Answer

What can the EPA do to avoid potential future problems?

To avoid future environmental problems, the EPA needs to be more proactive rather reactive. The following are necessary for proactive planning: 1. Adequate resourcing. 2. Adequate environmental monitoring to detect chemicals of concern and to measure temporal trends in pollution. 3. Refinement of best practice guidelines and environmental policies. 4. Development of strategies to address future problems such as climate change, population growth and more intensive agriculture and forestry. 5. Engagement with key stakeholders that can help address these emerging problems.