

Regulating for Tomorrow

A discussion paper
to inform our 30-year
strategy



Regulating for Tomorrow

EPA supports reconciliation

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Country on which we live and meet and pay our respects to their elders past and present. We appreciate their traditional knowledge, care of, and spiritual connection to the air, land and sea. We thank them for their ongoing stewardship and ways of seeing, thinking and being as part of Country. Alongside Aboriginal nations, we strive to protect and grow the health of our beautiful state.



Shaping the EPA of the future

South Australians expect their environment to be protected not just today, but for decades to come. We are developing a 30-year strategy with South Australians so that we can look far ahead, imagine what South Australia could be in 2055, and work out the steps to get there.

EPA 30-Year Strategy

2025 ————— 2055

We are starting this journey together. To get the conversation going, we have gathered some early ideas about what the future might hold. These are starting points only; we want your ideas, challenges and fresh perspectives to shape what comes next. Alongside broad community input, we will also hold targeted conversations with experts and leaders across key sectors.

Your knowledge and experience will help test and improve this early view. We invite input from across the community, including government, industry, environmental organisations, technical experts, First Nations voices, and young people. When this consultation ends, we will bring together what we heard, refine our thinking into a clearer long-term direction, and share how your feedback influenced the strategy. We will then test the revised strategy with our Board, staff and partners, and explore ways to track progress over time. In every stage we aim to be respectful, inclusive, purposeful, timely and transparent — listening with intent and closing the loop so you know what comes next.

You can have your say by completing the online survey at yoursay.sa.gov.au. We will also be holding workshops with our key stakeholders, including First Nations people, children and young people, state government agencies, local government, EPA licensees and industry bodies, and independent experts. You can contact us on (08) 8204 2004 or engage.epa@sa.gov.au.

A vision for South Australia's environment in 2055

There are many unknowns about what South Australia will look like in 2055. Technology will change, global events will influence our economy, and new environmental challenges will emerge. We cannot predict every detail of the future, but we do know some things, including that the South Australian Government has committed to:

- Reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- Supporting a circular economy that keeps resources in use for as long as possible.
- Protecting biodiversity and restoring degraded ecosystems.

These commitments give us fixed points on the horizon. Around them is a much wider landscape of possibilities, risks and opportunities. We want to hear your thoughts on these possibilities.

Our working vision for 2055 – we want your feedback

Imagine it's 2055, and South Australia is a place where:

- Climate risks are well managed, and the state is thriving in a hotter, drier world because we planned ahead. Communities, industries and infrastructure have adapted with foresight and care.
- Nature is healthy and resilient, with stable soils and biodiversity that sustains cultural connection, wellbeing and economic productivity.
- Air is safe to breathe, and water is safe to drink, shared fairly and protected for generations to come.
- Circular economy principles guide how we use materials, recover resources and reduce waste.

In this version of the future, the EPA would need to be modern, visible, adaptable and deeply connected to the people and places it serves – clear about its role, building strong relationships across systems, and acting early to protect what matters.

We see this as a working vision, not a final destination, and we want your feedback on what is missing and what steps we could take to get there.

We are all an integral part of our environment. Our actions affect our natural environment in its entirety and the state of the natural environment has consequences for our future well-being.

2025 ————— **2055**



About the EPA

For three decades, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has been South Australia's independent voice for the environment. We work to keep air clean, water safe, land healthy and communities protected — and we want your ideas to help shape what we do next.

South Australian laws, including the *Environment Protection Act 1993* and the *Radiation Protection and Control Act 2021*, give us the authority to set rules, give advice, assess proposals, check compliance and take action when rules are broken.

We use science and local knowledge, and we work with communities, councils, First Nations, industry and government to make good decisions and act when needed.

In partnership with our stakeholders, we have achieved lasting improvements for South Australia, including:

- **Action when it counts.** With 156 successful [prosecutions and civil penalties](#), we have sent a clear message that harming the environment has real consequences.
- **Partnerships that protect communities.** Working with councils, we have run targeted programs to stop illegal dumping, unsafe burn-offs and poor hazardous waste practices, keeping neighbourhoods cleaner and safer.
- **Balancing growth with care.** We have assessed more than 6,000 development applications, advising on ways to protect the environment while supporting sustainable development proposals, enabling projects that meet the rules to proceed.
- **High standards for high-impact activities.** We license more than 2,500 environmental activities and over 13,000 radiation activities, making sure they are managed to high safety and environmental standards.
- **Keeping valuable resources in use.** Through South Australia's container deposit scheme, we have supported the return of hundreds of millions of containers each year, cutting waste and boosting recycling.

We are proud of these results and are focused on what must come next to ensure that we are the environmental regulator our community needs us to be in the decades ahead.

We invite you to look ahead with us, to explore how the EPA can keep protecting what matters most, and to join us in creating a South Australia where our environment, economic prosperity and communities thrive together.



The principles which guide our decisions

The EPA follows six best-practice principles to make sure our decisions are fair, effective and trusted. We refer to these as the **PACTTT principles**:



Proportionate

Our actions match the risks posed to the environment and the seriousness of the offence, with case-by-case consideration where appropriate.



Accountable

We give reasons for and can justify the decision we make.



Consistent

We ensure fair, equitable and uniform processes, with trained staff and clear systems to support them.



Targeted

Our regulatory effort is focused on the greatest risks and environmental harms.



Transparent

We openly share our decisions and help stakeholders understand what is required and why.



Timely

We act without delay to inform, manage and progress matters.

Together, these principles guide everything we do as a regulator, from setting rules and giving advice to monitoring compliance and taking action when needed..¹

¹ Pink, G., *Navigating Regulatory Language: An A to Z Guide*, 2021.

Looking ahead to 2055

South Australia's environment, economy and communities are facing rapid and complex change. Global trends in technology and international commerce, shifting public expectations, and new or evolving environmental pressures mean we need to do things differently.

Environmental regulators are in the business of behaviour change, and we need to ensure we have the right tools to drive behaviours that bring about positive environmental outcomes.

The choices we make today will shape the environment our children and grandchildren inherit, the quality of our air and water, the health of our land and oceans, the resilience of our communities, and the strength of our economy.

If we stand still, our systems and tools will fall behind, and our ability to protect what matters will shrink. Inaction is not neutral; it is a choice with real consequences. That's why we are planning for the future.

The trends shaping our environment

South Australia's future will be shaped by powerful global forces, some already visible, others still emerging. The choices we make now will affect the environment we protect – land, air, water and ecosystems – and the environment we operate in – the law, the economy and the policy settings. These global shifts are already being felt here at home, and include:

- **Hotter, drier conditions:** More extreme heat, rising sea levels and shifting rainfall patterns will mean more dangerous weather events, longer dry periods, and new challenges for farming, infrastructure, health and daily life.
- **Water under pressure:** Less rainfall, more demand for water and over-extraction (taking water faster than it can be replenished) is stressing our rivers, aquifers and groundwater.
- **Nature in decline:** more than 1,000 native species are threatened by habitat loss, invasive species and land clearing, weakening ecosystems and reducing their ability to provide essentials like clean air and water, healthy soils, crop pollination and natural pest control, which in turn puts communities, industry and the economy at greater risk.
- **Valuable resources going to waste:** Illegal dumping, recycling challenges and materials being sent to landfill means useful materials are lost, pollution increases, and more pressure is placed on the environment to supply new raw materials.
- **New environmental risks:** Emerging contaminants and pollutants like microplastics, pharmaceuticals and nanomaterials (very small engineered particles) must be managed alongside issues we're already managing, such as forever chemicals and heavy metals. This requires new science and new tools to detect, manage and reduce their impacts and avoid harm to people, wildlife and ecosystems.
- **Rising expectations:** Communities want more transparency, faster action and clear evidence of impact, which means we need to share information openly, respond quickly to concerns, and explain our decisions and actions.
- **A net-zero economy:** Changes in energy, transport, agriculture and construction can open the door to cleaner industries, new jobs and innovative technologies, while also creating challenges such as transitioning workforces, updating infrastructure and ensuring no community is left behind.

Each of these changes brings choices. With the right tools, partnerships and vision, we can turn them into opportunities for stronger environmental protection, healthier communities and a more resilient economy.

We want your ideas on which risks matter most and where we should focus first.

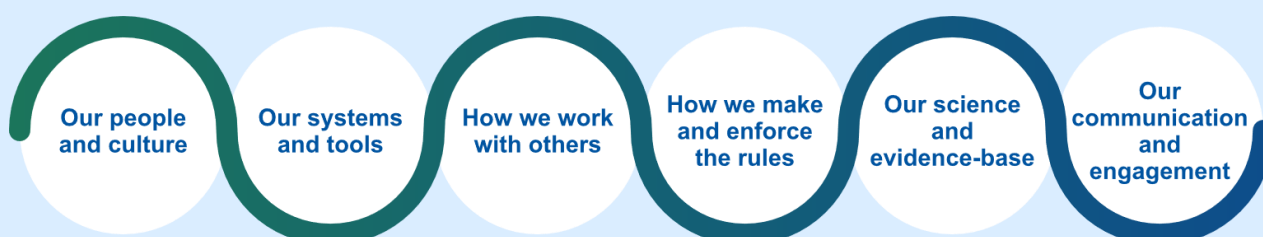
Examples of how the EPA could evolve

Reaching a shared vision for 2055 will take more than one organisation. It will need action from governments, communities, industries, and individuals. The EPA's role will be important – but exactly what that role should look like is something we want to shape with you. The areas below are examples to start the conversation.

How the EPA could evolve

To achieve our 2055 vision, the EPA will need to grow and adapt. Below are six areas where your ideas could shape our future role.

1. **Our people and culture:** In 2055, what skills, knowledge, and ways of working will our people need for the EPA to be an effective environmental regulator?
2. **Our systems and tools:** How should our systems, processes and technology work in 2055 so that people can find the information they need, meet their environmental responsibilities and raise concerns with us?
3. **How we work with others:** In 2055, what should it look like when the EPA works with communities, businesses, other regulators and governments?
4. **How we make and enforce the rules:** In 2055, how should the EPA make sure environmental rules are followed, and take action when they are not? And are there other ways of driving behaviours that lead to positive environmental outcomes?
5. **Our science and evidence-base:** In 2055, how should we collect, use and share environmental information so that decisions are based on the best available knowledge?
6. **Our communication and engagement:** In 2055, how should we explain what we are doing, listen to the community, and make environmental information easy to access and understand?



We want to hear your view on which areas matter most, what good performance would look like, and any ideas you have for getting there. Your feedback will help us focus our effort and track progress over time. We will report back on what we heard and the changes we make as a result.

You can have your say by completing the online survey at yoursay.sa.gov.au. We will also be holding workshops with our key stakeholders, including First Nations people, children and young people, state government agencies, local government, EPA licensees and industry bodies, and independent experts. You can contact us on (08) 8204 2004 or engage.epa@sa.gov.au.