



Australian Government
National Water Commission

Chair

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Ms Dunstone

Inquiry into the National Water Commission Amendment Bill 2012 (the Bill)

Thank you for inviting the National Water Commission (the Commission) to make a submission to this inquiry. The Commission welcomes the announcement made on 14 March 2012 that the Australian Government proposes to continue the Commission as an independent and expert national agency to oversee water reform under the National Water Initiative (NWI).

The Government's decision responds to a review of the Commission conducted by Dr David Rosalky in accordance with section 38 of the *National Water Commission Act 2004*. Dr Rosalky concluded in his review report that:

The elements of the NWI still to be implemented are, by their nature, the more difficult ones and the role that can be played by a specialist and independent body like the NWC is likely to be even more important in the future.

It is the judgement of this Review that the NWC constitutes one of the investments that has been producing valuable products in pursuit of the NWI objectives. It has built a skill base, expertise and an information base positioning it well to contribute significantly to the effort that is still required.

In referring to the breadth of work undertaken by the Commission since 2004, Dr Rosalky observed that 'these activities form an integrated whole of significant value to the water reform agenda and the NWC has honed its focus over time to perform those activities with proficiency.' He also commented that 'the leadership activities performed by the NWC have set a strategic agenda and initiated essential elements of the reform activity'.

Dr Rosalky also concluded:

'Delivery of the range of work described in this Review has enabled the NWC, over the past seven years, to respond, to evolve and to become a centre of knowledge

on parts of the water reform work and its implementation. The NWC has contributed, and can contribute to an even greater degree in the future, through bringing that knowledge and experience to bear on issues and challenges in the implementation of the NWI agenda and related water management and reform topics.'

The proposed amendments to the *National Water Commission Act 2004* contained in the Bill provide for a set of functions that broadly reflect the recommendations of Dr Rosalky's report relating to assessment, audit and monitoring. They also provide for the Commission to undertake activities that promote the outcomes and objectives of the NWI, administer programs, and for COAG to seek advice on the broader COAG Water Reform Framework and matters of national significance relating to water.

The Commission looks forward to developing a work program that strengthens its engagement with jurisdictions and with COAG, whilst retaining its credibility as an expert and independent assessor of the national water reform agenda. Through its renewed role, the Commission will continue to provide strong, transparent and public reporting on reform progress. It will also continue to work with jurisdictions and other stakeholders to undertake activities that promote the outcomes and objectives of the NWI.

The Commission supports the Bill and looks forward to its renewed role as the independent and national voice driving the water agenda beyond 2012.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bunn
Acting Chair
10 April 2012