

Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2009, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources commenced its inquiry into Australian farmers and climate change.
- 1.2 The focus of the inquiry has always been on the practical actions and outcomes that farmers, communities and governments can undertake to deal with the actual and potential challenges of climate variability and climate change.
- 1.3 A recurring theme of the evidence presented to the Committee has been the adaptability of farmers in the face of Australia's extremes of climate variability. Many of the adaptations to meet the challenge of climate variability will also assist the adaptation to climate change.
- 1.4 The report has been structured to illustrate the principal issues brought to the attention of the Committee. Debate on the incidence and impact of climate change has attracted a great deal of attention in the Parliament, the government, and the media during the course of the inquiry. It is a contentious and potentially divisive issue in many minds. Even amongst evidence received by the Committee, there was no single definition offered, and in significant ways the debate on climate change science detracts from the very real challenges farmers are facing.
- 1.5 The Committee found that issues farmers are managing on a daily basis are dealt with in countless different ways, and that any discussion of farmers' methods of adapting to climate variability inevitably hinges on different attitudes and decision making processes. Therefore, before consideration of specific aspects of on-farm responses to climate variability, the Committee examines those social impacts of managing **any kind** of change. Chapter 2 therefore examines the recognition that response to climate change must start with people and communities, not just practices and technology.

- 1.6 Chapter 3 gives an overview of the many practical adaptations to climate variability and climate change that have been brought to the attention of the Committee.
- 1.7 Chapter 4 looks at the issue of energy consumption and production on-farm, the capacity to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and the capacity of the sector to contribute to the overall mitigation effort.
- 1.8 Chapter 5 examines the need for better weather and climate forecasting, and the potential to deliver same.
- 1.9 Chapter 6 looks at the research and extension effort, especially the need to ensure ongoing investment into research that assists farmers to meet the challenges of climate variability and climate change, extension services that give effect to this research, and a high level of coordination of the research effort.
- 1.10 Chapter 7 examines the overall role of government in supporting adaptation.