

Introduction

1.1 Wouldn't it be good to be able to take the family from Melbourne this Saturday to see Granny in Ballarat and be able to check on Friday exactly which station along the highway would have the cheapest petrol? Wouldn't it be better to be able to get a good price for petrol without having to queue up on a Tuesday night and hope you had picked the right station? And wouldn't it be better for small independent petrol retailers to have the same information about prices as the big supermarket chains so they can compete on fairer terms?

1.2 These are the benefits a national Fuelwatch scheme would offer. And its not just an economic theory. It's a model that has operated in Western Australia for years and the public there like it.

1.3 The committee is not saying that Fuelwatch will make the petrol market perfect. There is more to be done at the wholesale level. But rejecting the Fuelwatch bill will not do anything to improve the wholesale market; it will just deny consumers the chance to put more competitive pressure on the big companies selling petrol in retail markets.

1.4 The committee's final report on Fuelwatch is not due until late September. But given the public interest shown in the bill, the committee is releasing this interim report to inform the public debate.

1.5 The background and conduct of the inquiry are described in Chapter 2. The economic arguments for and against Fuelwatch are evaluated in Chapter 3. The evidence on the impact that the Fuelwatch scheme has had in Western Australia is evaluated in chapter 4. As the implications for small independent operators have been given such attention, this topic is given its own chapter.

1.6 In brief, the majority of the committee believes that a national Fuelwatch scheme should be introduced. Its detailed conclusions and recommendations will be contained in its final report.