

Background and conduct of the inquiry

2.1 Following receipt of a report by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2007), the Prime Minister and the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs announced on 15 April 2008 that a national version of the FuelWatch scheme currently operating in Western Australia would be introduced with the aim of improving price transparency for consumers in the retail petrol market. Fuelwatch is proposed to commence operating nationally on 15 December 2008. Its effectiveness will be reviewed a year later.¹

2.2 The new Fuelwatch scheme will cover unleaded petrol, premium unleaded petrol, LPG, Diesel, 98 RON and biodiesel blends. It will cover metropolitan and major regional areas. The minister will have power to alter the areas covered, in light of submissions by relevant local governments. The scheme requires petrol retailers to notify the ACCC by 2 pm of their price for the next day (if it is changing) and this price must be maintained for 24 hours from 6 am. The ACCC will publish this information on a website by 4 pm. Penalties will apply to retailers who deviate from their stated prices, although some discretion will be given to the ACCC in the case of inadvertent breaches.

2.3 On 17 June 2008 the Senate referred the National Fuelwatch (Empowering Consumers) Bill 2008 and the National Fuelwatch (Empowering Consumers) (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2008² to the Committee for report 'not before 29 September 2008'.

2.4 The committee advertised the inquiry in the national press and invited written submissions by 7 July 2008. Details of the inquiry were placed on the committee's website and the committee also wrote to a number of organisations and stakeholder groups inviting written submissions.

2.5 The committee received 38 submissions. These are listed in Appendix 1.

2.6 Public hearings were held in Karratha (14 July 2008), Perth (16 July), Brisbane (17 July), Rockhampton (18 July), Adelaide (21 July), Sydney (1 August), Melbourne (7 August) and Canberra (11 August). No submissions were received from Tasmania or the Northern Territory but evidence was heard from Hobart and Darwin by teleconference. Witnesses appearing at these hearings are listed in Appendix 2.

2.7 The committee thanks those who participated in this inquiry.

1 Prime Minister and Assistant Treasurer; joint press release, 15 April 2008 (some versions misdated 15 March).

2 The latter bill amends the *Trade Practices Act 1974* so that it covers Fuelwatch.