

Labor Senators Additional Comments

1.1 Labor Senators share the concerns of the Committee about the ongoing impacts of water over-allocations and unlicensed extractions from our river systems, believing that these are unsustainable and must be addressed urgently.

1.2 The collective emphasis of climate science has now shifted the argument from the reality of climate change to assessment of the seriousness of its impacts. Several studies indicate that Australia will become hotter and drier in coming decades with more extremely hot days and fewer cold days. Global warming will result in a significant reduction in rainfall and riverflows and higher evaporation of the water in reservoirs.

1.3 Labor calls for greater recognition of the importance of both adaptive and mitigative strategies to deal with the broader impacts of climate change on our national water supplies.

1.4 Labor members believe that the Howard government has wasted ten long years denying the existence of climate change and much more must be done to make up for this decade long lack of action. Significantly more must be invested in addressing the cause of climate change and assisting farmers, industry and the public to adapt to much drier conditions.

1.5 Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from a range of witness about the consequences of the failure of the Howard Government to deliver on key commitments under the Living Murray Initiative. The recent National Water Summit, called in haste, achieved little other than to identify limitations of the National Water Initiative to deliver key outcomes, particularly those in relation to the Murray Darling system.

1.6 Labor Senators urge the Government to move more quickly on the funding of infrastructure projects under the National Water Initiative and to re-visit issues and priorities around national standards and licensing regimes, particularly for floodplain harvesting.

1.7 The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists have stated that nature has overtaken the timeframes of the National Water Initiative and that it must be revisited to strengthen outcomes that are in the national interest. The National Water Initiative has as its centrepiece the establishment of a national water market, and while market mechanisms will deliver more appropriate water pricing and demand from high end value users, in record drought conditions it is not possible to trade water between systems if it not there. Therefore it is important that other policy instruments are developed to address the water priorities.

Senator Ursula Stephens

Senator Kerry O'Brien

Senator Anne McEwen

Senator Glenn Sterle