

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of Reference

1.1 On 27 August 2008, the following matter was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report by 30 September 2008:

- (a) the volume of water which could be provided into the Murray-Darling system to replenish the Lower Lakes and Coorong;
- (b) options for sourcing and delivering this water, including:
 - (i) possible incentive and compensation schemes for current water holders who participate in a once-off voluntary contribution of water to this national emergency,
 - (ii) alternative options for the acquisition of sufficient water,
 - (iii) likely transmission losses and the most efficient and effective strategies to manage the delivery of this water,
 - (iv) Commonwealth powers to obtain and deliver water and possible legislative or regulative impediments, and
 - (v) assessment of the potential contribution of bring forward Australian Governments agreement to deliver water to save the Coorong and lower lakes;
- (c) the impact of any water buybacks on rural and regional communities and Adelaide including compensation and structural adjustment; and
- (d) any other related matters.

1.2 On 28 August 2008, the Senate referred the Emergency Water (Murray-Darling Basin Rescue) Bill 2008 to the committee for consideration in conjunction with the above matter.

Scope

1.3 The inquiry is divided into two sections, the first covering the immediate problems facing the Coorong and Lower Lakes, the second addressing broader management issues across the Murray-Darling Basin. Although matters of relevance to the second phase of the inquiry have been raised, this report focuses on the first phase.

Conduct of the Inquiry

1.4 Following the referral of the inquiry, the committee advertised the references in *The Australian* on 3 September 2008. The committee received 84 submissions from state and federal government departments, key organisations and stakeholder groups and individuals. A list of written submissions is included at appendix 1.

1.5 The committee held public hearings in Adelaide on 10 September 2008 and in Canberra on 9, 18, 19 and 26 September 2008. It heard evidence from a number of witnesses, including representatives from the relevant Federal, Queensland, South Australian and New South Wales Departments, farmers' and irrigators' groups, the Australian Conservation Foundation, local councils and residents; and technical experts. A complete list of the witnesses who appeared at the hearings is included at appendix 2. The Hansard transcripts of the committee's hearings are available on the Parliament's homepage at <http://www.aph.gov.au>.

Acknowledgements

1.6 The committee appreciates the time and work of all those who provided oral and written submissions to the inquiry, particularly given the short timeframe for the inquiry. Their work has assisted the committee considerably.