



**73 Headland Road
Castle Cove NSW 2069**

19th March 2021

National Water Reform: Productivity Commission Draft Report, February 2021 – Review comments from *OneWater Advocates*

1. Introduction

OneWater Advocates (OWA) made a submission to the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into National Water Reform on 28 July 2020.

OWA representatives subsequently downloaded and reviewed the Commission’s draft report, after its release on 11 February 2021, and participated in the webinar held on 2 March 2021.

OWA generally supports the suggestions and recommendations raised in the draft Report, but we do consider that there are some salient gaps in the conclusions that should be addressed in the Commission’s final report.

2. OWA Comments on the Draft Report

The OWA Group’s comments relate principally to the absolute necessity of having a strong, independent and appropriately funded governance structure in place that is legislated to ensure that all states and territories move uniformly in responding to, implementing and reporting on an updated NWI. The Commission’s Draft Report is silent on this aspect.

One comment made by the Commission during the webinar, and recorded on **Slide 13**, is that:

Jurisdictions have made good progress against the current NWI

Commitments have been largely achieved

- 33 out of 53 sub-elements (62%) were assessed as being largely or fully achieved.

OWA consider that having a 62% achievement after the 17-odd years that the NWI has been in place, **does not equate to** ‘good progress’ for such an important national initiative. OWA further submits that this significant level of under-achievement is due to the lack of

oversight by an appropriate COAG Ministerial group and by an independent body with suitable regulatory authority reporting to that group. There is simply a lack of focus in holding States and Territories to account for implementing the NWI..

This lack of national regulatory oversight was raised and discussed in OWA's submission on recommended improvements in its 28 July 2020 submission to the Commission; these are repeated below:

OWA's proposed solutions are:

- *A water minister's group should be reconstituted, (OWA note that this is recommended in the Commission's report) under the new National Cabinet and that this group determine the state and territory water priorities (geographical and temporal) within the agreed framework of the NWI.*
- *An independent group be set up by legislation through the Federal Government reporting to both the Federal Parliament and the national water minister's group to lead the NWI and its implementation and to update it, as necessary.*
- *The intent of the NWI should be revisited and/or refreshed to ensure that a new consensus is reached between all jurisdictions as to the priorities for water in Australia.*
- *An incentive programme should be created, equitably shared across the states and territories, but not necessarily focused on the same initiative in each state and territory, to support the implementation of the initiative (in agreement with the Commonwealth.*

3. Closure

OWA urges the Commission to fully consider the content of the OWA submission and should the Commission wish to contact OWA to clarify any of the above comments, the contact persons are:

- 1. Adjunct Professor Ian Law** (OWA co-convenor)

and/or:

- 2. Peter D Moore, PSM** (ex Federal President, Australian Water Association)
