

National Water Reform 2020  
Productivity Commission  
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National Water Reform 2020: Submission on Draft Report

Reform of Water Management in Australia has been a long drawn-out and much needed struggle to achieve equitable use of Australia's water resources to both sustain the life support services of the natural environment and support flourishing human communities and economies. Accordingly, the proposed modernising and strengthening of the National Water Initiative (NWI) is welcome.

There have been some good advances in policy and practice, but also some serious backsliding and undermining of progressive initiatives. The risk of failing to achieve intended outcomes due to perverse interests and pressures was made clear in the 2007 NSW Matthews Report, subsequent to the ABC media expose "Pumped".

In broadly supporting the proposed changes to the NWI, I encourage the Commission to take note of aspects of the recent review of the Environment & Protection of Biodiversity Act (EPBC) with respect to its findings on the need to improve collaboration and consistency with other agencies and jurisdictions; and to "build and improve" an efficient environmental information supply chain; and above all to make sure first nation people are involved and respected in policy and governance.

Water resources are a vital component of our biophysical world: **an integrated approach to the water cycle is essential** in order to recognise the links between the use of water as a commodity with landuse, planning and climate. As a long-term resident of South Australia, prior to moving to NSW, the 'driest state in the driest continent' phrase was well and aptly raised as a constraint on the extent, type and location of human settlement and activity. In Coastal SE Australia the current extreme floods are highlighting that some locations are just not appropriate for permanent human residence.

The risk is that the needed shift towards an integrated approach will come too slowly to address the impending catastrophic impacts of increasing climate change. The long evolved complex web of life that underpins our world today may tip towards extinction faster than small adaptive tweaks in natural resource management can deliver.

Modernising and strengthening water reform processes, including through amendments to the NWI is urgently needed, and at all levels; snail pace is no longer acceptable. This should include support for research and for community involvement in delivering water reform objectives.

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