



Commissioner Jane Doolan
Productivity Commission - National Water Reform
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Dear Commissioner Doolan,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *National Water Reform 2020: Productivity Commission Draft Report (February 2021)*.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has responsibility for several water quality guidelines including the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (2011)* and the *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water (2008)*. These guidelines are based on the best available evidence and aim to provide nationally consistent advice to maintain public health. NHMRC water guidelines also contribute to the National Water Quality Management Strategy which is managed by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

NHMRC acknowledges the extensive work undertaken by the Productivity Commission in preparing the Draft Report and supports the draft recommendations regarding the renewal of the National Water Initiative. In particular, we strongly support the recommendation for improved service provision of safe, reliable drinking water for all Australians, with safety as defined by the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines*. We are particularly encouraged by the advice on service provision in remote and regional communities. Jurisdictional agreement to meet a basic level of service provision such as safe, reliable drinking water will help to meet the national objective to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

NHMRC would like to see water quality and human health feature more prominently in a renewed National Water Initiative. While the recommendations in the Draft Report go some way to addressing this issue, explicit mention of public health as a desired outcome in addition to other public benefits in a renewed National Water Initiative will highlight the importance of this issue. It will also align with the work of the jurisdictions through the National Water Reform Committee to enhance social, human health, economic and environmental outcomes through sustainable water use.

As outlined in the NHMRC submission to the 2020 Issues Paper, poor water quality (i.e. the microbial, chemical and radiological qualities of water) can impact all key objectives of the National Water Initiative. Giving greater prominence to water quality as a central component of any reforms will ensure that public and environmental health issues are not overlooked as the jurisdictions work to manage our water resources safely and fairly in a changing environment.

NHMRC would welcome the opportunity to provide further information on its work on water quality. I look forward to reviewing the final Report and a renewed National Water Initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anne Kelso AO
Chief Executive Officer

19 March 2021