

Submission to the National Water Initiative review proposal Draft Report

External Constraints

The proposed National Water Initiative review is rightly focussed on strengthening water resource management and executing improved water service provision. Recognition of the needs of First Nations peoples is a major new addition.

Whilst the major “external” threats of climate change and future planned population growth are identified they are both presumed as “givens”.

In this case, the economic, social and environmental cost of these threats under differing strategies will not be considered. This is not a sound and comprehensive planning process.

The report refers to a projected 11 million (44%) increase in population major urban areas to 2050. Given the general level of over commitment of water resources, this new population will be largely served via high cost desalination or by transfer of allocation from irrigation or the environment. All these options represent major costs and other societal implications.

In the Australian context, population growth is currently more than 60% coming from immigration and in the future this share will increase. It is an input largely in the hands of the Commonwealth Government.

Hence, any review of the NWI should include consideration of the impact of this projected population growth (and the immigration policy which drives this population growth) in terms of providing *effective, equitable and efficient water service provision*. It needs to be mindful that with this massive population growth comes attendant major development.

Hence, population growth of the scale projected should not be regarded as a fixed constraint or “given” to the NWI. Rather it should be considered a variable with attendant costs. Whilst this might be generally stated for all manner of infrastructure provision, it is particularly the case that in the Australian context water scarcity is major constraint to growth. This is only exacerbated by the other major external constraint, namely climate change.

The same interactive principle that applies to population growth also applies for climate change. However, as we know, for the former the situation is more complex, much less controllable by Australian jurisdictions and has a much longer time scale between cause and consequence.

I submit to you that population growth as envisaged by this Draft Report should not be taken as a given but rather as a variable for which a range of impacts should be quantified and reported on. This should then feed back into the planning of population (and immigration) growth.