

PREFACE

The inquiry into the proposal to drain and restore Lake Pedder was much more controversial than the members of the House of Representatives Committee on the Environment, Recreation and the Arts expected when we decided to study the issue. We began the inquiry in the spirit of serious exploration of the idea, and in the belief that dispassionate study of all sides of the issue would lead to a reasonable conclusion. Some members thought the idea attractive, others that it was silly but all members from all parties agreed that a parliamentary inquiry was warranted and that it was an appropriately low cost method of considering the issue.

However, the inquiry generated wild controversy. Some absurd, seriously misjudged and quite untrue assertions were made. The Committee was attacked from many sides. Some people believed that the Commonwealth Government must have instigated the inquiry for some hidden political reason - when in fact the idea of undertaking the study had been the Committee's own. Tasmanian state politicians chose to portray the inquiry as a prelude to Commonwealth intervention in the state - when in fact the Committee was interested in and could only consider the potential national responsibilities relating to the issue. Members of the Committee had not realised the continuing emotional intensity of the debate and the symbolic importance of the Lake Pedder, old and new.

Nevertheless much lucid, informed evidence was presented in submissions and by witnesses, and the Committee appreciates the effort which the main proponents from both sides of the argument put into gathering, preparing and presenting their material. Inevitably there were strong conflicts and sharp contrasts in the perspectives of the witnesses, but some narrowing of those differences occurred during the course of the inquiry.

There were differences in attitude and orientation amongst members of the Committee as well, and therefore I am particularly grateful that members have been willing to make a concerted effort to reach an agreed conclusion. The Committee was aware of the importance of trying to reach a conclusion which would last by being based on a sufficiently thorough examination of the issues to avoid a reopening of the subject for a long time. Inevitably insufficient evidence was available to reach conclusions about some of the issues, but we weighed all the material presented to us and have noted where more would have been of value.

The drafting of the report by the Secretary of the Committee, Ian Dundas, and the research officer, Sue Irvine, was undertaken with intellectual rigour, thoroughness and sympathy to each side of the debate. They reflected accurately the information and views of witnesses and the opinions of the Committee and prepared a comprehensive and lucid draft. I thank them warmly for their professional commitment to the drafting and, with Marlene Lyons, for the efficiency with which the inquiry was organised.

I regret that we have had to come to the conclusion that the Lake should not be drained, but do firmly consider this to be the recommendation which most fully

reflects the responsibilities of the Committee to all Australians and to Australia's natural environment.

John Langmore
Committee Chair

19 June 1995