

Chair and Senators of the Committee

As I indicated to you in my letter, I offer my apologies for not being with you in person today. I am unfortunately abroad and I am advised that this prohibits me from connecting into today's hearings in person.

Consequently, Daniel Blacker is the Acting Inspector-General and he is joined by Tim Gilbert as the acting Deputy Inspector-General, Sheridan De Kruiff, Acting Assistant Inspector General Oversight and Dr Tara Schalk, Acting Assistant Inspector General Regulation. I have every confidence my executive team will all be able to answer all your questions today.

On my return to Australia next week, I am also happy to make myself available to meet with you if there are specific questions you have of me.

By way of an update from me to you, since I last appeared before you, I have observed a strong and growing sentiment of consultation fatigue across our Basin communities. This comes on top of a historic level of exhaustion and frustration from the community toward water agencies that has built-up over time. The sentiment I am picking up is coming from a feeling in the community that outcomes are not matching the investment of time and effort made by the community.

As the agency charged with engaging with the Australian community in relation to the management of Basin water resources, we are acutely aware of this phenomenon and are cognisant in our work to not add to their burden. Our own sentiment survey shows marginal improvements in sentiment towards the Basin Plan, and the work we have been undertaking, but there remains much to do.

When we last met, I had just announced my first inquiry into the Northern Basin Toolkit and the environmental outcomes from

that \$180M. That work is now well underway. We have requested and received information from agencies so that I have the relevant material I require to examine the issues in the terms of reference. This work will be a key focus of my team over the coming months.

I have recently published our first compliance performance report looking at the activities of state regulators, and in the next few months I will be publishing our annual metering report card which for the first time will examine in detail the implementation of measurement of floodplain take in the northern Basin.

Related to that work, the Compliance Compact is due to expire in 2025, and I will undertake a review this year. I have given a commitment to examine the Compact and will be working with jurisdictions regulatory bodies in that review. I look forward to reporting those results back to this committee and the public more broadly. As an independent Commonwealth integrity agency, we are an evidence-based organisation. I can assure the Committee that the review will follow the mantra that our work always follows, “Don’t tell us; show us!”.

With that I now hand over to the Acting Inspector – General and my team.

Hon Troy Grant
Inspector-General of Water Compliance