

IGWC ESTIMATES OPENING ADDRESS

Senators, I am delighted to appear before you today, my first appearance in front of this committee at the beginning of my second and last tenure as the Inspector-General Water Compliance, which commenced in August this year. I'm very grateful and proud to have been re-appointed, to give the continuity to the independent regulation, oversight and integrity functions entrusted to me and my team through the Water Act and other legislation to restore trust and confidence in the Murray Darling Basin Plan's management.

Today I am joined by Acting Deputy Inspector General Tim Gilbert. We offer our congratulations to any new Senators of this Committee and those returning Senators on your elections and are keen to answer any questions you have, or respond to concerns relating to our work and functions, which includes:

- Monitoring and overseeing the performance of function and exercise of power by agencies of the Commonwealth
- Monitoring and overseeing relevant Commonwealth and Basin jurisdictions performance in the management of Basin Water Resources

- Enforcing compliance with Commonwealth laws that regulate the management of Basin water resources and the provision of water markets information
- Engaging with the Australian community on the management of Basin water resources.

Through our evidence and examples of work being undertaken to meet the objectives set out in our strategic plan, I look forward to demonstrating how our work is very much focused to:

- Ensuring it's lawful
- Ensuring it's visible
- Do it better
- Make it better

I'm delighted to inform the Committee that on 1 September, I provided the 2024-2025 Annual report of the IGWC to the Minister for Water, who tabled it in the Parliament on 24 September. The report – along with much of our work – has been published on my website - igwc.gov.au.

Regarding my first ever Inquiry, an Inquiry into the Northern Basin Toolkit launched this time last year, I can report that work is in its finalisation stages

and I'm authoring that report, its findings, observations and importantly - recommendations. I expect to provide that report to the Minister, as required in the Act, before year's end.

We have plenty on our plate at the moment, which I consider is a good thing as well as a challenging thing. There has been improvement from Basin jurisdictions over the last four years – due largely to the collegiality among jurisdiction regulators working together for a more harmonised basin outcomes and regulatory consistency. There is always more work to be done, and our review of the Compliance Compact which is also underway will help narrate a status report of the Compacts outcomes and options to move forward for those Jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.

There is more work to be done in our relationship and support of the policy arm and agencies with responsibility for implementation of the Basin Plan. There has been significant cultural challenges in that space over the last four years with some improvements. However, with new leadership in that space and having recently met with and articulated my observations and some frustrations with the new Secretary of DCCEEW Mike Kaiser and Deputy

Secretary of Water Division Sean Sullivan, I am very confident after those meetings that more positive outcomes in that space are on the near horizon.

News of a recent positive outcome and good news in the Northern Basin with Queensland advising me in August they have delivered on a key commitment through the Border Rivers and Moonie Water Entitlement Notice 2025 (WEN). This work now regulates and licenses overland flow (floodplain harvesting) a long-term frustration that now moves them into a position where they can now have improved measurement and regulation on this water take, work that has been done over many years finally realised.

Senators, our independence is critical to the success of our role and the trust and confidence we are building among Basin governments and communities. The administrative requirements of running this division mean I am supported by the Department; my team are department employees they are determined and dedicated to our task, and I appreciate them immensely. As I have previously stated on the record and demonstrated through our work, I hold no fear or favour about overseeing the department and its responsibilities under the Water Act. I warmly

welcome to Department's new secretary, Mr Mike Kaiser; and along with support from Deputy Secretary Luise McCulloch, I thank him for his support to date and thank the new Minister for the Water portfolio and his team for their support and co-operation of our work since they've commenced their appointment.

We warmly welcome any of your questions.