

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 410
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: National Water Commission
Topic: NATIONAL WATER INITIATIVE
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 29 October 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Rhiannon asked:

The COAG review of the National Water Commission in 2012 stated that: 'The elements of the NWI (National Water Initiative) still to be implemented are, by their nature, the more difficult ones'. Please outline what these elements are?

- a. Where are each of these "elements" at, at the present time?
- b. What are the other areas of reform still needed?
- c. What are the barriers to the implementation of solutions to these problems?
- d. Can you outline the process of pulling together your assessment of the National Water Initiative? How do you involve stakeholders? What expertise is called upon?

Answer:

The 2012 Review suggested that urban water, access of mining to water, water quality, and environment and river health were likely issues that remained as significant features of the future of a water reform agenda for Australia.

- a) In order of the above: urban water issues remain a key responsibility for the states and territories with Commonwealth involvement generally on an as-needs basis only; access of mining to water remains a state responsibility but noting that the Commonwealth has legislated for the 'water trigger' in the EPBC Act and that this process of independent scientific review is now well established; the Commonwealth Department of the Environment is currently leading a major technical update of the National Water Quality Management Guidelines in partnership with the states and CSIRO and which is due for completion in mid to late 2016; environment and river health is a high priority for all jurisdictions, with the largest river health restoration program in Australia's history underway at present in the Murray Darling Basin under the Basin Plan.
- b) The National Water Commission's 2014 Triennial Assessment outlines these other areas of possible reform, for consideration by governments and stakeholders.
- c) The National Water Commission's 2014 Triennial Assessment provides extensive discussion on the barriers to possible reform, for consideration by governments and stakeholders.
- d) The methodology for the 2014 assessment is outlined in Appendix A to the report, http://www.nwc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/37658/Appendix-A-accessible-PDF-for-web-NWC-Australias-water-blueprint_national-reform-assessment-2014.pdf

The assessment was informed by:

- Public submissions
- A series of four water stakeholder roundtable workshops held in late 2013 and early 2014 in Albury, Cairns, Perth and Melbourne
- Consultation with the Commission's Stakeholder Reference Group, representing peak industry and community groups concerned with water management
- Consultation with state, territory and Australian Government agencies
- Consultation with other stakeholder groups including the Commission's Urban Water Strategic Advisory Panel which includes both industry and regulator perspectives.
- Subject specific assessments undertaken by the Commission since 2011
- Published and unpublished statistical data from agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)
- Projects undertaken specifically to inform the assessment
- Peer reviews of key sections of the report