

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 19 September 2007, the Senate referred the following matter to the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report by 30 June 2008:

- (i) the scientific evidence available on the likely future climate of Australia's key agricultural production zones, and its implications for current farm enterprises and possible future industries;
- (ii) the need for a national strategy to assist Australian agricultural industries to adapt to climate change; and
- (iii) the adequacy of existing drought assistance and exceptional circumstances programs to cope with long-term climatic changes.

1.2 On 14 February 2008, the Senate re-adopted the Inquiry with terms of reference unchanged and with a reporting date of 4 September 2008.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and through the Internet. The committee invited submissions from a wide range of interested organisations, government departments and authorities and individuals. The committee continued to accept submissions throughout the Inquiry.

1.4 The committee received 42 submissions. A list of individuals and organisations that made public submissions to the inquiry together with other information authorised for publication is at Appendix 1. The committee held two public hearings in Canberra. A list of the witnesses who gave evidence at the public hearings is available at Appendix 2.

The committee's interim report

1.5 The committee has decided to report in two stages. This interim report addresses two parts of the Inquiry's terms of reference. Chapter 2 of the report outlines the scientific evidence available on the likely future climate of Australia's key agricultural production zones. Chapter 3 of the report discusses the adequacy of existing drought assistance and exceptional circumstances programs to cope with long-term climatic changes.

1.6 The extension in the reporting date has enabled the committee to gather further evidence on the implications of climate change for Australia's key agricultural zones. In particular, the committee will use the extension to conduct further

investigations into soil carbon sequestration. On 19 August 2008, a subcommittee visited the Binu district of Western Australia for a site visit to a farm which is developing grazing and cropping systems using sub-tropical perennial grasses. The committee is planning a further site visit to Western NSW in September. Information about these site visits will be contained in the committee's final report.

1.7 The extension in the reporting date will also give the committee the opportunity to give consideration to the final Garnaut report, which is due for release on September 30 2008, and consultations on the Federal Government's proposed emissions trading scheme, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. The committee will use this information in its final report to address the remaining terms of reference in relation to the implications of climate change on Australia's agricultural zones and the need for a national strategy to assist Australian agricultural industries to adapt to climate change.

1.8 The committee intends to table its final report on 4 December 2008.

Acknowledgement

1.9 The committee thanks those organisations and individuals who made submissions and gave evidence at the public hearings.

Note on references

1.10 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the committee, not to a bound volume. References to the committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard: page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.