

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 27 August 2008, the Senate referred the following matters to the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report by 4 December 2008.

The implications for the long-term sustainable management of the Murray-Darling Basin system, with particular reference to:

- a) the adequacy of current whole-of-basin governance arrangements under the Intergovernmental Agreement;
- b) the adequacy of current arrangements in relation to the implementation of the Basin Plan and water sharing arrangements;
- c) long-term prospects for the management of Ramsar wetlands including the supply of adequate environmental flows;
- d) the risks to the basin posed by unregulated water interception activities and water theft;
- e) the ability of the Commonwealth to bind state and territory governments to meet their obligations under the National Water Initiative;
- f) the adequacy of existing state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements; and
- g) the impacts of climate change on the likely future availability of water.

1.2 The Senate extended the reporting date to 25 June 2009 to enable the committee to take further evidence in relation to the terms of reference.

1.3 This inquiry is the second part of an inquiry. The first part of the inquiry was into water management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes. The committee tabled a report for the first part of the inquiry on 10 October 2008.¹ The committee notes that a number of submissions and witnesses to Part 1 of the inquiry also addressed the terms of reference for Part 2 of the inquiry. In so far as submissions and evidence from Part 1 of the inquiry are relevant to the committee's deliberations for Part 2 of the inquiry, the committee has considered those submissions and evidence.

Conduct of inquiry

1.4 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* newspaper on 10 and 24 September, 8 and 22 October and 5 November 2008, and on the internet. In addition to

1 Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport, *Water management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes (including consideration of the Emergency Water (Murray-Darling Basin Rescue) Bill 2008*, October 2008.

relevant government agencies and departments, the committee invited a number of key stakeholder groups and individuals to provide a submission. The committee continued to accept submissions throughout the inquiry.

1.5 The committee received 19 submissions to this part of the inquiry, listed in Appendix 1. Submissions to Part 1 of the inquiry are also listed in Appendix 1. The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 10, 13 and 16 March 2009. For a full list of witness please refer to Appendix 2.

1.6 All relevant submissions for the inquiry and the Hansard transcripts of the committee's hearings are available on the Australian Parliament's homepage at <http://www.aph.gov.au>.

Structure of the committee's report

1.7 Chapter 2 of the report discusses the adequacy of the governance arrangements under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin Reform. Chapter 3 discusses the adequacy of the implementation of the Basin Plan and water sharing agreements.

1.8 Chapter 4 of the report considers the long-term sustainable management of Ramsar wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.

1.9 Chapter 5 discusses the supply of adequate water to environmental assets in the Murray-Darling Basin.

1.10 Chapter 6 outlines the likely impacts of climate change on water availability in the Murray-Darling Basin.

1.11 Chapter 7 considers the risks to the Murray-Darling Basin posed by unregulated water interception activities.

1.12 Chapter 8 of the report summarises other issues raised in the inquiry, namely: the progress in implementation of the *National Water Initiative* reforms and the appropriateness of these reforms to the situation in the Murray-Darling Basin; and the adequacy of state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements.

Acknowledgements

1.13 The committee appreciates the time and work of all those who provided oral and written submissions to the inquiry. Their work has assisted the committee considerably in its inquiry.

A note on references

1.14 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.

