

23 March 2021

National Water Reform 2020
Productivity Commission
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National Water Reform 2020 - draft Productivity Commission Report

Dear Commissioners,

eWater welcomes the release of your draft report into Australia's water reform journey and its comprehensive assessment of progress in implementing the National Water Initiative (NWI).

The draft report recommends an ambitious modernisation of the NWI to ensure Australia meets emerging and predicted water management challenges. eWater fully endorses the Commission's recommendations, many of which are consistent with initiatives we are currently undertaking or planning.

eWater is proud of its role in supporting the implementation of the NWI. The development and adoption of eWater Source as our National Hydrological Modelling Platform has been important for achieving many of the NWI's reforms. Ongoing investment, including in the scientific knowledge underpinning the Source platform and other water management tools will be equally important to achieving the recommended updates to the NWI, including:

- Understanding how to optimise economic, environmental, social and cultural outcomes and to plan for and adapt to a changing climate.
- Planning water services that integrate traditional and non-traditional water sources.
- Representing cultural water objectives in water plans and supporting Traditional Owners to participate in water planning, environmental water management and natural resources management.
- Improving water literacy of the broader community by visualising the potential impacts of different water management scenarios.

To this end, eWater recommends section 15 Knowledge, Capacity and Capability Building specifically recognise that achieving the goals of a modernised NWI will also require ongoing investment in technology and tools, including water models. We need to ensure that our water

management tools can include new science and knowledge and provide robust platforms for evidence-based decision making. Similarly, investing in the capability of water managers in using these tools is also vital.

The Commission notes the need for a consistent national approach to identifying research priorities, and that the National Water Reform Committee is well placed to do this (supporting document K, p 13). As with research investment, the most effective outcomes for investment in technology and tools will also be achieved with a coordinated approach. The National Water Reform Committee is also well placed to consider priorities for investment in technology and tools. For example, the Committee oversaw the updating of the refreshed National Hydrologic Modelling Strategy in 2018 and has recently appointed an independent advisor (Greg Claydon) to review the implementation of the strategy, identify current and future challenges and advise on future directions. eWater encourages the Commission to extend its advice to reflect a role for the National Water Reform Committee in providing national, strategic oversight to investment in research tools and technology.

In closing, eWater acknowledges the comprehensiveness of the review and ambitious program of reform. We look forward to supporting our Government owners and water managers across Australia to implement a re-vitalised NWI.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Robert Carr
Chief Executive