



Australian Government  
National Water Commission




*Reflections on the new role of  
the National Water Commission*

Water Law & Policy Conference  
Canberra, 7 December 2012

**The Hon Karlene Maywald**  
Chair

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## Federal framework of water governance

Recent advances to build on:

- Basin Plan – a step change in Australian water management
- Renewal of the National Water Commission
- Continued commitment to the National Water Initiative
- Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development
- Improved water science and information – the Commission's RNWS legacy (e.g. Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems Atlas), BoM investments, National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training
- Advancing Indigenous access to water resources - National Water Commission position statement, First Peoples' Water Engagement Council, Indigenous Water Advisory Committee

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## COAG review of the National Water Commission



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- Independent COAG review conducted in 2011
- Overwhelmingly positive review report released in March 2012
- The COAG review observed:
  - *The elements of the NWI still to be implemented are, by their nature, the more difficult ones and the role that can be played by a specialist and independent body like the NWC is likely to be even more important in the future.... It has built a skill base, expertise and an information base positioning it well to contribute significantly to the effort that is still required. Its independence is recognised and valued by stakeholders, especially those outside government.*
- Australian Government renewed the Commission's mandate in June 2012 (Act amended and new Chair appointed)

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## Looking forward



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The COAG review report concluded:

*There remains a clear need for an independent expert body to drive the national water reform agenda, maintain the collaborative and consultative partnership approach necessary for the delivery of that agenda, and focus attention and investment on emerging issues and challenging aspects of reform.*

- The Commission will continue to provide oversight of the COAG national water reform agenda and the objectives agreed under the NWI.
- Core functions are **monitoring, audit and assessment**
- Broader advocacy activities will promote national reform objectives and provide policy leadership
- Strong, transparent and public reporting on reform progress will continue

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## Forward work program – core functions



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### Assessments

- Triennial assessments of progress by all parties in achieving the objectives and outcomes in the National Water Initiative (NWI) - first is due in 2014.

### Murray-Darling Basin audit

- Reporting to the Commonwealth Parliament, through the Minister, and to COAG and Murray-Darling Basin states on the performance of all relevant bodies (including the MDBA and the states) in implementing the Basin Plan. Inaugural scoping audit due March 2013.

### Monitoring progress

- Assist with the implementation of improved water management by providing advice, information and guidance through our monitoring, assessment and audit functions, as well as performing activities to promote the objectives and outcomes of the NWI.

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## Triennial assessments



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- Assessments of progress in achieving the objectives and outcomes in the National Water Initiative (NWI) are now triennial
- **First triennial assessment is due to be provided to COAG in 2014**
- The Commission's three-year work program will cover all major aspects of the NWI to support delivery of the triennial assessment

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## Murray-Darling Basin audit



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- The Commission acquired an ongoing Murray-Darling Basin audit function as a requirement set out in the *Water Act 2007*.
- Audit role will provide independent oversight on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basin Plan and associated water resource plans.
- Goal is to contribute to more effective management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin.
- Independent audits will be an important element of the new basin governance arrangements.
- Aim is to improve public confidence, strengthen accountability and transparency, and promote continuous improvement in water resource management at the basin and water management area scales.

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## Initial MDB audit



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- Statutory responsibility to complete first audit by 3 March 2013
- Given delayed release of Basin Plan, this initial audit document will assess preparedness for early implementation actions and outline the Commission's expectations for its first full audit, likely in 2014-15 (tbc)
- Initial audit document will consider:
  - **Baseline for implementation**—is the starting point for Basin Plan implementation clearly understood; what aspects of Murray-Darling Basin water management and condition are expected to change and what will not?
  - **Institutional arrangements**—are the required governance arrangements and structures are in place to support effective implementation?
  - **Organisational arrangements**—are the management structures, systems and processes designed to support effective implementation?
  - **Early environmental watering arrangements**—is early planning for environmental watering in accordance with the Basin Plan and likely to effectively contribute to the Plan's outcomes?

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## Monitoring progress



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### Other work program elements - 2012-13

- Water markets – reporting, emerging markets and ongoing development
- Water planning – monitoring and evaluation to support adaptive management, pathways to sustainable levels of extraction
- Integrity of water management systems - unaccounted water use through interception, water use from mining outside of water planning frameworks
- Groundwater/surface water connectivity and conjunctive management
- National performance reporting for urban and rural utilities

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## Advocacy and leadership



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### Continuing interest in key issues:

- information to support decision making by governments - science strategy, and effectiveness of compliance and enforcement arrangements
- community engagement in water planning
- skills and industry capability
- extent of Indigenous involvement in water planning and role of water in the *Closing the Gap* agenda
- sustainable development in northern Australia
- interface issues, including quality/quantity and climate change

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