



National Water Reform 2026

Call for submissions



The PC has released this paper to assist individuals and organisations to prepare submissions. It contains and outlines:

- the scope of the inquiry
- the PC's procedures
- matters about which the PC is seeking comment and information
- how to make a submission.

Acknowledgement of Country



The Productivity Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to their Cultures, Country and Elders past and present.

About us

The PC is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Its role, expressed most simply, is to help governments make better policies, in the long-term interest of the Australian community.

The PC's independence is underpinned by an Act of Parliament. Its processes and outputs are open to public scrutiny and are driven by concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

For more information, visit the PC's website: www.pc.gov.au

Call for submissions

The PC has released this paper to assist individuals and organisations to prepare submissions to the inquiry. It contains and outlines:

- the scope of the inquiry
- the PC's procedures
- matters about which the PC is seeking comment and information
- how to make a submission (see attachment B).

Participants should not feel that they are restricted to comment only on matters raised in this paper. The PC wishes to receive information and comment on issues which participants consider relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Key dates

Receipt of terms of reference	27 March 2026
Due date for submissions	24 April 2026
Release of interim update	June/early July 2026
Final report to Government	4 September 2026

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National Water Reform 2026

Call for submissions

The Productivity Commission has been asked to undertake the National Water Reform 2026 inquiry.

The terms of reference (attachment A) require the PC to:

- assess progress under the 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI) in accordance with the requirements of *Water Act 2007* (Cth), which includes making recommendations on actions that parties to the NWI might take to better achieve the objectives and outcomes of the NWI
- assess and recommend water policy and regulatory settings that support a secure, resilient and sustainable water services industry.

This document sets out the inquiry process and provides a list of questions for individuals and organisations to respond to.

Inquiry process

The PC must deliver its final report to Government by 4 September 2026, which necessitates compressed consultation timeframes.

Submissions are invited in two stages:

1. following this call for submissions
2. in response to an interim update (expected to be released in June or early July 2026).

Initial submissions are requested by **24 April 2026**.

Further information is available at: www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/water-reform-2026

For enquiries, please contact Pragma Giri (Inquiry Administration Officer) on (02) 6240 3277 or waterreform2026@pc.gov.au.

How to respond (overview)

The PC invites participants to respond to the questions included in this document. You may address questions related to Part A (NWI Assessment), Part B (secure, resilient and sustainable water services), or both.

You do not need to respond to every question. Submissions may focus on the issues you consider most significant and may also raise other issues relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Submissions may be national or jurisdiction-specific.

Where possible, submitters are encouraged to draw on evidence, data, case studies or practical examples. When proposing reform ideas, respondents may wish to briefly outline the problem being addressed, why it is a priority, and any likely benefits, costs or implementation risks associated with the reform.

As an alternative to providing a submission, stakeholders may provide a brief comment via the PC's website.

Submissions may be provided in written form or other formats accepted by the PC, as outlined in attachment B, which also sets out information on publication, confidentiality, privacy, and lodgement arrangements.

Information request Part A – NWI assessment

The PC is assessing progress against the 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI), including jurisdictions' responses to findings and key priorities identified in the PC's 2024 NWI assessment (attachment C).

1. Progress since the 2024 NWI assessment

- What actions have jurisdictions taken in response to the findings and reform priorities identified in the PC's 2024 NWI assessment?
- Where has progress occurred?
- Where has progress been limited or slower than expected, or been reversed, and why?
- What policy, legislative, regulatory, funding or governance factors have influenced progress (positively or negatively), and how?

2. Barriers and emerging risks

- What policy, legislative, regulatory, funding or governance barriers are affecting progress towards NWI outcomes in your jurisdiction or operating context (including how responsibilities, decision-making and oversight are organised)?
- What emerging risks are currently affecting, or over the next three years could affect, NWI water reform objectives and outcomes?

3. Forward reform priorities (next three years)

- From your perspective, what 1–3 water reform priorities would most improve outcomes in your jurisdiction or operating context over the next three years?

Information request Part B – Secure, resilient and sustainable services

The water services industry provides essential water, wastewater and stormwater services ('water services') to households and businesses across urban, regional and remote areas. These services are mainly (although not exclusively) delivered by government-owned utilities and local councils. They own and operate storage, delivery, harvesting, treatment (including desalination and recycling) and distribution infrastructure. They also implement demand management initiatives and undertake retail functions such as customer service, billing, and administering customer hardship programs. Some providers are subject to independent economic regulation, while all are subject to environmental, public health and other regulation.

This part of the terms of reference relating to water services examines whether current pricing, economic regulation and governance arrangements are delivering:

- secure and resilient services
- financial and environmental sustainability over the long term
- affordable outcomes for customers.

The PC is interested in how arrangements operate in practice, where risks or trade-offs arise, and what reforms would deliver net benefits.

Water resource management is not the primary focus of Part B of this inquiry; however the PC recognises that it underpins water services such as the provision of safe drinking water. The terms of reference direct

the PC to avoid re-examining matters already under review, including through the 2026 Commonwealth Water Act and Basin Plan reviews. The PC will therefore focus on economic regulation and governance settings for water services rather than water resource management. This will include the pricing of water services, how investment decisions are made, and implications for service delivery.

Overall questions

- Which elements of current water service arrangements (for example, pricing design, regulatory oversight, funding mechanisms, or governance arrangements to promote accountability and transparency) are working effectively?
 - What evidence or examples demonstrate this performance?
 - What objectives and goals are these arrangements achieving well?
- Are there specific aspects of current water service arrangements, in particular regions or jurisdictions, that create material risks, inefficiencies or misalignments?
 - What consequences have you observed, and who is affected by them?
 - Do you anticipate any risks, inefficiencies or misalignments increasing in the future, and if so, why?
- How do current arrangements affect how trade-offs are made between service reliability, long-term financial sustainability, affordability and any other objectives?
 - Are there objectives and goals that are not being achieved as successfully as others, and if so which ones?
 - How might these trade-offs become more acute over the medium to long term (for example, due to climate change, population growth, new or expanding water-intensive industries, or emerging demand profiles), and how well are current arrangements positioned to manage these pressures sustainably?
- How well do current arrangements support safe, secure and culturally appropriate water services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- Are there specific reforms to water service arrangements that would materially improve outcomes?
 - What problem would the reform address, and what implementation challenges or risks should be considered?

The questions below relate to specific themes associated with water services.

Theme 1: Pricing and economic regulation

This theme examines whether pricing and regulatory frameworks support efficient investment, cost-recovery and appropriate risk allocation.

Trade-offs between policy objectives

- How do current pricing determinations meet and balance different objectives relating to service reliability, long-term financial viability, affordability and any other objectives (e.g. cost-recovery, asset renewal, monopoly price regulation, social equity, addressing disadvantage, environmental outcomes, liveability or other customer priorities)?
- How are trade-offs made during the price setting process, especially between long-term objectives (such as those relating to asset expenditure and renewal) and short-term social equity objectives (such as affordability)?
- Are broader policy objectives (such as housing growth or emissions reduction) clearly specified in pricing decision processes? If so, how?

- How is affordability defined, considered and assessed in practice in price setting processes? Is affordability primarily addressed through targeted measures for customers experiencing hardship or vulnerability, through average/broader price moderation for all customers, a combination of both, or otherwise?
 - What trade-offs arise between these approaches?
 - How are distributional impacts assessed and monitored?

Incentives and efficiency

- How do current regulatory settings support efficient and prudent capital and operating expenditure?
- What, if any, aspects of current settings create incentives for decision-making that leads to inefficient outcomes?

Process and regulatory burden

- Are pricing review and economic regulatory processes proportionate to the risks being managed?
- What administrative, planning, management or compliance costs arise from current pricing review and economic regulatory processes, and who bears them?
- How do regulatory timeframes support or affect investment certainty or service delivery?

Theme 2: Governance, accountability and coordination

This theme considers whether governance arrangements support clear accountability and integrated system outcomes.

Roles, responsibilities and accountability

- How clearly defined are the differing roles of governments, regulators and service providers? How well are these roles communicated to customers and the general public?
- Are responsibilities between levels of government and different agencies sufficiently clear, including in discrete or remote communities?
- Are there areas of overlapping or fragmented responsibilities, and if so, what consequences arise?
- How well do existing accountability mechanisms (such as economic regulation, performance reporting, ministerial oversight or board governance) drive measurable performance improvement?
- How well do these accountability mechanisms engender broader community and customer trust in water service decision-making?
- What reforms would strengthen governments' accountability and improve outcomes?
- Are there formal partnership arrangements in place between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to support joint decision-making? How could these partnerships be strengthened?

System coordination

- How do current arrangements support effective coordination between:
 - water supply, wastewater and stormwater services (including recycled water and other options)?
 - water services provision and land-use planning systems?
 - service providers and economic regulators?
 - economic, environmental, health and other relevant regulators?

Theme 3: Regional, remote and equity considerations

This theme examines challenges and equity considerations outside major urban centres.

Financial sustainability and viability

- What structural or other factors (such as scale, customer density, workforce constraints or source water variability) affect provider viability?
- How well do current funding and governance arrangements reflect higher per-customer costs in regional or remote settings?
- How well and how consistently do current funding arrangements encourage efficient delivery of services (i.e. long-term lowest cost?)

Service equity

- How well designed are pricing and community service obligation arrangements to transparently balance cost-recovery and affordability?
- What reforms would improve equity outcomes (e.g. for those communities systematically experiencing lower service standards) without undermining financial sustainability?
- What have been the implications of lower service standards and reliability in regional and remote communities, such as on economic and social outcomes?

Place-based evidence and comparative data are particularly useful.

Alternative models for service provision

- What, if any, alternative service provision models (such as aggregation, collaboration, separation of functions, regionalisation or system operator models) are likely to improve performance in your context, and why?
- What problem(s) would any changes address, and what transition risks or costs should be considered?
- What examples are there of (alternative) service provision models that would support self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and drive improved outcomes in regional and remote areas?

Theme 4: National consistency and intergovernmental coordination

This theme considers whether, and if so how, greater national alignment and/or intergovernmental coordination would improve efficiency, investment certainty, consumer outcomes, or other key objectives of water service provision arrangements.

- Do differences between jurisdictions create compliance costs or inefficiencies, and if so, how?
- In which areas would national consistency deliver net benefits?
- Where is jurisdictional flexibility most important, and why?
- How should the benefits of flexibility for individual jurisdictions be balanced against nation-wide benefits from greater national consistency?
- How could intergovernmental coordination/collaboration be strengthened without increasing regulatory complexity?

A. Terms of reference

National water inquiry

I, the Hon Jim Chalmers MP, Treasurer, pursuant to Parts 2 and 3 of the *Productivity Commission Act 1998* and Section 88 of the *Water Act 2007* (the Water Act), request the Productivity Commission (the Commission) undertake a National water inquiry.

In addition to the requirements of Section 88, the inquiry should also advise on approaches for a more sustainable water service industry, as set out below, to inform further work by all jurisdictions to refresh Australia's water policy.

Background

Water underpins Australia's social and cultural wellbeing, supports the resilience of communities and industries, and sustains the ecosystems and environmental values that make Australia unique. As climate change places increasing pressure on this finite and highly variable resource, we must continue to ensure that water is managed carefully to meet the needs of people, economies and the environment.

The water sector plays a critical role in delivering the services that underpin economic activity in urban and regional communities. Ongoing reform and adaptation of the sector is essential to ensure its continued effectiveness in responding to contemporary challenges, such as climate change, population growth, and competition for water resources from new and expanding industries. The inquiry provides the opportunity to examine approaches needed to manage and support a sustainable and resilient water services industry.

Since the last inquiry, the Australian Government worked in partnership with all jurisdictions to renew the national approach to water reform established under the 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI). This was done through the development of a new intergovernmental agreement – the National Water Agreement (NWA). The Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests provided guidance on developing the NWA to the National Water Committee and the Water Ministerial Council to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water interests and values.

The NWA retains the strong foundations of the NWI, while introducing new priorities, objectives and outcomes. Jurisdictions are commencing work to refresh Australia's water policy. This will include updating water pricing principles and reviewing independent economic regulation.

Scope of the inquiry

The Commission should apply the requirements of Section 88 of the Water Act noting that:

- the NWI that set shared goals and national priorities for water management – is more than 20 years old
- the Commonwealth, together with the States and Territories, has developed a new NWA which builds on the strengths of the NWI to address current and future water challenges
- the Australian Government has signed the NWA, and it is now with each state and territory government to consider signing
- jurisdictions who are party to the NWA by 28 May 2026, will have entered into the successor framework to the NWI with updated objectives.

The Commission should also examine all jurisdictions' water policy and regulatory settings required to support the long-term sustainability of Australia's water services industry, having regard to water affordability, productivity and other key priorities (housing supply, net zero transition, National Closing the Gap targets and the sustainable development of new industries, including data centres).

The Commission should provide recommendations on approaches that Australian governments and the water services industry can take to improve the security, resilience and sustainability of water services, and support productivity and affordability, through consideration of:

- pricing:
 - ensuring efficient resource allocation and the long-term financial sustainability of the water services industry
 - approaches to the challenge of balancing affordability with long-term service resilience.
- economic oversight and regulatory design that:
 - balances national consistency with jurisdictional diversity
 - achieves efficient cost recovery while meeting distributional and social policy objectives
 - promotes proactive and sustainable asset management
 - is responsive to emerging challenges such as environmental contaminants
 - supports utilities' long-term planning, including investment in circularity and moving operations towards net zero.
- governance options to improve the overall sustainability of the industry
- regional and equity considerations, including structural challenges faced by regional and remote utilities.

In conducting the inquiry, the Commission should consider:

- where relevant, the NWI and in particular the objectives listed in clause 23
- where relevant, the NWI schedules and associated principles, guidelines and modules and further policy work underway by jurisdictions to refresh Australia's water policy
- any Commonwealth, state or territory reform initiatives relevant to the inquiry scope including the NWA
- the scope of other relevant reviews (such as the reviews of the Water Act or Basin Plan 2012) with a view to avoiding re-examination of matters already under consideration
- the perspectives and socio-cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- the government response to the recommendations of the independent review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Process

The Commission is to update its findings from the National Water Reform 2024 inquiry report, in line with the requirements of the Water Act.

The Commission is to undertake public consultation including, inviting public submissions where appropriate.

The Commission should establish a stakeholder working group in accordance with Section 89 of the Water Act.

The Commission should consult nationally, including with Commonwealth, state and territory governments, relevant sectors and stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The final report should be provided no later than 4 September 2026.

The Hon Jim Chalmers MP
Treasurer

[Received 27 03 2026]

B. How to make a submission

How to prepare a submission

Written submissions may range from a short comment outlining your views on a particular topic to a much more substantial document covering a range of issues. Where possible, you should provide evidence, such as relevant data and documentation, to support your views.

Publishing submissions

Each submission, except for any attachment supplied in confidence, will be published on the PC's website shortly after receipt, and will remain there indefinitely as a public document.

The PC reserves the right to not publish material on its website that is offensive, potentially defamatory, or clearly out of scope for the inquiry or study in question.

Copyright

Copyright in submissions sent to the PC resides with the author(s), not with the PC.

Do not send us material for which you are not the copyright owner – such as pictures, photos and newspaper articles – you should just reference or link to this material in your submission.

In confidence material

This is a public review and all submissions should be provided as public documents that can be placed on the PC's website for others to read and comment on. However, information which is of a confidential nature or which is submitted in confidence can be treated as such by the PC, provided the cause for such treatment is shown.

The PC may also request a non-confidential summary of the confidential material it is given, or the reasons why a summary cannot be provided.

Material supplied in confidence should be clearly marked 'IN CONFIDENCE' and be in a separate attachment to non-confidential material.

You are encouraged to contact the PC for further information and advice before submitting such material.

Privacy

For privacy reasons, all **personal** details (e.g. home and email address, signatures and phone numbers) will be removed before they are published on the website.

You may wish to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym. Please note that, if you choose to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym, the PC may place less weight on your submission.

Technical tips

The PC prefers to receive submissions as a Microsoft Word (.docx) files. PDF files are acceptable if produced from a Word document or similar text-based software. You may wish to search the Internet on how to make your documents more accessible or for the more technical, follow advice from Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>.

Do not send password protected files.

Track changes, editing marks, hidden text and internal links should be removed from submissions.

To minimise linking problems, type the full web address (for example, <http://www.referred-website.com/folder/file-name.html>).

How to lodge a submission

Submissions should be lodged using the online form on the PC's website. Submissions lodged by post should be accompanied by a submission cover sheet, available from the PC's website.

Online* www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/water-reform-2026

Post* National Water Reform 2026
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Phone Please contact Pragya Giri (Inquiry Administration Officer) on 02 6240 3277

* If you do not receive notification of receipt of your submission to the PC, please contact the Administrative Officer.

Due date for submissions

Please send submissions to the PC by **24 April 2026**.

C. Findings and key priorities from the 2024 inquiry

Table 1 summarises the key priorities identified by the PC in 2024 for each jurisdiction. Table 2 lists the findings from PC (2024). This is not an exhaustive list of issues raised in 2024, or what will be considered in this inquiry. For comprehensive information, please consult the complete 2024 final report.

Table 1 – Key priorities for the three-year assessment period commencing 2024

New South Wales

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, New South Wales should:

- obtain accreditation for its remaining eight water resource plans in the Murray–Darling Basin
- complete its planned rollouts of floodplain harvesting licences and AS4747 metering
- establish accurate, numeric long-term average annual extraction limits in water sharing plans for unregulated river systems
- continue its efforts to establish an agreement with the ACT Government to enable cross border trade between the two jurisdictions.

Victoria

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, Victoria should:

- clearly establish a specific risk assignment framework
- keep all options on the table in managing urban water supplies, particularly in removing explicit or implicit barriers to the use of purified recycled water for drinking water supplies, and to urban-rural water trade.

Queensland

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, Queensland should:

- finalise and implement its First Nations Water Strategy
- progress its current program of approved water security infrastructure projects, focusing on cost effective investments
- continue its Urban Water Risk Assessment program to understand drinking water quality, water supply security and water and sewerage service delivery risks across remote and regional Queensland
- expand independent economic regulation for urban providers and replace capital grant funding for regional urban providers with transparent community service obligation payments.

Western Australia

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, Western Australia should:

- introduce NWI-consistent water legislation
- strengthen independent economic regulation frameworks to align water service pricing with cost-recovery principles
- increase the transparency of information on prices, costs and subsidies for irrigation services.

South Australia

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, South Australia should:

- continue water security planning and investment activities in line with its Water security statement
- progress unbundling of remaining water entitlements, where feasible
- review grandfathering provisions to encourage greater uptake of the AS4747 metering standard.

Tasmania

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, Tasmania should:

- address under-pricing by the state-wide water service provider
- increase transparency of information on prices, costs and subsidies for irrigation services
- publicly report compliance and enforcement activities and implement actions from the review of its water accountability framework under the RWUS
- specify cultural and spiritual outcomes for First Nations communities in water plans
- specify and implement risk sharing provisions between licence holders and government, based on the NWI risk assignment framework.

Northern Territory

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, the Northern Territory should:

- progress its planned safe drinking water legislation and continue to improve water quality in remote communities
- strengthen the voice of First Nations peoples in water management and enhance access to water for Aboriginal peoples within its Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves
- more clearly specify environmental and cultural outcomes in its water allocation plans, ensuring these outcomes are informed by high quality engagement and science.

Australian Capital Territory

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, the ACT should continue its efforts to establish an agreement with the NSW Government to enable cross border trade between the two jurisdictions.

Australian Government

In the next three-year NWI assessment period, the Australian Government should:

- articulate its strategic vision for national water policy
- coordinate across jurisdictions on water policy matters of shared interest, and support collaborative innovation and knowledge sharing efforts through the NWRC to facilitate best practice water management
- ensure that new or refurbished water infrastructure projects are compliant with the NWI as a condition of Australian Government funding (and pre-conditioned, to encourage adherence to commitments agreed in a renewed NWI)
- continue its policy and investment efforts to rebalance already overallocated surface water and groundwater systems and avoid overallocation in 'at risk' systems.

Source: PC (2024).

Table 2 – Findings

Water markets and trading – Finding 5.1

Further improvements can be made to trade registers to provide necessary information to market participants

Most state and territory governments have implemented water registers that comply with the NWI. But further improvements, such as ensuring that water registers include current entitlement and allocation information, real time (or recent) trade data, and that registers are freely accessible by the public, and ideally, easy to search, would increase the efficacy of registers in supporting trade in water entitlements.

Best practice water pricing and institutional arrangements – Finding 6.1

Some governments have moved away from NWI commitments to deliver cost-reflective and consumption-based pricing

Some jurisdictions have maintained or strengthened pricing regulation to focus on the long-term interests of end users, such as the Victorian Essential Services Commission's application of the PREMO water pricing framework (performance, risk, engagement, management, outcomes) and the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal adopting a 3C's approach (customers, costs, credibility).

In some other jurisdictions, NWI pricing arrangements have been significantly eroded or remain well short of best practice. Jurisdictions that lacked independent economic regulation in 2021 have not taken steps to improve water pricing regulation. Further, a number of jurisdictions have weakened independent regulation through:

- applying discounts or price caps to independently determined consumption-based prices
- issuing ministerial directions that affect the decision-making processes of independent regulators
- not using water price monitoring or review powers to determine if greater price regulation is needed.

Best practice water pricing and institutional arrangements – Finding 6.2

Some government decision making for major water infrastructure is not fully compliant with the NWI

The NWI requires governments to be satisfied that infrastructure investments are economically viable and ecologically sustainable. To be consistent with these principles, investments should be rigorously assessed, comparing all options available to meet identified needs. Ideally, this would also involve a transparent, independent assessment of proposals.

This is currently not being achieved by all parties to the NWI, and the commitment to these principles appears to be waning:

- A significant proportion of major infrastructure developments funded by governments since 2021 have not been subjected to a transparent assessment of the costs and benefits of the proposal, or to independent scrutiny of business cases.
- Further, a number of successfully funded investment projects – including those funded under the Australian Government's National Water Grid program – were funded even where the assessed costs of the project outweighed the estimated benefits to the community.

Integrated management of water for environmental and other public benefit outcomes – Finding 7.1

Environmental and other public benefit outcomes are inconsistently specified

There remains a lack of specificity about environmental outcomes defined in water plans, their level of detail and indicators.

Other public benefit outcomes continue to be undefined or defined only at a high level. While the achievement of environmental outcomes can also contribute to other public benefit outcomes, such as recreational opportunities, amenity benefits and public health, the Commission has found no clear long-term performance indicators specified linking these outcomes.

Integrated management of water for environmental and other public benefit outcomes – Finding 7.2
Reporting on environmental outcomes is overall inadequate, particularly for planned environmental water

Jurisdictions generally report on how much environmental water was delivered, and there is reasonable reporting of outcomes by some environmental water holders. However, there is very little reporting on:

- what both held and planned environmental water achieved in terms of outcomes
- the counterfactual – that is, what would have happened if the water had not been delivered, and
- whether the environmental water allocations are sufficient to achieve environmental outcomes specified in water plans.
- In many jurisdictions it remains unclear how reporting arrangements for environmental water subsequently feed back into their water planning process and support adaptive management.

Integrated management of water for environmental and other public benefit outcomes – Finding 7.3
Independent review of environmental outcomes is absent in many jurisdictions

There is no consistent basis for independent audit of whether environmental and public benefit outcomes from environmental water have been achieved, the adequacy of water provision for these objectives, or the performance of environmental water managers. While most jurisdictions have built-in reviews of their water management plans, these are not always undertaken in a timely manner or by an independent body.

Water resource accounting – Finding 8.1

Jurisdictions are not projected to meet their metering installation commitments

Most states or territories are not on track to meet their commitment to have all new and replacement meters AS4747 compliant and have all water entitlements metered by July 2025. This undermines the ability of states to conduct proper measurement of watering limits and increases the risk of unreported water use and overextraction.

The private benefits for water users to upgrade their water meters to AS4747 standard are low and therefore not a sufficient incentive to upgrade.

Urban water reform – Finding 9.1

Some regional and remote areas still do not have access to safe drinking water supply

There continue to be drinking water quality issues in some remote areas of Australia caused by exceedances in the chemical health standards outlined in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. In addition, exceedances of aesthetic parameters such as colour, palatability have led to acceptability issues. This is leading to a loss of confidence in the water supply amongst the community in these areas.

Urban water reform – Finding 9.2

There continues to be a lack of consistency and transparency in relation to the publication of drinking water quality data

The detail, consistency and availability of drinking water quality reports continues to vary for regional and remote areas. There have been improvements to the publication of data across all Australian Drinking Water Guidelines standards for the regions and communities serviced by Power and Water Corporation in the Northern Territory. Also, from July 2024 water service providers with under 10,000 connections will now report on the water quality risk management guidelines used as part of the National Performance Report.

Further development is required to centralise the reporting of drinking water quality indicators, such as percentage of the population where microbiological compliance was achieved, percentage of the population where chemical compliance is met, and the number of boil water alerts issued.

Source: PC (2024).