

OFFICIAL



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council



Commissioner Joanne Chong
Productivity Commission
National Water Reform Inquiry

via email: water.reform.2024@pc.gov.au

Dear Commissioner

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Productivity Commission's inquiry on National Water Reform (2024).

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for several national water quality guidelines, including the [Australian Drinking Water Guidelines](#) (2011) and the [Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water](#) (2008). These guidelines are based on the best available evidence and aim to provide nationally consistent advice to maintain public health. NHMRC's water quality guidelines also contribute to the National Water Quality Management Strategy, which is managed by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

As outlined in our 2 September 2020 submission to the *National Water Reform: Productivity Commission Issues Paper*, NHMRC considers water quality and human health to be high priorities that should underpin all key objectives of a renewed National Water Initiative. Placing greater prominence on water quality as a central component will help to ensure that public health issues are not overlooked, no matter how water supplies might be allocated or used.

Both water quality and water quantity together are essential for water security across Australia. This is particularly true with ongoing uncertainty and challenges due to climate change. Our 2020 submission provides more information on how NHMRC and the NHMRC Water Quality and Recreational Water Quality Advisory Committees envision a renewed National Water Initiative that provides secure, safe water to Australians. A copy of the 2020 NHMRC submission is enclosed for consideration as part of the 2024 Review.

I note that the findings and recommendations from the Productivity Commission's 2020 inquiry include a new objective to ensure access to safe and reliable drinking water as part of enhanced water service provision. NHMRC is aware of recent progress that has been made through funded infrastructure projects to meet this objective. However, drinking water quality remains an ongoing issue in many parts of Australia, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Emphasising the importance of water quality and fit-for-purpose management approaches will help to address inequity regarding water quality and improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It will support the achievement of Community Infrastructure Target (Target 9b) under the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (the Agreement) and to meet our obligations under the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6](#).

In addition, strengthening any recommendations about access to safe and reliable drinking water will help enable numerous other outcome areas under the Agreement.

NHMRC welcomes the opportunity to participate further in this inquiry as it progresses.

OFFICIAL

+61 2 6217 9000
16 MARCUS CLARKE STREET, CANBERRA ACT 2601
GPO BOX 1421, CANBERRA ACT 2601
NHMRC@NHMRC.GOV.AU
NHMRC.GOV.AU

BUILDING
A HEALTHY
AUSTRALIA

OFFICIAL

Yours sincerely

Professor Steve Wesselingh
Chief Executive Officer

January 2024

Enc. NHMRC submission to National Water Reform 2020

OFFICIAL