

Water Security Statement 2021

Water for Sustainable Growth¹

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Submission from

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About the Author

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¹ <https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/draft-water-security-statement>

Preamble

Water for Sustainable Growth is a diligently prepared Statement but one which leaves many needs unanswered if South Australia is to have an environmentally sustainable future. The emphasis is on economic growth and it is noted that “Sustained economic growth can only be realised if the necessary water is available.”

The present submission places emphasis on **human health and environmental sustainability**. It is, in effect, a critique of the Water Security Statement based on its lack of health and sustainability concerns and therefore upon secure foundations of water policy. The author considers he may best serve the state of South Australia in this way.

It is noted that “Building on past success in water management, there is the opportunity for South Australia to further establish itself as a world leader in new water innovation”. However, this aim is irrelevant without environmental sustainability.

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Abbreviations used in the text;-

Productivity Commission National Water Reform Draft Report (PCWRR)

Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan (GABSMP)

Water Security Statement 2021 Water for Sustainable Growth (the Statement)

I. Comments about Process

The Statement does not indicate the names and credentials of the author(s). This is clearly of relevance to the standing of the Statement and its future impact.

The “have your say” process fails to give a clear indication of the online publication of submitted material. Publication is essential if scientists, technologists, administrators, and economists are to spend time placing their expertise into the public arena to improve the wellbeing of this state. This contrasts poorly with the Commonwealth procedures which have transparency for such information. For example, let us contrast the Statement with the recent Productivity Commission National Water Reform Draft Report² (PCWRR) which has a range of submissions from scientific water experts which will be of enduring value to the nation. Furthermore, the submissions to the PCWRR provide important information to which I will refer in this submission.

II. Sustainability

The state government is responsible for sustainable management of South Australia’s water resources and is committed to ensuring that water availability supports economic growth.

Whether South Australia survives for human habitation by the end of this century can be summed up in one word “water” and this is embraced in the concept of ‘sustainability’, a word not mentioned in the Statement. The word ‘sustainable’ is used several times in relation to economic growth and the management of some individual water sources but overall the Statement engenders a sense of unreality and even denial in relation to awareness of this fundamental issue.

The concept of sustainable development is described by the 1987 Bruntland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The concepts of economic and social sustainability both depend on environmental sustainability.

Environmental sustainability³ is the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future. Because so many decisions that impact the environment are not felt immediately, a key element of environmental sustainability is its forward-looking nature. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines it as “meeting today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”⁴

This issue will be discussed in detail in Section V. Climate Change and Environmental Water.

² <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/water-reform-2020/draft/water-reform-2020-draft.pdf>

³ <https://sphera.com/glossary/what-is-environmental-sustainability/>

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/report-environment/sustainability-and-roe>

III. Aboriginal Rights and Water Security

This issue is discussed first because it is absent from the Statement. The word Aboriginal is included twice, once to indicate the expenditure of \$7.9m with no further detail. There are no references to Aboriginal needs on water, and it is not possible to glean information from other online government documents.

This omission will be regarded as breathtaking in a Closing the Gap year. Not only is it relevant to several of the Closing the Gap's aims on health, wellbeing, and cultural identity but it also has an economic relevance in the virtual exclusion of Aboriginal people from water markets.

This omission is in stark contrast to its coverage in the Productivity Commission National Water Reform Draft Report (PCWRR) and the Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan (GABSMP).

In this submission we feel compelled to remind the authors of the Statement that water is a human right for all Australians and yet this right is not being applied to many Aboriginal people. Nor is this recognised in the PCWRR as pointed out in this submission.⁵

The legal opinion expressed by the Environmental Defenders Office in their Submission to the Productivity Commission on the PCWRR 21 August 2020 is⁶

“Objectives” and “Key Elements” of the NWI do not explicitly mention water quality, and more generally that it tends to be separated out from other water planning and land use legislation. However, water quality is often linked to water quantity and/or development (of different stripes) and accordingly ought to be dealt with in a more integrated fashion. Similarly, binding water quality objectives for rivers and aquifers need to be built into jurisdictional legislation. In making this comment, we note that Tasmania, for example, does not have published (or binding) water quality objectives”.

*Furthermore, water quality is linked to fundamental human rights (notably the Right to Life) ** and is an element of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6). Regrettably, the EDO has many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients across numerous jurisdictions who are unable to routinely access water that is safe to drink or bathe in and who are consequently unable to fully exercise their Right to Life. This is a function of a range of factors, including poor water management (for example ongoing over-extraction, which can increase salinity and the likelihood of algal blooms) and systemic racism (which results in the de-prioritisation of clean water supply to Aboriginal communities).*

***The Right to Life is an established human right and is notably recognised in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (which is binding under international law)*

⁵ https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/273989/subdr126-water-reform-2020.pdf

⁶ https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/255773/sub054-water-reform-2020.pdf

It is therefore necessary to point out that the Statement should include recognition that inadequate availability of water for some Aboriginal communities is a fundamental cause of poor health outcomes, particularly in children and also for a 10 year decrease in life expectancy as pointed out in the Close the Gap Report.⁷

In these communities, a lack of access to clean and secure drinking water has been linked to significant health impacts, including hygiene-related, ear, eye, skin, respiratory infections, and diarrhoeal diseases. Such repeated infections have also been linked with increased risk for long-term diseases including chronic kidney disease, rheumatic heart disease and renal failure.⁸

The eye disease Trachoma, a hygiene/water related disease, is a measure of our failures on the prevention of an infection present only in the world's most undeveloped countries. The picture is made clear by the Fred Hollows Foundation⁹ and whilst most cases are in the northern parts of Australia, it is a national issue with Aboriginal peoples moving across state borders and it is one which hallmarks the poor endeavours of Australia over many years. Furthermore, the water sources available to Aboriginal people are frequently contaminated with heavy metals and radioactivity for mining wastes.

There are many other aspects of Aboriginal needs which should be included in the Statement which are relevant to the shamefully wide gap on the provision of water as a determinant of good health. The needs described in many submissions to the PCWRR from Aboriginal groups should be noted in the Statement, for example the impacts described in the words of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN)¹⁰:

We have been the Traditional owners of the Basin for over 30,000 years. Whilst our involvement in the management of water is essential for our physical, spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic health, our potential to do this has been hindered in recent decades by our relative lack of water license holdings. Nearly 10 percent of the population of the Murray Darling Basin area in NSW are First Nations people; however, our Nations and organisations legally only hold 0.2 percent of the available surface water.

The principles of this statement from New South Wales apply to all states and territories.

IV. Water Quality

This is a further issue of importance as a health issue to all Australians but also to those in remote communities and particularly to Aboriginal people.

⁷ <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdf/closing-the-gap-report-2020.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4007027/>

⁹ <https://www.hollows.org/au/what-we-do/indigenous-australia/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-eye-health/trachoma>

¹⁰ https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/255655/sub017-water-reform-2020.pdf

In a submission from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), to the PCDR the following the following is stated in the covering letter¹¹

NHMRC would like to see water quality and human health feature more prominently in a renewed National Water Initiative. While the recommendations in the Draft Report (PCWRR) go some way to addressing this issue, explicit mention of public health as a desired outcome in addition to other public benefits in a renewed National Water Initiative will highlight the importance of this issue.

These thoughts are relevant to the Statement which notes

International standards for water quality and management are also a major driving force in the development of the water industry. Work continues to refine and upgrade regulations and standards to ensure they are based on strong policies underpinned by sound scientific knowledge.

Yes, this is true for urban areas and many regional areas, but it remains a major issue for remote areas and adequate plans for management are not described. In these remote areas there is also concern about contamination from fracking and from mine tailings. The Statement does not detail any sense of urgency and planning for the delivery of clean and safe water to communities.

V. Climate Change and Environmental Water

The Statement notes in the section "Changes in South Australia's Climate" the need to recognise climate change as a factor in all water considerations. It is vital that the current projections referred to, detail the scenarios used, for example 1.5., 2.0., or 3 degrees temperature rise before the end of this century,^{12,13} for a 3 degree rise is increasingly likely under current international progress on mitigation and related issues.¹⁴ Clearly under a precautionary principle, planning must cover the most severe outcomes.

Page 12 of the Statement states

Increasing demand and climate change will put pressure on the environment and it is important to monitor, plan for and respond to future changes. Water planning will remain important to strike the right balance between utilising water for economic benefit and ensuring the health of our ecosystem.

¹¹ https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/273988/subdr125-water-reform-2020.pdf

¹² https://52a87f3e-7945-4bb1-abbf-9aa66cd4e93e.filesusr.com/ugd/148cb0_c65caa20ecb342568a99a6b179995027.pdf

¹³ <https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2021/risks-australia-three-deg-warmer-world-report.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/un-chief-urges-substantial-g7-climate-aid-pledges-2021-05-06/>

This needs further explanation of the meaning of the word **balance**, taking into account in the words of the UN World Water report 2020¹⁵ on increasing water security;-

Around one million animal and plant species are facing extinction. Freshwater species have suffered the greatest decline, falling by 84% since 1970. Humans are also affected: around four billion people currently experience severe physical water scarcity for at least one month per year, a situation that has been exacerbated by the climate crisis

Australia is part of this crisis with the ANUs Environment Explorer Report for 2019¹⁶ revealing the worst environmental conditions in many decades, perhaps centuries, and confirms the devastating damage global warming and mismanagement are wreaking on our natural resources.

Without our biodiversity and ecological services there is no economy.

The Statement's page 12 on "Water for the Environment" is supported with reservations on "Water planning will remain important to strike the right balance between utilising water for economic benefit and ensuring the health of our ecosystems." But the word **balance** is again used.

In the interest of environmental sustainability, this needs water resource management based upon a simple understanding of priorities. As the first priority, water must be provided for the basic needs of people, particularly considering the physiological requirement for water in high temperatures. Secondly, water is vital for the sustainability of the biodiversity and ecological services and for some food production. As the third priority, the remaining water is needed for economic activity but will require its own list of priorities based on usage and its economic importance to the nation.

However, the Statement does contrast favourably with the PCWRR which frequently mentions "maintaining a balance" between water users. As climate change bites, the environment and its services need more water to survive. Their necessary share of the total water available will need to increase. The PCWR unfortunately states "the environment will have to adapt to lower water."

It is suggested therefore that the Statement recognises that Environmental water must be prioritised; otherwise, we will reach a tipping point where whole regional environmental systems can collapse.¹⁷

It is surprising that the National Water Initiative (NWI) fails to provide a statement of understanding on this vital issue.

¹⁵ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/world-water-development-report-2020/>

¹⁶ https://wenfo.org/ausenv/#/2020/Environmental_Condition%20Score/Region/Actual/Local_Government%20Areas/bar,options/-28.96/135.00/3/none/Roadmap/Opaque

¹⁷ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-15029-x>

However there seems to be one important exception to the prudent use of water in all states and territories including South Australia. This emanates from the National Water Initiative in 2012 as “Full incorporation of water use by mineral and petroleum industries”.¹⁸

The NWI includes a special provision for mineral and petroleum industries. It states that ‘factors specific to resource development projects, such as isolation, relatively short project duration, water quality issues, and obligations to remediate and offset impacts, may require specific management arrangements’ that are outside the scope of the agreement.

This provision was intended to provide flexibility, given the nature of mineral and petroleum industries’ water extraction requirements, such as the use of saline or hyper-saline water.

This might be termed most politely as a cop out, a provision for plunder of water resources framed in obscure words.

Most jurisdictions have incorporated mineral and petroleum industries into their entitlements and planning frameworks to some extent. In Queensland, however, alternative arrangements remain where resource tenure holders may be granted rights to take ‘associated water’ (Groundwater taken or interfered with in the course of mining activity), with the amount of water take permitted not determined by water plans and allocations.

In their submission to the PCWRR the National Farmers’ Federation noted that the current approach has “two sets of rules” —one for farmers and the other for the resources industry’.

VI. The Murray-Darling River

As indicated in the Statement, South Australia has significant dependence on the river for water supply to Adelaide and regional towns and for irrigated agriculture. South Australia is therefore in significant danger for much current scientific opinion is that the demise of the MDB is now likely due to mismanagement. A fundamental problem has been detailed by Richard Beasley, former senior counsel assisting the Murray-Darling Royal Commission in his book ‘Dead in the water: a very angry book about our greatest environmental catastrophe – the death of the Murray Darling Basin’ (Allen & Unwin, Feb 2021). Essentially, maladministration by the Authority commenced with a recommendation of 4-7 thousand billion litres of water for environmental needs to sustain the integrity of the river system on the basis of CSIRO modelling for the impacts of climate change. This was reduced to 2.7 and this action was claimed to be by threatening the CSIRO with reduced funding. Over the years the situation has been compounded by further political disruption, state conflicts over water, and frequent state and Federal political decisions such as ad hoc announcement of dams.¹⁹

¹⁸ <https://reneweconomy.com.au/a-fossil-fuel-frenzy-is-drinking-australias-finite-water-resources/>

¹⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/most-expensive-water-in-history-minister-to-push-ahead-with-new-murray-darling-basin-dams-20210609-p57zgn.html>

The current state of the Murray-Darling and its management has been described recently by Margaret Simons.²⁰

Essentially the suppression of climate modelling data could be seen to negate much of current policy and the report of the ACCC Murray-Darling Basin water markets inquiry.²¹

The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement defines the rules for how water in the River Murray is shared between New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia. It is naïve to believe that decreasing river flows, which are likely to lead to the demise of some River Murray towns and enterprises, can be managed under the current Murray Plan and short-term political decisions, which override science. This must have been in the minds of a previous South Australian government when a desalination capability was established. Consequently, it is essential that a statutory independent Sustainability-type Commission be established to replace current Murray management and South Australian government policy should be working for this outcome.

VII. The Great Artesian Basin

This is also a vital supply for South Australia but best used with care because with 3 or 4 degree climate scenarios it might become the main supply for human use, a case presented in this submission to the PCWRR.²²

The Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan (GABSMP)²³ states Basin governments and community and industry representatives have agreed to seven guiding principles for managing the Great Artesian Basin to achieve economic, environmental, cultural and social outcomes.

These are

1. coordinated governance
2. a healthy resource
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values, cultural heritage and other community values
4. secure and managed access
5. judicious use of groundwater
6. information, knowledge and understanding for management
7. communicate and educate

None of the seven principles directly address human health needs or sustainability.

²⁰ <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2021/06/12/conciliation-murray-darling/162342000011853>

²¹ <https://www.accc.gov.au/focus-areas/inquiries-finalised/murray-darling-basin-water-markets-inquiry-0>

²² https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/273989/subdr126-water-reform-2020.pdf

²³ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/national/great-artesian-basin/strategic-management-plan>

However it is noted that “Groundwater in the Basin, although substantial, is finite. In most parts of the Basin, recharge rates have declined over geological time, so the resource is in natural decline.”²⁴

This means that, even if humans were not extracting water, the volume of water and water pressure in the Basin would continue falling. As the extraction of water has significantly increased the speed of this decline, the Plan seeks to encourage actions which ensure judicious use of water by all water users.

Section 3 of the GABSMP “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values, cultural heritage and other community values” states

Water from the Basin is crucial to the maintenance of numerous natural and cultural resources and assets that are considered by the community to have high value. Basin water sustains natural biodiversity and ecosystems as well as settings and assets that are recognised as having important local, national and international values.

The Statement has no such message, which leads to the question whether South Australia agrees with Section 3, and if so, why is no reference made to it?

In the Statement section ‘Far North’ on page 42, the questions of usage is dealt with briefly but leaves many questions unanswered, and particularly the following requires clarification.

In nearly all cases, petroleum wells produce a mixture of petroleum and water. This water, mixed with the petroleum, is commonly known as co-produced water and a volume of 29.2 GLper year is currently authorised to be taken from the GAB, with 20.8 GL extracted in 2018-19. A total of 26.2 GLper year is authorised to be taken by the mining industry. This includes water used for product processing and mine dewatering, and includes the water currently authorised for taking by Olympic Dam Mine (15.3 GLper year) under the Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) Act 198.

For example, the disposal of coproduced water and water from the expanding industry is a potential source of contamination.

Section 3 of the GABSMP continues

The rights of all authorised users must have a clear, secure statutory basis, and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood by all water users regardless of access arrangements. Secure and managed access increases the certainty of water supply over the long term, an outcome beneficial to all Basin water users.

Safe and reliable water supplies are critical to people who live and operate businesses in the Basin. Governments, industries, water users and others need to protect and maintain the resource, preserve cultural values and ensure environmental water requirements are understood and met. This means that impacts resulting from water extraction need to be clearly identified,

²⁴ <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP132686&dsid=DS5>

accounted for and adequately managed to maintain the health of the resource and the greatest long-term benefits to the community.

Does the South Australian government agree? If so, it is not made clear if the Aboriginal people have secure rights.

In the GABSMP, it is noted in Appendix D that the monitoring wells situated in the northern region are stable with some declining. These cannot be taken to reflect those in other regions further south. However, the case for a declining water resource is evidenced by the decline of the Mound Springs.²⁵

The following is evidence given in Supplementary Submission No.73.1 (30th Oct 2020)²⁶ to the Federal Juukan Caves Inquiry.

I commend the strong heart-felt Arabana Aboriginal Corporation Submission No.92²⁷ (11 August) to this Inquiry. You must act on the Arabana Chairperson's call for protection of GAB Springs:

Unfortunately, our springs are disappearing.... The cause of the disappearance of our springs, is water that is being taken from the Great Artesian Basin by BHP's mine at Roxby Downs.... Unless something is done by the Commonwealth, our springs will disappear... It is unsustainable, destructive of nature, and destructive of our culture to allow the springs to die. Will you please enact laws that ensure our mound springs and culture are recognised, respected and protected?

This Inquiry must recognise BHP's ongoing threat to the integrity of the Springs. Through excessive BHP operations in extraction of approx. 34-35 million litres of GAB waters a day, regulated under the outdated 1982 Indenture – set to apply out to 2036, and in proposed application in the 2020's of 'rights' under an Indenture Act License from the 1990's to take up to 42 million litres a day.

These matters are in no way lessened by BHP recently abandoning a proposed Olympic Dam mine expansion, announced just after BHP's AGM, and despite the PM's 'fast track' of Approvals to BHP.

Submission No.73²⁸ has set out evidence²⁹ of BHP retaining outdated legal privileges since taking over Olympic Dam in 2005 and of unheeded civil society calls³⁰ for BHP to surrender such anachronisms. It is a travesty that BHP has deliberately retained 1982 era over-rides of

²⁵ <https://www.theage.com.au/environment/sustainability/south-australia-s-disappearing-springs-raise-questions-for-miner-bhp-20201117-p56f6m.html>

²⁶ <https://nuclear.foe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Noonan-Supp-Sub-JSCNA-BHP-Olympic-Dam-Oct2020.pdf>

²⁷ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Northern_Australia/CavesatJuukanGorge/Submissions

²⁸ <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=618a6907-0fe7-441e-91f2-1268aca34d1b&subId=691112>

²⁹ <https://nuclear.foe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ODM-BHP-legal-privileges-Indenture-Act.pdf>

³⁰ <https://nuclear.foe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019-Dec-final-submission-joint-ENGOS-BHP-Olympic-Dam-EPBC-Referral-2019-8570.pdf>

Aboriginal Heritage across the 12,000 km² “Stuart Shelf Area” around the Olympic Dam mine, and retains outdated legal rights to take excessive volumes of GAB waters affecting the integrity and very survival of GAB Springs. These matters affect the rights and interests of a number of Aboriginal groups, including Arabana, Kokatha, Kuyani and Barngarla, and are ongoing issues for SA Native Title Services (SANTS).

This Inquiry should make Findings for action to repeal Clauses of the “Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) Act 1982”,³¹ a dated ‘State Agreement’, that impose over-rides of Aboriginal Heritage protection and legislation, despite successive State Governments having inexplicably failed to do so.

For this reason, it was recommended in a submission to the PCWRR³² that in Australia, basin water should be quarantined for human needs and food production. The identification of the appropriate resources, for example the GAB and other Basins, would be by water experts from the IESC and independent scientific organisations such as the AAS.

Quarantining is a formidable task. To take the example of the GAB, its current management is the responsibility of the four jurisdictions acting under their NRM/water legislation. Each jurisdiction has in place some form of management plan which guides extraction of water from the Basin - and which are not observed in many cases. These would probably need to be radically and uniformly revised to limit future extraction to human and food priorities. Unfortunately the resource is owned ultimately by the Crown in the right of each State/Territory and the Commonwealth has no clear constitutional authority to constrain extraction directly.

The reality is that the current work of the GAB Coordinating Committee and the overlying Ministerial Council appears to be in abeyance, as a result of a review of inter-governmental arrangements more generally following the establishment of the new National Cabinet to deal with the COVID crisis. So there is not even a forum at present to discuss any possible collaborative approach to tightening the extractive regime for the GAB. The Coalition government has no interest in any such arrangements – likewise, for the Lake Eyre Basin, and its Community Advisory Committee.

In summary we are presented with a confluence of threats to water supply ranging from accelerating climate change, deteriorating natural springs and consequential natural vegetation loss; an indenture act which allows huge usage of water till 2036, contamination threats from tailing dams and from gas mining and most importantly political indifference to these threats either because of ignorance or because of the primacy of development.

³¹

[https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/ROXBY%20DOWNS%20\(INDENTURE%20RATIFICATION\)%20ACT%201982/CURRENT/1982.52.AUTH.PDF](https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/ROXBY%20DOWNS%20(INDENTURE%20RATIFICATION)%20ACT%201982/CURRENT/1982.52.AUTH.PDF)

³² https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/273989/subdr126-water-reform-2020.pdf

VIII. Summary

Comments about process

It is important that the names and credentials of the authors of the Water Security Statement be listed and submissions be published on-line promptly in the interests of transparency of government decisions.

Sustainability

The Statement is focussed on sustainable management of South Australia's water resources to ensure that water availability supports economic growth. It fails to demonstrate an understanding that economic activity depends upon environmental sustainability. In turn this requires greater understanding of the current trajectories of climate change progression and an environmental demise this century.

Aboriginal Rights and Water Security

This issue is discussed first because it is absent from the Statement. The word Aboriginal is included twice, once to indicate the expenditure of \$7.9m with no further detail. There are no references to Aboriginal issues on water and it is not possible to glean information from other online government documents. This issue is one of human rights. It is relevant to several of the Closing the Gap's aims on health, wellbeing and cultural identity but it also has an economic relevance to the virtual de facto exclusion of Aboriginal people from water markets in the Murray Darling Basin.

Water Quality

The Statement says, "Work continues to refine and upgrade regulations and standards to ensure they are based on strong policies underpinned by sound scientific knowledge." Yet this remains a major issue for remote areas and adequate plans for management are not described. This is an important human health issue and the Statement should recognise this. It should also recognise the importance of avoiding contamination of water basins likely to be vital to sustainability.

Climate Change and Environmental Water

The Statement fails to grasp the prime importance of environmental water in the range of climate change scenarios and environmental demise occurring in Australia and particularly South Australia. This failure is implicit in the following statement "Increasing demand and climate change will put pressure on the environment and it is important to monitor, plan for and respond to future changes. Water planning will remain important to strike the right balance between utilising water for economic benefit and ensuring the health of our ecosystem." The use of the word "balance" indicates a profound misunderstanding of the scenarios in a drying climate. Planning must prioritise human and environmental water.

The Murray-Darling River

South Australia is significantly dependant on the Murray-Darling for the water supply to Adelaide and regional towns and for irrigated agriculture. The current state of the river is precarious, will

undoubtedly deteriorate further and its current management is inappropriate for its survival. South Australia has recognised its insecurity with the provision of desalination, but the Statement fails to indicate any options for necessary change in future policy.

The Great Artesian Basin

This resource is owned ultimately by the Crown in the right of each State/Territory and the Commonwealth has no clear constitutional authority to constrain extraction directly. Neither the Commonwealth in the GABSMP, nor the state of South Australia in the Statement, recognises the human health and sustainability role of the Basin as Australia, and particularly South Australia, becomes drier.

Currently the NWI has regulations which allow plunder (unlimited take for some resource projects). There is no prioritisation for the use of Basin water and little consideration of Aboriginal cultural health or spiritual needs for water access.

IX. Some Recommendations

1. Consideration of revision of the document to address omissions identified in this submission.
2. Identify authors and publish submissions.
3. Introduce vital and urgent water delivery to Aboriginal people to take account of their health and cultural needs.
4. Institute a full scientific review of the Great Artesian Basin water taking into account current uses and problems; set priorities for future use based upon scientific predictions. For example, taking into account proposals for expansion of the gas industry, seek input from the IESC to provide a comprehensive assessment of the South Australian portion of the Basin.
5. Consider current SA policy on the availability and use of Murray Darling River water with a view to establishing a national independent Statutory Sustainability Commission which would best protect South Australian interests by basing decisions on science.