

AUSTRALIAN[®] WATER

ASSOCIATION

18 February 2016

AUSTRALIAN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

CEO of the Australian Water Association (AWA) Jonathan McKeown welcomed the release of Infrastructure Australia's '*Australian Infrastructure Plan*^[1] that has recommended 92 priority projects and changes to regulations relating to the cost, price and ownership of key infrastructure.

The AWA welcomes the support given for many of the reform initiatives that have been championed by the water sector over recent years, including:

- A need for an independent national regulator for the water sector
- Re-engagement with the principles of the National Water Initiative (NWI) in both urban and regional areas
- Refocusing the attention of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) back onto water issues
- Establishment of a water reform plan and an independent body to complete water market reforms
- Lifting drinking water quality to minimal standards in all regional communities
- Implementing more aquifer recharge projects rather than surface water dams

"The Association welcomes IA's call to implement national regulatory reforms over the next five years to enable the sale of state owned water utilities. The reforms need to create a regulatory framework that protects the long term interests of consumers, provides a reasonable return on capital, and removes political interference from the governance of our water utilities. An important aspect of reform is to safeguard access to drinking water for society's most vulnerable," Mr McKeown said.

"Australia needs a clear and transparent infrastructure investment policy framework which encourages private sector involvement to attract major investment to meet environmental, community and business needs. This is imperative to achieve water security in Australia and to allow the timely adoption of new technology to improve water efficiency.

"We also need to be thinking more broadly about innovative partnership arrangements to attract investments for large scale and regional projects. The AWA feels more attention could have been paid to specific water infrastructure projects in the mix of priority projects (with the Infrastructure Plan dominated by roads and congestion projects). It is not clear how the Commonwealth Government's plans for the development of Northern Australia and additional dams to increased agricultural production fit with the priority projects included in the infrastructure plan.

^[1] <http://infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/policy-publications/publications/Australian-Infrastructure-Plan.aspx>

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“However, the Australian Water Association supports the inclusion of projects to address Darwin’s water supply, Tasmania’s sewerage treatment needs and mitigating the risk of flooding of the Hawkesbury river in NSW,” Mr McKeown said

The AWA congratulates Infrastructure Australia for its thoughtful approach to Australia’s future infrastructure needs and urges all water users to contribute to a sensible, apolitical, debate.

ENDS

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