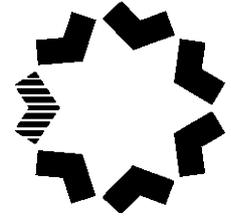


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PRESS RELEASE

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Water Reform – A National Approach

The President of the National Competition Council (NCC), Mr Graeme Samuel, today reconfirmed that the NCC would not comment on the specific assessment advice it provides to the Federal Treasurer on National Competition Policy.

However, in response to today's claims by the Queensland Government and the Local Government Association of Queensland, Mr Samuel said that the NCC neither had the power, nor had it ever been its practice, to change the competition policy agreements adopted by all Australian Governments - including the water reform commitments.

Queensland's commitments on water reform are the same as for all other States and Territories. These commitments can only be changed by agreement of all State, Territory and Commonwealth governments.

Clearly water reform is a matter of national importance and as such Queensland can not expect to receive special treatment.

The NCC will continue to assess all governments' performance on their competition policy obligations, to which they agreed, and provide advice to the Federal Treasurer, as it is required to do.

In June of last year the NCC explicitly stated, as part of assessment of Queensland's water reforms that it required information "not only for the big 17 local governments but also for other significant water and sewerage businesses. While the big 17 businesses may include 85 per cent of water provided, Council notes that the next 10 local governments bring this figure to 92 per cent."¹

¹ Second Tranche Assessment of Governments' Progress with Implementing National Competition Policy and Related Reforms, Vol. Two: Water Reform, 30 June 1999, p458.

It is therefore somewhat disingenuous for the Queensland government to be publicly objecting to these commitments at this stage. That said, it is not an unusual practice for Queensland to publicly raise objections to competition policy commitments, agreed by all States and Territories, just a few days before Council provides advice to the Federal Treasurer.

The management of Australia's water resources is a most serious social, economic and environmental issue that will impact on future generations. It is time that the Queensland government recognised that it shares responsibility for this national issue with all other Australian governments.

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