

# GRAVESTONES

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**TABLE 1:**

**GRAVESTONES – BIRTH AND DEATH OF A SAMPLE OF SCIENTIFIC INITIATIVES, 1985-2015**

Science-based Initiative	Creator	Destroyer	Born	Died
Commission for the Future (CFF)	Hawke Labor government	Howard LNP government	1985	1998
Resource Assessment Commission (RAC)	Hawke Labor government	Keating Labor government	1989	1993
Land and Water Australia (LWA)	Hawke Labor government	Rudd Labor government	1990	2009
Regional Open Space System (ROSS)	Goss Queensland Labor government	Newman Queensland LNP government	1994	2014
National Land And Water Resources Audit (NLWRA)	Howard LNP government	Rudd Labor government	1997	2008
Sustainable Rivers Audit (SRA)	MDB Ministerial Council *	Baird NSW LNP government **	2000	2012
Native Fish Strategy (NFS)	MDB Ministerial Council *	Baird NSW LNP government **	2003	2012
National Water Commission (NWC)	Howard LNP government	Abbott LNP government	2004	2014
Climate Commission (CC)	Gillard Labor government	Abbott LNP government	2011	2013

\* The Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) Ministerial Council comprises Ministers from the Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian, ACT, Victorian, South Australian and Australian governments.

\*\* “State governments in September quietly canned funding for the popular Native Fish Strategy, following a NSW government cut in its contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority – the body overseeing the river – by \$20 million” (Arup 2012 b).

**TABLE 2:****PRINCIPAL FUNCTION, AIM OR GOAL TO BE ACHIEVED BY THE INITIATIVE**

<b>Body</b>	<b>Principal function, aim or goal to be achieved by the initiative</b>
CFF	Initiate a continuous public information process to 'demystify' science and raise public awareness of the social and economic impacts of technological change, addressing in particular concerns about the effect of such change on employment (National Archives of Australia n.d. b).
RAC	Resolve competing claims for the use of resources (Federal Register of Legislation 2004).
LWA	Act as a research investor (to achieve the <i>sustainable</i> management and use of Australia's natural resources) and as a leading research broker, organising collaborative research and development programs (Land and Water Australia 2009 a).
ROSS	<p><i>Regional Frame</i> - provide a frame to urban development, defining the limits of the metropolis.</p> <p><i>Recreation</i> - provide opportunities for both passive and active recreation.</p> <p><i>Conservation</i> - protect the natural environment.</p> <p><i>Landscape</i> - contribute to the scenic quality of the landscape and the liveability of South East Queensland.</p> <p><i>Economic Potential</i> - provide opportunity for sustainable commercial activity. (Edwards 2019)</p>
NLWRA	Provide nationwide assessments of Australia's land, vegetation and water resources now and in the future: collate and assess data on natural resource issues to provide information in forms suitable for decision makers, recommend monitoring and assessment systems for Australia's natural resources, design and implement an Australian Atlas to display data collated during the Audit to form a basis upon which a range of natural resource related data sets could be displayed within a distributed network Australia-wide (NLWRA Advisory Council 1999).
SRA	Provide a continuing, systematic assessment of the health of river ecosystems across the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB), to provide ecological data to support major and rapidly evolving investments in river management (Davies <i>et al</i> , 2010).
NFS	Rehabilitate native fish communities in the Murray-Darling Basin back to 60 per cent of their estimated pre-European settlement levels, after 50 years of implementation (Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, 2003).
NWC	<p>Provide independent assurance of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) national water reform agenda, promote the objectives agreed by all governments in Australia under the 2004 Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative (NWI), assess the implementation of water reforms by all jurisdictions, provide strategic guidance and information, and provide independent advice and reports.</p> <p>The NWC was also required to audit the effectiveness of the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and associated water resource plans and assess performance against reform commitments in water management partnership agreements under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 2008 (National Water Commission 2015).</p>
CC	Provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change, the international action being taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the economics of a carbon price (National Library of Australia 2012 a).

## REASONS AND RATIONALES

### Reasons

- 1 Ideology
- 2 Ignorance of the value of science and/or disrespect for science and scientists
- 3 Political perceptions of expendability
- 4 Hoarding or rearranging power within the political establishment.

### Rationales

- 0 No justification is offered
  - a Progressive funding starvation
  - b Funding termination or savage funding cuts (usually unheralded)
- 1 The initiative is no longer necessary
- 2 The work has been transferred to other instrumentalities
  - a Increased efficiency of service deliver
  - b Bureaucratic restructuring
- 3 It is a budget-saving measure
- 4 The initiative is of little or no worth.

**TABLE 3:**

**PROBABLE REASONS FOR (AND RATIONALES USED TO JUSTIFY) ABOLITION OF INITIATIVES**

Body	Reasons and Rationales for the abolition of the initiative
CFF	<p>“It was not supported by Jones' [Labor] government colleagues or by Coalition politicians. I still remember the hostility and ignorance allocation ... of some elected members when I appeared before the Senate Estimates Committee to defend the CFF's meagre budget It was not surprising that the CFF's public funding was discontinued, when Jones was no longer the responsible minister” (Lowe 2016, p. 87).</p> <p>“At the time [the 1980s], the problem wasn't denial. The climate change conspiracy theorists were yet to emerge. Nor was it a question of party-line hostilities—they, too, would emerge much later. Indeed, more concern was shown for the issue [the greenhouse effect] on the conservative side. The problem was just that it was early days for anxiety. What the Commission for the Future was shouting about belonged to ... the future” (McKinlay n.d).</p> <p>“The CFF was designed to be at arm's length from government and free to encourage discussion without political or bureaucratic constraint” (National Archives of Australia n.d.).</p> <p>“It limped along for a few years with limited resources from the private sector, before finally being wound up” (Lowe 2016, p. 87).</p>
RAC	<p>“A number of matters associated with the Kakadu Inquiry contributed significantly to a decline in support for the RAC in some parts of Commonwealth government, including disappointment that the RAC did not recommend a specific course of action, and, in some circles, that it did not recommend that mining go ahead... concern was expressed in some quarters that it gave detailed attention to cultural issues affecting indigenous people” (Stewart and McColl 1994).</p> <p>“Politicians and bureaucrats were unhappy about the transparency of the political process. Given the preference for hiding behind the cloak of expert advice, the government surprised few when it decided in the 1993-1994 Budget round to abolish the RAC. The Commission's crime was to use a rational and visible process, thus exposing the nature of the decision to the public gaze.” (Lowe, cited in Stewart and McColl 1994).</p> <p>“Hawke's departure from the leadership brought this period of extraordinary federal institutional interest in the environment to an end, and the RAC suffered as a result... Without Richardson, the government failed to realise the utility of the RAC as a place to shunt seemingly intractable disputes between noisy interest groups. Without Hawke, the RAC's place in the general scheme of reforming policy-making along consensual lines was no longer recognised.” (Economou 1996).</p> <p>“...the government gave no public explanation of its decision not to provide further references to the RAC” (Stewart and McColl 1994) and “... as part of the cost-cutting exercise by the Keating government, the commission's fate was sealed by a small announcement in the budget paper that it would cease to exist in the new financial year. Amidst the controversy surrounding the budget's problems in the Senate, the death of the RAC was hardly noticed” (Economou 1996)</p>
LWA	<p>This appears to be a result of the Rudd Labor government's continual shifts in priorities, in response to external pressures. “Rudd's government was elected in 2007 with an ambitious program for change, [but] these ambitions were thwarted by a range of factors, not the least ... managing his massive agenda which constantly elevated issues to 'first order priority'” (Aulich and Evans 2010).</p> <p>In a Senate estimates hearing in May 2009 (during the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2009) on being asked the question "Why are we axing such a central research organisation?", the Superannuation and Corporate Law minister replied that natural resource management was now a mainstream issue for government and the community, but "We're doing as much as we can afford to ... and in times of economic contraction you have to make some hard decisions" (Anon 2009).</p> <p>Alexandra and Campbell (2013) viewed the Rudd Labor government's axing of LWA as a 'strategic blunder', not an ideological act.</p> <p>"The 2009 federal budget papers implied that LWA had become redundant, because 'a number</p>

Body	Reasons and Rationales for the abolition of the initiative
	of tertiary, public and private sector bodies have been established in the natural resource management research and development field' since its formation in 1990 " and "The 2009 federal budget announced the disbandment of LWA, with associated savings of \$45.9 million over four years" (Robins and Kanowski 2011)].
ROSS	No public scholarly explanation of the reasons for the demise of the ROSS is known. The initiative was announced by the Premier in May 1994 as confined to public land (19% of SEQ) and private land purchased or covenanted by agreement (another 6%). It came into operation on 1 July 1994 but ran into difficulties within its first 12 months after maps were published showing some 50% of SEQ, including large tracts of land covered by landscape-type zones as included within the ROSS. The pivotal issue was land tenure rather than science. Hostility from rural landholders caused the secretariat to be shuffled from one department to another and its budget for land acquisition and park development to be appropriated by others. Reconstituted as the Regional Landscape Strategy, it continued until abolished in 2012 along with the regional planning unit, a victim of the Newman's government's general hostility towards environmental protection and 'green tape'. The Minister for Planning at the time was on record as asserting that the purpose of planning was to facilitate economic development. (Edwards 2019).
NLWRA	Creighton (2018) saw bureaucratic jealousies as a contributing factor – “As for the demise of Audit 1 – well the agencies that were supposed to build policy off our evidence felt we had too much control”.  The end of the NLWRA came as a line in the 2009 budget. However, even though the tasks assigned to the NLWRA were ongoing, its funding never was.
SRA	The NSW government appears not to have provided any specific explanation as to why it suddenly and savagely reduced its contribution to jointly-funded river operations and natural resource management programs administered by the MDBA. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (2013) stated “After the NSW state government cut its funding, the Basin governments made the decision to cut the Native Fish Strategy and the Sustainable Rivers Audit, and delayed maintenance programs”. However, the other governments made no public criticism of the actions of the NSW government and made no attempt to take up the slack.  Later, in 2016, the MDBA used other justifications “Since the end of the SRA, the MDBA has established a monitoring program to gather information about the environmental impact of the Basin Plan at the Basin scale” and “Basin state and territory governments decided to cease funding the SRA program as it did not align with the monitoring of ecological health required under the Basin Plan – The SRA monitored ecological health compared to a pre-European benchmark. It was also not linked to specific water management actions like the Basin Plan [Rationale 4]”. (Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission 2019).
NFS	See the SRA rationale for details.
NWC	An independent statutory authority being too independent is the most probable reason, because of the multiple sometimes conflicting rationales and the political resort to denigration.  “Liberal Senator Simon Birmingham said the purpose of the commission had been fulfilled and its roles would be taken over the Productivity Commission, saving the budget \$20.9 million over four years. Much of the savings will be absorbed by an aid agency to help other nations improve their water management. ‘Nowadays it's nothing more than a government-funded commentary organisation’, Senator Birmingham told Fairfax Media. The Productivity Commission will provide ‘more robust, more independent, more fearless criticism than the NWC has shown the likelihood to do to date’.” (Hannam, 2014)].  Liberal Senator Mitchell Fifield (2014) said “Given both the substantial progress already made in water reform and the current fiscal environment, there is no longer adequate justification for a stand-alone agency to monitor Australia's progress on water reform. In line with reform priorities to improve efficiencies across the Australian Government and to improve the budgetary outlook, the NWC will cease its functions following the release of its assessment of national water reform in

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	October this year”.
CC	<p>The Abbott LNP government (2013-2015) abolished the Climate Commission as part of its campaign to reverse government action on mitigating anthropogenic climate change. Talberg, Hui and Loynes (2016) list the abolition of the Climate Commission, followed by repeated failed attempts to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Climate Change Authority and the Australian Renewable Energy Authority, the abolition of the Emissions Trading Scheme and the reduction of the 2020 Renewable Energy Target (RET).</p> <p>The Climate commission was an independent expert body - its deliberations, reports and public engagements were not subject to Ministerial direction (National Library of Australia 2012 b).</p> <p>“Mr Hunt [the Environment Minister] confirmed that he had dissolved the commission. ‘As part of the Coalition’s plans to streamline government processes and avoid duplication of services, the commission’s function to provide independent advice and analysis on climate change will be continued by the Department of the Environment [Rationale 2a]’, he said... ‘This decision will save the budget \$580,000 in 2013-14 and an annual funding of up to \$1.6 million in future years’.” (Arup 2013).</p>

**TABLE 4:**

**EPITAPHS - ACHIEVEMENTS IN LIFE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF PREMATURE DEATHS**

Body	Achievements and the consequences of premature death
CFF	<p>The CFF did what it was it tasked to do – raise public awareness of issues affecting the future (see Table 2).</p> <p>In 1987, the CFF and the CSIRO conducted a major scientific conference (<i>Greenhouse '87</i>) that addressed how specific scenarios of climatic change in Australia would impact on Australian farming, water supplies, ecosystems, coastal development, public health, etc. In 1988, the CFF conducted <i>Greenhouse '88</i> – a media event to focus on responses to the greenhouse effect. “From the day I landed in Sydney, it was nonstop media, government, or public events. It looked like a political campaign. A dozen interviews in one day, plus flights from Melbourne to Canberra (to brief the national Parliament), to Sydney (to do a press conference), and back to Melbourne (to talk to water planners) were all crammed into 24 hours! This was typical of the pace for five days before the national broadcast. After that, I had to fly to Perth to participate in still more meetings, press conferences and public discussions... The Greenhouse '88 week was to be composed of dozens of 10-minute interviews by radio and television stations and reporters from localities all over Australia” (Schneider 1989, p. 240).</p> <p>“The awareness of the greenhouse issue is probably greater amongst the general public in Australia than in any other country in the world. This is partly because the last two years [1987-1988] have seen meetings devoted to the topic of the greenhouse effect” (Henderson-Sellers and Blong 1989, p. 155). Unfortunately, “the public” didn’t include the politicians. “We published documents, convened conferences, imported experts, held meetings in town halls across Australia. There was a dramatic response from scientists and public alike but a negligible reaction from our politicians” (McKinlay n.d).</p> <p>“That was the aim of the CFF: to remind Australians that there is a wide range of possible futures and stimulate discussion of what country we would like to be in the twenty-first century.” (Lowe 2016, p. 88). In the present Australia of fake news, the 24-hour news cycle and the 30-second political sound bite, there is now no political and societal discussion of what this country should aspire to become and no vision for its future.</p>
RAC	<p>“... the RAC stands as an important development in the history of environmental policy creation at the national level. With its emphasis on comprehensive processes involving fulsome investigation of land-use debates, ‘independent’ analysis of data and information, and multilateral interest-group and public participation, the processes of land-use policy formulation in the RAC period stand in contrast to an earlier period in which decisions were made on an ad hoc basis usually as the result of a reactive campaign conducted by environmentalists aggrieved by the failure of old processes to take environmental considerations into account” (Economou 1992).</p> <p>“The decision not to continue the RAC on an on-going basis means that there is no longer a body concerned directly with the development of methods and expertise for analysing major resource issues. While there was considerable movement of staff in and out of the RAC secretariat, particularly in exchanges between government agencies, the accumulated expertise of the RAC in dealing with resource issues constituted a valuable public asset which has now been dissipated. In addition, the lack of opportunities for personnel from government agencies and elsewhere to participate in the work of an independent and objective body such as the RAC in examining major resource issues represents a considerable loss” (Stewart and McColl 1994).</p> <p>"In one of those perennial ironies of administrative politics, the very government that could have benefited from having a statutory authority like the RAC towards whom it could, in the immediate term, push developers, environmentalists and others in a bid to come up with a consensual outcome on what should be done about logging in Australia’s native forests, was the same government that killed off just such a body." (Economou 1996).</p> <p>“The demise of the RAC represented a demise in the idea of ‘better policy-making’ as based on careful, proactive, inclusive decision-making.” (Economou 1996).</p>

Body	Achievements and the consequences of premature death
LWA	<p>This completely-publicly-funded statutory rural research and development corporation listed 15 significant achievements, including the AUSRIVAS system for measuring river health, developing the model for collaboration of states and other agencies to address the major landscape challenge of dryland salinity, leading multi-partner programs (to manage climate variability and Australia's northern rivers, improve irrigation systems, and develop Australia's national Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industries), working closely with the cotton industry to eliminate pesticide contamination of waterways and working with the wool, meat and grains industries to develop more-sustainable mixed farming systems (Land and Water Australia 2009 b).</p> <p>A conservative independent study in 2006 by consultants Agtrans found that LWA had delivered \$4.80 in direct economic benefits for each government dollar invested, equating to an internal rate of return (IRR) exceeding 24%. (Robins and Kanowski 2011).</p> <p>The abolition of LWA in 2009 caused the cancellation of a large number of contracts with university-based and other researchers across Australia and the closing-down of many partly completed research projects (Land and Water Australia 2009 c).</p> <p>The 2009 budget terminated almost all research within the Rural Research and Development Corporation system that was not matched by industry levy contributions.</p> <p>LWA was the peak body supporting research designed to inform and strengthen the regional NRM model through programs such as the Social and Institutional Research Program (SIRP) and Knowledge for Regional NRM. These programs did not have equivalents (or replacements) elsewhere in the Australian R&amp;D arena. (Robins and Kanowski 2011).</p>
ROSS	<p>No public scholarly evaluation for the early days is known. Unpublished departmental documents indicate that in the first 12 months (to May 1995) the program achieved the following:</p> <p><i>Planning:</i> regional open space attributes mapped and given to local governments; six specific locality reports; consultants' reports obtained on implementation through statutory planning and tenure, landscape of Tamborine Mountain, Bicentennial National Trail and wader roosting sites.</p> <p><i>Land acquisition:</i> 100 properties evaluated for purchase, 7 approved, 4 purchased, \$4m fully committed.</p> <p><i>Development and maintenance:</i> park development projects funded at six reserves, mainly via local governments.</p> <p><i>Information:</i> a five-year, \$7m program to supply base mapping and other land information for SEQ for all purposes was launched. This was suspended in 1996 when the incoming Borbidge Coalition government reviewed all procurement contracts. (Edwards 2019).</p> <p>This was just the first year. From 2004-2012, the achievements included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Queensland Greenspace Strategy</li> <li>SEQ Greenspace Network Plan</li> <li>SEQ State of Region Report</li> <li>Strategic Cropping Land Strategy</li> <li>SEQ Active Trails Strategy</li> <li>Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Plan and 96km of trail open</li> <li>Maroochy River Trail Plan and works completed</li> <li>Boonah to Ipswich Trail Plan and 49km of trail open</li> <li>Kingaroy to Theebine Trail (Business Plan &amp; Feasibility Study) and key rail assets secured</li> <li>Queensland Outdoor Recreation Strategic Framework and demand studies</li> <li>SEQ Scenic Amenity methodology, Planning Guidelines &amp; mapping</li> <li>SEQ Rural Futures Strategy and Rural Precinct Planning Guidelines</li> <li>Sustainable Poultry Strategy</li> <li>Water Sensitive Urban Design Planning Guideline</li> <li>North East Gold Coast land use and infrastructure strategy</li> <li>Landscape heritage discussion papers</li> <li>Rural and Greenspace Policy Forum and working groups</li> <li>Regional Landscape Forums (5)</li> </ul>

Body	Achievements and the consequences of premature death
	SEQ Regional Plan: policy development/review, notably Regional Landscape Planning Framework. (Resource and Landscape Planning 2012).
NLWRA	<p>“I reconvened the original Audit team, including Commonwealth officers, to see how we could build on the first report for a second review, Audit II. We were keen to further quantify assessments where possible, add other components such as soil biota, and to start a process to more empirically assess trend, but there was no Commonwealth support for a comprehensive follow up. This burnt considerable jurisdictional goodwill across the States and Territories. Similarly, Col Creighton’s push for a separate national resource monitoring and assessment body to be permanently established was never acted upon. The National Land and Water Resources Audit program, and then Land and Water Australia, a successful body providing natural resource management advice to rural Australia, were closed down by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests. Subsequently, the Australian National Reserve System Program was closed down. The waste in setting up and then closing these successful Commonwealth programs was staggering” (Sattler 2014).</p> <p>“The NLWRA Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment (TBA) was a very successful exercise in describing the condition and trend of a number of biodiversity elements across species and ecosystems for each bioregion, in identifying threatening processes, and biodiversity conservation opportunities and priorities for management. Fourteen case studies were also completed across the range of ‘Landscape Health’ scenarios to provide detailed insight into the specific mix of management responses required.</p> <p>“This experience informed the Humane Society International (HSI) submission for a new approach in regional planning. Despite significant goodwill by all States and Territories at the time to further expand on the Audit’s work, (it is estimated that the States and Territories contributed an additional \$2m on top of the \$1m allocated by the Federal government for the TBA), the Federal government of the day did not show leadership in this regard or accept HSI’s submissions for a new cost effective approach to regional planning upon which to further roll out the Natural Heritage Trust program and its subsequent incarnations. Today little legacy exists of what was one of Australia’s most expensive environment initiatives at that time” (Sattler 2018).</p>
SRA	<p>The Commonwealth Government’s 2016 State of the Environment Report stated “The Sustainable Rivers Audit is the most comprehensive Basin-wide river health assessment available [in 2016]”, but lamented “however, the most recent report covers 2008–10, so is not relevant to condition assessment after 2011” (Argent 2017, p. 46).</p> <p>“The main reason for a lack of proper monitoring of the environmental condition of the Basin is a lack of adequate government funding. The discontinuation of the Sustainable Rivers Audit was undesirable and inappropriate” (Walker 2019, p. 65).</p> <p>Witnesses at hearings of the Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission “lamented the discontinuation of one of the Basin’s most successful condition monitoring programs, the Sustainable Rivers Audit (SRA)... Dr Celine Steinfeld of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists (Wentworth Group) submitted that, ‘without the ability to track the condition of the Basin it is not possible to understand the ecological changes at a valley and Basin scale’. In Associate Professor Jamie Pittock’s view, no program of commensurate independence and scientific rigour has replaced the SRA, and its absence represents a ‘major failing’. Similarly, Mr Peter Cosier stated: ‘Managing the health of the Murray-Darling Basin rivers without the Sustainable Rivers Audit would be like trying to manage the Australian economy without the national accounts. It’s just not possible’. In a similar vein, Dr Anne Jensen observed that the SRA’s discontinuation has prevented a thorough assessment of whether the Basin Plan requirement that there be no further decline in respect of prescribed environmental targets is being met” (Walker 2019, p. 568).</p>
NFS	<p>The NFS was large-scale (the 1 million km<sup>2</sup> of the basin), focused on rehabilitation, not just managing the status quo, took a threat abatement approach, considered both native fish and alien species, included all native fishes (not just angling species), was developed as a long-term approach given the scale of the problem, undertook significant public engagement and incorporated an independent review of progress (Koehn, Lintermans and Copeland 2014).</p> <p>Many (often multifaceted) projects were completed over the 10 years of the NFS, including 5 projects on ‘Rehabilitating Fish Habitat’, 3 on ‘Protecting Fish Habitat’, 14 on ‘Managing Riverine</p>

Body	Achievements and the consequences of premature death
	<p>Structures', 7 on 'Controlling Alien Species', 10 on 'Protecting Threatened Native Fish Species' and 3 on 'Managing Fish Translocation and Stocking' (Anon 2014).</p> <p>Koehn, Copeland and Stamation (2014) concluded "While goals of the NFS remain, cessation of funding for the NFS programme after just 10 years appears short-sighted, particularly considering the plight of the fish and the NFS's achievements, and this has again left MDB fish populations in a vulnerable state. The lessons learnt from the NFS have, however, only reinforced the importance of the need for coordinated, basin-wide long-term solutions to fish recovery".</p>
NWC	<p>In a submission to the Inquiry into the National Water Commission (Abolition) Bill 2014, the chair of the NWC asserted "The NWC has been unique in Australian water governance in its capacity to deliver a national interest perspective (as distinct from individual state, industry or Commonwealth perspectives), to provide independent, expert and credible advice, and to collaborate with partners in government, industry and academia to develop new ways to better manage water resources... Despite its small size, the NWC's collaborative and consultative partnership approach to its roles and functions, underpinned by its structure as an expert and independent body with a dedicated remit, ensured that it built up a strong basis of expertise... the expertise of the office dispersed rapidly following the announcement earlier this year of the Government's intention to abolish the agency. All subject matter specialists within the Commission (excluding corporate functions) have already left, or will be leaving shortly... a concern is that the splitting of the NWC's various roles [on its abolition] will inevitably lose the synergistic advantages of integration... Strengths of the NWC have been that it reports to all Australian governments and to COAG, its Commissioners were nominated by all states and territories as well as the Commonwealth for their specific expertise, and it provided a skills-based national perspective not driven by shorter term interests" (Parliament of Australia 2014).</p> <p>The National Irrigators' Council fully supported the government's abolition of the NWC. The National Farmers Federation (NFF) labelled the abolition as 'disappointing'. The South Australian government worried that the abolition risked "a loss of leadership knowledge and expertise as well as less effective support for, and scrutiny of water reform efforts". The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) labelled the abolition as "a short-sighted and backward step", that "would likely result in another wave of conflicts over water due to the absence of what all sides regard as a well-respected expert independent body". The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) opposed the abolition on the grounds that it "removes national water leadership, fearless advice and independent custodianship of the NWI" (Parliament of Australia 2014).</p>
CC	<p>In its two-year life, the commission produced 27 public reports on topics that included the effects of climate change in Australia, global action being taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the potential of renewable energy (Arup, 2013). It also held dozens of public meetings around the country to explain climate science, and no other body existed to serve that role (Hannam 2013).</p> <p>The chief climate commissioner at the time, Professor Tim Flannery, defended the Commission's role: "We've stayed out of the politics and stuck to the facts... As a result, we've developed a reputation as a reliable apolitical source of facts on all aspects of climate change... I believe that Australians have a right to know - a right to authoritative, independent and accurate information on climate change... As global action on climate change deepens, propaganda aimed at misinforming the public about climate change, and so blunting any action, increases". (Arup 2013)</p> <p>Professor Flannery said that he was not aware of any organisation that can do the same job - not even the CSIRO or universities: "The Bureau of Meteorology puts out advice and information on weather events, but doesn't cover the economics or international action happening around climate change... There are various other groups that may or may not be able to do some of it, but having an independent strong authority that's committed to just telling the facts as they are - we're the group that was doing that... You need a well-informed public in order to make the right sort of decisions". (Griffiths 2013).</p>

## **AUTHOR PROFILE**

The author began his career as a milling metallurgist with Mount Isa Mines at Mount Isa, before returning to the University of Queensland to complete his M.Sc. He later worked as Engineering Computer Manager for the South East Queensland Electricity Board, before moving to the Queensland Public Service, holding the position of Principal Research Adviser at his retirement. He has lately involved himself in investigating the benefits to be derived from the involvement of communities and professional organisations in the increasingly important issue of site rehabilitation and in forging productive links between the scientific community and the society it serves.