

31 August 2026

Mr Geoff Leeper
Independent Reviewer
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and
Water
GPO Box 3090
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Leeper,

ATSE submission to the *Water Act 2007* review

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) is a Learned Academy of independent, non-political experts helping Australians understand and use technology to solve complex problems. Bringing together over 950 of Australia's leading thinkers in applied science, technology and engineering, ATSE provides impartial, practical and evidence-based advice on how to achieve sustainable solutions and advance prosperity.

ATSE thanks the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for the opportunity to respond to the review of the *Water Act 2007* (the Act). ATSE has recently responded to the [2026 Basin Plan Review](#), the Productivity Commission inquiry on National Water Reform ([submission 1](#) and [submission 2](#)), and the [Water Science and Research Review](#). The 2026 Basin Plan Review submission has already been passed onto the Department from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. However, this submission will highlight some central themes from those submissions that are of particular relevance to the current review.

The Murray-Darling Basin remains a vital source of Australian water, fuelling commerce, industry and society. But water quality and quantity remain crucial for our prosperity across the nation, not just around the Basin. All sources of Australian water need to be covered by a plan for water security, whether they are urban, regional, rural or remote. This plan would ideally be monitored and managed by an independent National Water Commission, similar to the one dissolved in 2015. A Commission can provide cross-jurisdictional authority and coordination for water reform and help manage the long-term sustainability of Australian water supplies. This Commission would be a separate body to the National Water Committee, which sits directly under the Water Ministerial Council, allowing for greater independence and a cross-jurisdictional approach.

There remains a significant gap in access to high-quality water and sanitation in regional, rural and remote communities. As outlined in ATSE's [Closing the water gap - Water, sanitation and hygiene for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities](#) explainer, some communities are experiencing persistent issues with water contamination from mining and agricultural operations, with contamination levels exceeding the Australian

Drinking Water Guidelines¹. These issues disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are often masked by inadequate data collection, monitoring and access to water quality data.

Securing our water future will be dependent on the quality and availability of water data. Australian water data is often fragmented, hard to access or not standardised across the country. ATSE therefore proposes that the Australian Government consolidates the range of disparate data sources into a single nationally consistent information hub for water data, allowing for simplified data sharing and communication, and greater national transparency about water quality. This hub would be in line with the current wording of the Act, which requires the Basin Plan to use the best available science to inform strategies to minimise climate risk. A single national hub could bring together data collected from all jurisdictions, as well as First Nations water knowledge.

Another consistent theme across ATSE's submissions is the need for clear definitions for key environmental water components that are prescribed in the legislation. This should include terms such as water security, surface water, groundwater, floodplain water and overland flow. Clear definitions of these terms will allow for nationally consistent interpretation and implementation of the Act. Consistent definitions can help support the work of a national data platform by providing a common basis for data standards.

The issues raised above are key considerations from ATSE's work to support Australian water quality and supply. We encourage the department to review our previous submissions mentioned here and to contact ATSE for further information at any time at academypolicyteam@atse.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Cathy Foley AO FTSE FAA PSM
President

Peter Derbyshire
Acting Chief Executive Officer

¹ Balasooriya, B. M. J. K., Rajapakse, J., & Gallage, C. (2023). A Review of Drinking Water Quality Issues in Remote And Indigenous Communities In Rich Nations With Special Emphasis On Australia. Science of The Total Environment, 903, 166559. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.166559>