

5 July 2012

The Hon Robyn Parker MP
Minister for the Environment
Level 32, Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

Review of the Snowy Precipitation Enhancement Research Project Annual Report 2011

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is required under Section 8 (1) of the *Snowy Mountains Cloud Seeding Trial Act 2004* (the Act) to supervise authorised cloud seeding operations and report to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for the Environment on environmental impacts.

The NRC has reviewed the *Snowy Precipitation Enhancement Research Project Annual Report 2011* (SPERP 2011). The key findings of this review are outlined below.

In 2011 the Snowy Precipitation Enhancement Research Project Environmental Management Plan (EMP) generated data and conclusions consistent with those of previous years. SPERP 2011 provides a realistic interpretation of the monitoring data and the conclusions appear to be consistent with both the data and the data analyses.

The trial, which commenced in 2004 and is due to complete in April 2015, continues to comply with the Act and to be of a high scientific standard. There is no evidence of adverse environmental impacts, or of adverse impacts on rainfall in down-wind areas.

In 2011 there were changes introduced to the EMP that reduced sample processing and the number of sites. These changes are consistent with continual improvement practice. The proposal to continue with the reduced monitoring program in subsequent years would not appear to prejudice the capacity to detect any environmental outcomes in the future. The NRC recommends that any future changes to the EMP be authorised by an appropriate body to ensure that monitoring rigour is not compromised by frequent changes.

In response to an NRC recommendation, Snowy Hydro commenced a three-year research program in December 2010 to determine the fate of cloud seeding agents in the environment, specifically silver iodide and indium trioxide. The research program, and discussion and analysis of the study, are scheduled for completion in 2014. Appraisal of the research at this time is limited; however we are advised that the first paper from the study is due in mid-July 2012. The NRC recommends vigilant monitoring of the research program by Snowy Hydro and the University of Queensland to ensure it meets its research objectives.

The NRC also notes that monitoring samples are no longer cross-checked by different laboratories, as is standard practice for the detection of low concentrations of chemicals. As this one laboratory also delivers all the key conclusions from environmental monitoring, the NRC recommends that independent service providers be used to manage these risks.

If it would assist, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our advice with you.

Yours sincerely,



Dr John Keniry
Commissioner

cc. Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services, Minister for Primary Industries, David Harris (Snowy Hydro Limited,)