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Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Tuesday, 12 August 2014 (Proof).

SNOWY HYDRO CORPORATISATION AMENDMENT (SNOWY ADVISORY COMMITTEE) BILL 2013

Second Reading

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Minister for Roads and Freight, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [9.22 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013 amends section 57 of the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 in order to create a new Snowy Advisory Committee, which will replace the Snowy Scientific Committee. While building on the strengths of the previous committee, the amendments will ensure the new committee is a more representative advisory body with contemporary governance arrangements. As a result, the committee will be more responsive to the needs of both the community and government. The role of the Snowy Advisory Committee will be to advise on the timing and patterns of the release of environmental water each year from that recovered under the Snowy Water Licence. Membership of the Snowy Advisory Committee will draw on expertise from community, Aboriginal and environmental groups, as well as government representatives. Drawing on this extensive knowledge base will ensure that comprehensive advice is provided to the New South Wales Government. The committee will better reflect local community needs, be practical and ensure that resources are not duplicated.

The new committee's arrangements will be more consistent with other environmental water advisory committees across New South Wales, which include both community and government representatives. Allowing for regulations to make provisions for changes to membership will allow greater flexibility and prevent the need for legislation if future changes to the committee are required. The Minister can ask the committee for advice on other aspects of the timing and pattern of the release of water as needed. The amendments state that the committee will be subject to the control and direction of the New South Wales Minister responsible for Water. The exception to this relates to the contents of any advice given by the committee, ensuring the Minister will not have any influence over the nature of this advice. The changes to section 57 are necessary to keep this committee functioning as effectively as possible. The community has been consulted: A discussion paper was released in February and 29 submissions were received. The general recognition was that a new approach to the committee was needed. This bill delivers that new approach.

The Government has met its obligations to recover the water for the Snowy River. The role of the committee will now be more focused on the regime and pattern of release each year. This year will see the largest volume of environmental water released into the Snowy River below Jindabyne: over 190 gigalitres in total during the 2013-14 water year. This will be achieved through a more variable flow regime, including a trial of five high flow releases over the spring period instead of one large event. This is designed to improve the habitat of the river for fish and other species. I have been advised that the Office of Water already is seeing good results from this new pattern of variable releases. The new committee will work hand in hand with government experts to review and refine the release patterns into the future. I commend the bill to the House.