**`MARIBYRNONG RIVR FLOOD EVENT INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL**

**PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS July 17-21, 2023**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

We meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people, and I pay respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. We also thank the Moonee Valley Council for making available their facilities for the public consultations over the next few days.

The Independent Review was established by Melbourne Water to undertake an independent and transparent review of the Maribyrnong River Flood Event which occurred on 14 October 2023. The Panel is constituted by me as Chair together with Mr Mark Babister, Professor Holger Maier and Mr Tim Peggie. Our Terms of Reference contemplate six stages of which the fourth is public consultations. We have scheduled this week for those consultations and have had published the times and topics on the Melbourne Water website. This is the first public consultation session of the Independent Review Panel.

The Panel is not a statutory body and has no power to compel attendance or to give evidence. The Panel has, however, received a great amount of information that it is working through in preparation of its report which is due later this year. We have requested a number of persons and entities to assist us with our review and, in the case of some, to participate in public consultations this week. Some have declined to participate in the public consultations, but we thank those who have agreed to participate in the public consultations and all who have assisted in our inquires thus far. at this stage the public consultations scheduled on Tuesday afternoon with the Rivervue Managers and Developers, and on Thursday afternoon with the Maribyrnong Community Recovery Committee, will not take place because both have declined our request to meet with them.

The public consultations are being transcribed to ensure that we have an accurate record of the information and submissions which we receive and on which we will be able to base our report. Members of the public have been admitted as observers, but their attendance as observers only is on the basis that there be no taping, filming or photographing of the proceedings in any way. Any observer, however, is free to make any further written submissions to the Panel on the basis of what they observe during these consultations.

The first session of these public consultations is with Melbourne Water which is present here today through Nerina De Lorenzo, Rachel Lunn, Wendy Smith and John Woodland. Melbourne Water has been asked to address the Panel on the matters in the Terms of Reference and to make its submissions on what it considers should be the Panel’s conclusions. We have already received much information from Melbourne Water and propose to ask its representatives about some of the matters in that material. Some of the material is confidential and not available generally to the public or through the Melbourne Water website. However it is important that the Panel’s work be as open and transparent as possible to ensure that the public can have confidence in its work as being independent.

The Hon G.T Pagone AM KC

17 July 2023