

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

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Old Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Lisa Corbyn (Chair)
Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington
Ms Jane Coram
Emeritus Professor Peter Flood
Mr Jim McDonald
Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda
Professor Craig Simmons

APOLOGIES

Dr Andrew Johnson

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE (OWS) - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Suzy Nethercott-Watson
Gayle Milnes
Peter Baker
Scott Lawson
Yvette Blackman
Crystal Bradley
Caryn Scott
Milica Milanja

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT THE ENVIRONMENT

Deborah Chen (Days 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science	Scott Lawson (Days 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science
Kimberley Hammond (Days 1-2: Items 2.1-2.4, 5.3) Office of Water Science	Sophie Alexander (Day 1: Items 2.1-2.4) Office of Water Science
Fiona Beynon (Day 1: Item 2.2-2.3) Office of Water Science	Kate Bayliss (Days 1-2: Items 2.2-2.4) Office of Water Science
Edwina Johnson (Days 1-2: Items 2.2, 4.1-4.3) Office of Water Science	Deborah Chen (Day 1: Items 3.1-3.4) Office of Water Science
James Hill (Day 1-2: Items 2.2, 2.4, 4.1-4.3) Office of Water Science	James Hill (Day 1-2: Items 2.2, 4.1-4.3) Office of Water Science
Ben Roundnew (Day 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science	Bruce Gray (Day 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

Casa Dalton (Day 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science	Tracey Lemmon (Day 1-2: Items 3.1-3.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science
Emily Turner (Day 2: Item 2.4) Office of Water Science	Christine McKnight (Day 2: Items 2.4) Office of Water Science
Moya Tomlinson (Day 2: Item 2.4) Office of Water Science	Craig Watson (Day 2: Item 4.1-4.3) Office of Water Science
David Parker (Day 2: Lunch) Office of Water Science	Professor Damian Barrett (Day 2: Item 4.3) CSIRO

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on 25 September 2013.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Committee members noting apologies from Dr Andrew Johnson.

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners, past and present, on whose land this meeting was held.

1.2 Conflict of interest

Before the meeting commenced, Committee members completed the Meeting Specific Disclosure of Interest. The determinations recorded at this meeting are available at *Attachment A*.

1.3 Confirmation of agenda

The Committee endorsed the agenda for Meeting 10.

1.4 Action items

Completed items were noted and other items were referred to agenda items for discussion later in the meeting.

1.5 Confirmation of out-of-session decisions

The Chair noted the following out-of-session items:

- The minutes of the Committee's ninth meeting (20-22 August 2013) were agreed out-of-session and posted on the Committee website.

1.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence up to 17 September 2013.

The Committee agreed the proposed revised agreements for handling correspondence identified as exempt from the correspondence protocol, for example unaddressed flyers for seminars and campaign form letters.

1.7 Environmental scan

The following developments were reported by the OWS:

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

- The recent International Association of Hydrogeologists Congress which was attended by a number of Committee members and OWS staff;
- Background research papers on coal seam gas that were released by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer;
- Release of the COAG Reform Council report assessing signatory states' performance against the milestones of the National Partnership Agreement on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development; and
- The submission to the Remuneration Tribunal regarding the Committee.

2. Advice on Projects Referred by Governments

2.1 Current arrangements for providing, releasing and handling advice on coal seam gas and large coal mining proposals

The Committee identified a number of principles that would guide its approach to the public release of its advice on development proposals: transparency; equity of access; and, respecting the regulator's decision-making role.

The Committee requested OWS revise the existing protocol to:

- clarify arrangements for publishing the Committee's advice particularly in cases where its advice was requested by both the Commonwealth and a state regulator, where portions of the Committee's advice have been made public, and potential trigger points where the Committee would discuss public release with the regulator (for example, if the Committee's advice has not been made public after a certain period, say six months); and
- request the regulator to notify the Committee in writing of any queries it has with respect to the Committee's advice.

OWS was asked circulate the revised protocol for confirmation by the Committee.

2.2 Uncertainty and levels of confidence

The Committee discussed ways to define uncertainty and criteria for assigning levels of confidence when considering requests for advice on development proposals.

Committee members agreed:

- to review the table presented at the meeting on possible hydrological criteria for different levels of confidence and add criteria relevant to geological, ecological and water quality issues;
- to provide comments defining relevant terminology;
- to review the updated table and the definitions at its October meeting (at which there would be a presentation on the proposed approach to managing risk associated with the bioregional assessments); and

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

- to trial the criteria for assigning levels of confidence at their November meeting.

The Committee noted that the information guidelines may need to be revised to reflect any agreed approach.

2.3 Cumulative impacts – proposed discussions with regulators

Following initial discussion at the August 2013 meeting, the Committee agreed that the Chair should pursue bilateral meetings with the Commonwealth, Queensland and New South Wales regulators to discuss water related cumulative impact assessments of coal seam gas and large coal mining developments.

The Committee agreed to an outline of topics for discussion at these meetings, which are expected to take place in November 2013, and requested the OWS provide them with a summary of advice the Committee has provided on cumulative impacts to date.

2.4 Theme sheets

The Committee discussed the theme sheets and their purpose, which is to provide a support tool for the Committee and OWS by:

- distilling key research findings and current 'state of knowledge' on relevant key issues; and
- documenting the Committee's advice provided to date for consistency.

The Committee agreed there was merit in the theme sheets and provided specific comment on the two drafts prepared by OWS covering management of voids and groundwater dependent ecosystems.

The Committee discussed topics for future theme sheets and noted that the intention is for these documents to be dynamic to ensure they contain current information.

The Committee agreed that OWS provide at its October 2013 meeting:

- operational arrangements for future theme sheets, including a list of potential topics for theme sheets such as diversions, cumulative impacts, flood management, ANZEC water guidelines and monitoring and management approaches;
- additional information on final voids; and
- an overview of the Committee's advice to date on the monitoring and mitigation strategies and cumulative impacts.

3. Research

3.1 Update on research program

The Committee was generally supportive of the proposed reporting approach. Members asked that future reports identify who had been commissioned to undertake projects and to provide more guidance on issues.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

The Committee discussed the timing in which existing research will be finalised and made publicly available, and project specific issues that may affect the timely delivery of research projects.

Members requested that comments from state governments and peer reviewers on the critical science reviews and other reports be made available to the Committee.

The Committee discussed the proposed next tranche of research projects and provided general guidance on the scope of key projects relating to groundwater modelling, assessments of aquifer connectivity and tolerances of key species and ecological communities to impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining.

3.2 Strategic discussion on research

The Committee discussed the concept of what constitutes research in the context of the existing and proposed research projects.

The Committee reviewed and endorsed, with minor amendments, the objectives members had identified for proposed research projects. The Committee discussed indicative research performance measures and agreed to incorporate performance measures into the Committee's annual review process.

3.3 Review advice to Minister on research priorities

The Committee agreed, with minor amendments, to the advice to the new Environment Minister on the Committee's recommended research priorities. Revised advice on research priorities would be provided to the chair out of session, for her consideration and signature.

3.4 Revised Terms of Reference for research sub-committee

The Committee agreed, with minor amendments, to the terms of reference for the Committee's research sub-committee.

4. Bioregional Assessments

4.1 Bioregional assessments program progress

The OWS provided the Committee with an update on recent activities relating to Bioregional Assessments program work that is currently underway, including a presentation on the preliminary assessment extent for three subregions. Topics of discussion included the link between bioregional assessments and cumulative impact assessments, and the quality assurance process for bioregional assessments.

The OWS updated the Committee on the five critical points in the quality assurance process at which their engagement is expected to be sought, in particular:

- finalisation of receptor register;
- coal seam gas and coal resource assessment;

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

- conceptual model of casual paths;
- impact register; and
- risk register.

The Committee noted that members would be likely to be invited to participate in workshops on these topics.

4.2 Communication products for bioregional assessments

The OWS briefed the Committee on the summary and communication products for bioregional assessments. Topics of discussion included the three types of products from bioregional assessments—technical products, summary products and communication products—and the expected audiences for each of these. Discussion also included the types of communication products that may be produced, including videos, fact sheets and journal articles.

4.3 Assets and receptors methodology

At the Committee's invitation, Professor Damian Barrett from CSIRO briefed the Committee on the methodology, which was developed to identify assets and receptors for bioregional assessments.

The Committee appreciated the update, which included an outline of the process to develop assets and receptors registers, information on how preliminary assessment extents are being determined, and definitions of response and impact variables.

5. Communications

5.1 Fact sheets – hydraulic fracturing and aquifer connectivity

The Committee provided specific comment on the three draft fact sheets: Hydraulic Fracturing in Australian Coal Seam Gas Operations; Coal Seam Gas and Connectivity between Water Systems; and Coal Mining and Connectivity between Water Systems.

The Committee reviewed and provided feedback to OWS on the topics, timeline and sources for the Committee fact sheets. Members were generally supportive of the proposed approach. They suggested an additional fact sheet on springs and the use of illustrations.

The Committee discussed the audience for the fact sheets and requested they be tested on end-users and be subject to technical review. OWS was also asked to provide the Committee with an assessment of some of the risks with publishing the fact sheets and how these might be managed (e.g. updated through annual review).

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

5.2 Annual review of Committee's work

The Committee agreed the outline proposed by OWS. Members suggested an annual report style reporting on what the Committee has done and why. It should be short, a mixture of tables, pictures, illustrations and dot points but with text to explain its activities and the links between the different functions.

5.3 Branding and communication of products

The Committee discussed the branding of outputs of the research and bioregional assessments program. Discussion included issues around publication of research and intellectual ownership, possible co-branding, as well as the usefulness and quality of the products.

The Committee discussed ways in which this relates to one of its functions, that is, the collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination and publication of scientific information and advice.

6. Close and other business

6.1 Forward planning agenda

The Committee considered the forward agenda and discussed possible topics for consideration at the October 2013 meeting. The Committee requested that the January 2014 meeting be rescheduled for the first week in February 2014 and for OWS to then consider the implications for future meeting dates and provide a schedule for the year to December 2014.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held over two days on 16-17 October 2013 in Canberra.

The meeting closed at 3.05pm on 26 September.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Ms Lisa Corbyn
Committee Chair

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 10, 25-26 September 2013**

Attachment A

Item(s)	Committee member	Disclosure	Determination
3	Craig Simmons	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 3 (research) because NCGRT is a potential provider for research.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Craig participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for the decision is the discussion on research is on next steps and will not include decisions on specific research projects so there will be no conflict.