

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Draft Minutes – Meeting 11, 16-17 October 2013**

**MINUTES – Meeting 11
16-17 October 2013**

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
Crystal Bradley
Caryn Scott
Milica Milanja

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Edwina Johnson (Days 1-2: Items 2.1, 2.2, 4.5) Office of Water Science	Bruce Gray (Days 1-2: Items 3.1-3.7) Office of Water Science
Ben Roundnew (Day 1-2: Items 2.2, 3.1-3.7) Office of Water Science	Casa Dalton (Day 2: Item 3.2) Office of Water Science
Ebony Coote (Days 1-2: Items 2.1, 2.2, 4.5) Office of Water Science	Fiona Beynon (Day 2: Items 3.3-3.6) Office of Water Science
Kate Bayliss (Day 2: Item 3.3-3.6) Office of Water Science	Rachel Bowman (Day 1: Item 4.5) Office of Water Science
Kimberley Hammond (Days 1-2: Items 4.3, 4.4) Office of Water Science	Anna-Liisa Lahtinen (Day 2: Item 3.5, 3.6) Office of Water Science
Sophie Alexander (Days 1-2: Items 4.3, 4.4) Office of Water Science	Christine McKnight (Day 2: Items 3.5, 3.6) Office of Water Science
Moya Tomlinson (Day 2: Items 3.3-3.6) Office of Water Science	Emily Turner (Day 2: Items 3.3-3.6) Office of Water Science

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Jacqui Mumford (Day 2: Items 3.3-3.7, 4.4, 5.1) Office of Water Science	Geraldine Cusack (Day 1: Items 2.1, 2.2) Office of Water Science
Paul Greenfield (Day 1: Item 4.1) Chair, Expert Scientific Panel	Shane Gaddes (Day 1: Item 4.1) Department of the Environment
Simon Barry (Day 2: Item 2.2) CSIRO	Kevin Hayes (Day 2: Item 2.2) CSIRO

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on 16 October 2013.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Committee members and noted 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 11 with some changes to scheduling.

1.4 Confirmation of minutes

The Committee accepted the minutes of the tenth meeting (25-26 September) and agreed to their publication on the Committee's website.

1.5 Action items

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

1.6 Confirmation of out-of-session decisions

There were no out-of-session decisions at this meeting.

1.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 8 October 2013.

1.8 Environmental scan

The following developments were reported by the OWS:

- the submission to the Remuneration Tribunal regarding the Committee;

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- positive feedback was received from the Australian National Audit Office in relation to the recent conflict of interest, drop-in, audit;
- the Committee Chair and OWS representatives met with the New South Wales Chief Scientist in early October;
- the OWS and Chair of the Committee have a number of commitments scheduled in October and November, including a meeting with the Queensland Resources Council and the facilitation of a session at the Water in Mining 2013 conference; and
- the recent announcement by the New South Wales government on several key initiatives under the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy.

2. Bioregional Assessments

2.1 Bioregional Assessment Programme progress

The OWS updated the Committee on recent activities regarding the Bioregional Assessments Programme, including planning for internal and external workshops, discussions on contractual arrangements and development of preliminary assessment areas (PAEs) for Galilee and Clarence-Moreton.

The OWS outlined for the Committee the proposed approach to identify Indigenous cultural assets, which will include drawing on information held by the OWS and the Department, State government registers, natural resource management groups and catchment management authorities, and liaising with Indigenous advisory bodies.

2.2 Risk analysis presentation

At the Committee's invitation, Dr Simon Barry and Dr Keith Hayes from CSIRO joined the meeting to provide the Committee with an overview of the risk framework for bioregional assessments. Key topics of discussion included development pathways, conceptual models and impact analysis.

The Committee were appreciative of the presentation and agreed that it would be useful to collaborate with Dr Barry on defining terminology for uncertainty and risk. The Committee requested that their November meeting include an initial discussion on risk and uncertainty across the bioregions and further discussions on thresholds.

3. Research

3.1 National Assessment of Chemicals Associated with Coal Seam Gas Extraction

The Committee provided comments to the OWS on the following two draft products, from the project being led by the National industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme, relating to the identification of chemicals associated with coal seam gas extraction in Australia and the approach to identifying coal seam gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing chemicals of low concern for human health.

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The Committee noted that these products constitute part of a larger project and that it would be good to describe how they fit in. It was agreed that this context would be provided at the next meeting.

3.2 New South Wales Chief Scientist supplementary reports overview

The OWS provided the Committee with an overview of technical information papers related to the coal seam gas industry that were commissioned as part of the Independent Review of Coal Seam Gas Activities in New South Wales, conducted by the New South Wales Chief Scientist and Engineer.

The Committee noted the range of subjects covered by these technical papers, including data, subsidence, multi-basin usage/cumulative impacts, seismicity and subsidence monitoring.

3.3 Process for theme sheets

The OWS briefed the Committee on theme sheets, including the potential topics for future theme sheets and timeframes for their preparation.

The Committee noted:

- that the theme sheet presented to the Committee at its September 2013 meeting, on *Management of Mining Voids* had been finalised and updated to the Committee's govdex site;
- the theme sheet on *Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems* now included technical updates to expand the scope beyond terrestrial vegetation and that comments will be incorporated before uploading to the Committee's govdex site; and
- that compilations of the Committee's advice on cumulative impacts and monitoring and mitigation have been made available on the Committee's govdex site.

The Committee agreed to the proposed:

- operating arrangements for the theme sheets, including the process for keeping them updated and accessible by the Committee; and
- list of topics for future theme sheets, with the further addition of a theme sheet on protected ecosystems and species (such as those that are matters of national environmental significance).

3.4 Update on Research Programme

The OWS provided the Committee with an update on the Research Programme and outlined key developments since the September 2013 meeting.

The Committee discussed expected outcomes and outputs for the proposed projects under the hydrology and ecology themes. The OWS briefed the Committee on recent meetings with Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia government officials to further inform the proposed research projects under the hydrology theme; and on

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meetings with Professor Arthington and Professor Nuggeoda to discuss projects under the ecology theme.

The OWS provided an update on the peer reviews received for critical science reviews (CSRs) on subsidence, co-produced water, bore integrity and hydraulic fracturing. The Committee noted that when the CSRs have been finalised to include peer review feedback, they will be made available on the Committee's govdex site so members can provide comment prior to publication.

3.5 Update on recently commissioned research and access to bibliographic references

The OWS briefed the Committee on recent activities currently underway. The Committee noted:

- the proposal to procure an update on recently commissioned research;
- the bibliographic database which was provided to the Committee on USB; and
- that access to the current references and abstracts from the citations database (as at March 2013) has been made available to members on govdex.

The Committee agreed:

- to the publication of the recently commissioned research report which was discussed at the June 2013 meeting alongside publication of an updated report;
- the Research Sub-committee would review the current report and provide comment on the scope and key areas of research focus for the proposed update of the recently commissioned research report;
- that when completed, the report would be provided to the Committee for information on a biannual basis and made publicly available annually on the Committee's website; and
- that the Committee should discuss, say every quarter, research developments relating to a topical issues.

3.6 Proposed new research theme outlines

The Committee provided comments to the OWS on the thematic overviews for proposed priority research projects under the hydrology and ecology themes.

The Committee discussed the proposed outcomes and outputs and among other things agreed that a section about bioregional assessments should be incorporated into the thematic overviews to demonstrate the linkages with the Bioregional Assessment Programme. The Committee discussed how the OWS research programme can add value to existing research, and agreed that this should be explicit in the thematic overviews.

3.7 Fact sheets

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The OWS provided the Committee with an update on the development of Committee fact sheets on key topics. The Committee reviewed the:

- revised fact sheets on *Surface Water and Groundwater Connectivity – coal seam gas* and *Surface Water and Groundwater Connectivity – coal mining*; and
- new draft fact sheets on *Subsidence – coal seam gas* and *Subsidence – coal mining*.

The Committee provided comments and agreed to provide any minor edits to OWS out of session. The Committee noted that following receipt and incorporation of final edits, OWS would review style and presentation issues and proceed with technical and end user checks with a view to publishing a number of fact sheets in December.

4. Advice on Projects referred by Governments

4.1 Overview of post approval coal seam gas projects, Queensland

At the Committee's invitation, Paul Greenfield, Chair of the Expert Panel for Major Coal Seam Gas Projects (the Expert Panel) joined the meeting to provide an overview of the role of the Expert Panel.

Professor Greenfield provided background information about the Expert Panel, which was established in March 2011 to provide expert hydrological and hydrogeological advice to the Minister and the Department of the Environment relating to major coal seam gas proposals were approved with conditions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Topics of discussion included:

- the purpose of the advice to be provided by the Expert Panel, its membership and scope of work;
- the three Queensland coal seam gas projects that have been approved under the EPBC Act; and
- requirements and processes for the two stages of water monitoring and management plans, which are required as conditions of an approval for specific coal seam gas projects.

The Committee were appreciative of the update and agreed to invite Professor Greenfield back to meet with the Committee in early 2014 when his work on these projects had further progressed.

4.2 Uncertainty and risk

At the September meeting, the Committee discussed ways to define uncertainty and criteria for assigning levels of confidence when considering requests for advice on development proposals.

The Committee discussed the importance of developing some consistent terminology on risk and uncertainty and agreed to work in collaboration with Dr Simon Barry to progress this.

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The Committee agreed to review the table presented at the September meeting on possible hydrological criteria for different levels of confidence, and to provide input relevant to their area of expertise for inclusion in the table. The Committee agreed to trial the criteria for assigning levels of confidence at their November meeting.

4.3 Review of information guidelines

The OWS provided the Committee with an update on the initial review of the Information Guidelines, which takes into account feedback provided by the Committee to date.

The Committee:

- reviewed and provided comments on the revised Information Guidelines; and
- agreed to include consultation on the Information Guidelines as part of the proposed meetings with regulators regarding cumulative impact assessment.

The Committee noted the OWS will have a revised version of the Information Guidelines for Committee consideration prior to consultation with regulators, with the aim to finalise the document at its February 2014 meeting.

4.4 Handling and publishing protocols

Following discussion at the September meeting, the Committee considered a protocol outlining when its advice to regulators on coal seam gas and coal mining developments will be published and a protocol for handling queries in relation to the Committee's advice.

The Committee:

- provided comments to the OWS on the draft protocol for publication of advice;
- agreed to consult with the Commonwealth, New South Wales and Queensland regulators about the proposed protocol; and
- endorsed the draft protocol for handling queries on the Committee's advice.

4.5 Galilee overview

The OWS and Professor Flood provided the Committee with an overview of relevant research and development proposals in the Galilee Basin. The presentation included:

- an overview of approved, pending and future coal seam gas and coal mining projects;
- a summary of report/s on impacts of Galilee Basin coal mining; and
- an update on progress of the Galilee Bioregional Assessment.

The Committee requested that OWS:

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- compile a summary of its advice to date on protected ecosystems and species (such as those that are matters of national environmental significance);
- consider cumulative impacts in its supporting information for Galilee Coal Project (November);
- bring the Preliminary Assessment Extent for the bioregional assessment in the Galilee subregion to the November 2013 Committee meeting; and
- consider whether the proposed timeline for the bioregional assessment in the Galilee subregion can be revised, for earlier delivery of products.

The Committee noted that an overview will be presented on the Bowen Basin at the next meeting.

5. Close and other business

5.1 Forward planning agenda

The Committee considered the forward agenda and discussed possible topics for consideration at the November 2013 meeting.

The Committee considered proposed meeting dates for 2014 and agreed to advise the OWS of their availability.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held over three days on 12-14 November 2013 in Canberra.

The meeting closed at 3.00pm on 17 October.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Ms Lisa Corbyn
Committee Chair

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Attachment A

Item(s)	Committee member	Disclosure	Determination
3.4 3.6	Craig Simmons	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 3.4 and 3.6 because NCGRT is a potential provider of research projects.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Craig participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for the decision is that as we are not making decisions on individual research projects there will be no conflict at this meeting.