

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)
Meeting 31, 12-13 November 2015**

**MINUTES
Crowne Plaza, Canberra**

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Andrew Johnson (Chair)
Dr Andrew Boulton
Professor Craig Simmons
Dr Jenny Stauber
Emeritus Professor Peter Flood

APOLOGIES

Ms Jane Coram (Attended Item 5.2 only)

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Matthew Whitfort
Jason Smith
Ann Hartley
Lily Knife

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Dr Diana Wright First Assistant Secretary Science Division	Ben Roudnew (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Anthony Swirepik (Item 3) Office of Water Science	Emily Turner (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Geraldine Cusack (Item 3) Office of Water Science	Emma Wiadrowski (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Craig Watson (Item 3) Office of Water Science	Mitchell Bouma (Item 2) Office of Water Science
John Higgins (Item 4) Office of Water Science	Melissa Liu (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Moya Tomlinson (Item 2 and 4) Office of Water Science	Scott Lawson (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Bruce Gray (Item 4) Office of Water Science	Joseph Henry (Item 4) Office of Water Science
Berlinda Bowler (Item 1.7) Office of Water Science	Jeff Fung (Item 1.7) Office of Water Science

INVITED GUESTS

Bronwyn Ray (Item 3) Bureau of Meteorology	Eliane Prideaux (Item 3) Bureau of Meteorology
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The meeting commenced at 12.45 pm on 12 November 2015.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Andrew Johnson, welcomed members of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC) to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Ms Jane Coram.

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

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

1.2 Declaration of interest

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

1.3 Confirmation of agenda

The IESC endorsed the agenda for Meeting 31.

1.4 Action items

Completed items were noted. A number of follow-up items were listed on the agenda for this or later meetings.

1.5 Confirmation of out-of-session decisions

The Chair noted the following items have been agreed out of session:

- minutes of the IESC's thirtieth meeting (7-8 October 2015) were confirmed and agreed for publication;
- advice on the China Stone Coal Project – New Development was finalised and provided to the decision maker; and
- IESC Review of Activities July 2014-June 2015 accepted and agreed for publication.

1.6 Correspondence

The IESC noted the action taken and status of correspondence to 31 October 2015.

1.7 Environmental scan

The Office of Water Science provided an update on developments since the October IESC meeting, including:

- the recent Senate motion by Independent Senator Glenn Lazarus to establish a Select Committee on Unconventional Gas Mining to inquire into the adequacy of Australia's legislative, regulatory and policy framework for unconventional gas mining including coal seam gas.

1.8 Forward Planning Agenda

The IESC noted the forward planning agenda and items due for consideration through to December 2015.

The December meeting was confirmed for 8-10 December 2015.

2. Advice on projects referred by governments

2.1 Advice on Bylong Coal Project – New Development

The IESC received a request for advice from the Australian Government Department of the Environment and the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment to provide advice on KEPCO's Bylong Coal Project in New South Wales.

The Bylong Coal Project lies within the western coalfields of the Sydney-Gunnedah Basin. Approximately 6.5 million tonnes per annum of run of mine coal is proposed to be extracted via open cut and underground mining methods from the target Coggan and Ulan coal seams. The operational life of the mine is anticipated to be approximately 23 years.

The IESC reviewed and discussed the information provided. Matters of interest to the IESC included:

- potential for changes to groundwater and surface water quality;
- the effectiveness of the proposed remediation measures for subsidence impacts;
- detail surrounding construction of the groundwater model (e.g. boundary conditions) and application of the groundwater model to consider impacts to the Goulburn River; and
- suitability of the proponent's risk assessment; consideration of impacts associated with flooding; and mitigation measures.

Consistent with the EPBC Regulations the advice will be published on the IESC's website within 10 business days of being provided to the Australian Government Department of the Environment and the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment.

3. Bioregional Assessments

3.1 Bioregional Assessments – Update

An update was provided to the IESC on:

- assessment status for the Bioregional Assessment Technical Programme;
- programme re-prioritisation that was discussed at the recent Bioregional Assessment Programme Implementation Board meeting; and
- action taken regarding the IESC comments at Meeting 30 on the sub-methodologies in November.

The IESC discussed at length the progress with the Assessments and stressed to the Office of Water Science Officers the criticality of delivering end-to-end products for the Namoi, Hunter, Galilee and Gloucester Bioregional Assessments regions.

The IESC requested a presentation on a worked end-to-end example of a bioregional assessment at the December meeting to demonstrate integration of the components across the whole assessment, and a half day session for the March 2016 meeting for a detailed discussion about how Group 2 and Group 3 analysis is being implemented with a focus on how the output from the analysis can inform project advice.

3.2 Bioregional Assessments – Quality Assurance and Communications

An update was provided to the IESC on:

- stakeholder engagement and communication information; and
- quality assurance of the Bioregional Assessments products.

The IESC emphasised the need to strengthen the communication and quality assurance processes for the Bioregional Assessment Programme.

Given the proposed Programme re-scope, the IESC advised that it thought it important for the Programme to re-engage with stakeholders to communicate changes to the scope and timing of the Programme in order to calibrate expectations. The IESC was informed that Programme is currently developing a new high level presentation that describes what the Programme will deliver with a view to enabling this communication.

Efforts to enhance external quality assurances of the Bioregional Assessments Programme were also discussed, with focus on three activities:

1. Broaden the current TARG process to include external professional reviews of Group 2 products
2. Engage individual IESC members – consistent with their areas of expertise - to review Group 2 products
3. Make arrangements for an independent (from the Programme) reviewer from CSIRO to review products

The IESC noted the update.

4. **Research**

4.1 Research Programme Update

An update was provided on key activities in the Research Programme including ongoing work as contracted on:

- Bore and well induced inter-aquifer groundwater connectivity: Consequence modelling and experimental design project;
- Research to inform the assessment of eco-hydrological responses to coal seam gas extraction and coal mining and
- Research to better include faults and aquitards in Australian regional groundwater models to improve assessment of impacts of coal seam gas extraction and coal mining.

The IESC Research subcommittee updated the IESC on the review of the research priorities and advised drafting is progressing, with input required from IESC members in order to turn the list of key research gaps into a set of draft research priorities. The draft Revised Priorities will be presented at the next IESC Meeting in December.

The IESC noted the update.

4.2 Update on the National Assessment of Chemicals Used in Coal Seam Gas Extraction

An update was provided on the National Assessment of Chemicals Used in Coal Seam Gas Extraction, including development of the communications strategy.

The IESC noted the developments since the IESC meeting in October 2015 and advised the Office of Water Science of the importance of a commissioning an appropriately resourced communications strategy. IESC members will have an opportunity to provide comments on key documents out of session.

5. Other Business

5.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategy Annual Operation Plan 2015-16

The IESC was presented with the IESC Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategy Annual Operational Plan for 2015-16, which had been expanded to extend engagement to a broad range of stakeholders, as requested by the IESC, and to include receiving presentations from key stakeholders.

The IESC endorsed the plan.

5.2 Efficiency and Effectiveness

The IESC discussed “in camera” how the IESC may improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The focus of the discussion was primarily on the Bioregional Assessment programme, with discussions on other matters identified by the Chair to be scheduled for future IESC.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 8-10 December 2015 in Canberra.

The meeting closed at 11.30am.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Andrew Johnson

IESC Chair

24 November 2015

Item(s)	IESC member	Disclosure	Determination
4	Professor Craig Simmons	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to Agenda Item 4 (Research) arising from NCGRT as a potential/current provider of research.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Professor Simmons participated fully in the IESC meeting.
5.2	Jane Coram	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to Agenda Item 5.2 arising from Geoscience Australia involvement in the Bioregional Assessments.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Ms Coram participated fully in this agenda item.