

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)
Meeting 39, 12-13 October 2016**

**MINUTES
Canberra**

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Andrew Johnson (Chair)

Dr Glen Walker

Dr Jenny Stauber

Dr Andrew Boulton

Dr Ian Prosser

Dr Wendy Timms

Professor Joan Esterle

APOLOGIES

Professor Craig Simmons

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Sean Lane

Jason Smith

Ann Hartley

Lily Knife

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Matthew Whitfort (Item 3 and 5) Acting First Assistant Secretary, Science	Dr John Higgins (Item 3 and 4) Office of Water Science
Anthony Swirepik (Item 3) Office of Water Science	Emily Turner (Item 3) Office of Water Science
Craig Moore (Item 2) Office of Water Science	Natasha Amerasinghe (Item 2, 4 and 5.3) Office of Water Science
Tashya Le Compte (Item 2) Office of Water Science	Sam Pettett (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Catherine Kooymans (Item 2) Office of Water Science	Sarah Taylor (Item 2) Office of Water Science
Peter Baker (Item 3,4 and 5.3) Office of Water Science	Malcolm Thompson (Item 5.2) Office of Water Science

INVITED GUESTS

Becky Schmidt (Item 3) CSIRO	Julie Burke (Item 3) Bureau of Meteorology
Steven Lewis (Item 3) Geoscience Australia	David Post (Item 3) CSIRO
Brent Henderson (Item 3) CSIRO	

The meeting commenced at 1.35 pm on 12 October 2016.

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.

The Chair introduced and welcomed new members Dr Wendy Timms and Professor Joan Esterle and noted the reappointment of Professor Craig Simmons.

The Chair noted the IESC's deep appreciation and thanks to retiring members Emeritus Professor Peter Flood and Ms Jane Coram for their valued experience and support over the past four years.

Apology was received from Professor Craig Simmons.

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 39.

1.4 Action items

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

1.5 Confirmation of out-of-session decisions

The Chair noted the minutes for the IESC's thirty eighth meeting on 31 August and 1 September 2016 were endorsed and published out of session.

1.6 Correspondence

The IESC noted the status of correspondence to 30 September 2016.

1.7 Environmental scan

The Office of Water Science provided an update on policy and other developments since the September 2016 IESC meeting, including:

- the Queensland Government announced it would invoke special powers to progress the Carmichael coal project.
- the Northern Territory Government announced a temporary moratorium on fracking, pending the outcome of an independent scientific inquiry into fracking; and
- the Western Australian Government announced it had established a Land Access Working Group which was recommended in the Standing Committee on

Environment and Public Affairs report 'Implications for Western Australia of Hydraulic Fracturing for Unconventional Gas'.

1.8 Forward Planning Agenda

The IESC noted the forward planning agenda and items due for consideration through to December 2016.

It was agreed the next meeting would be scheduled for 9 - 10 November 2016. The Secretariat will seek alternate dates from members for the December 2016 meeting.

IESC members agreed to advise the Secretariat regarding availability for 2017.

2. **Advice on projects referred by governments**

2.1 Advice on United Wambo Coal Mining Project

The IESC received a joint request for advice from the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy and the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment to provide advice on the United Collieries Pty Ltd and Wambo Coal Pty Ltd joint venture. The proposed project is located in the Hunter Valley region.

The proposed project is a modification to the existing Wambo Coal open cut mine layout located 16 kilometres west of Singleton. The proposed project includes an extension to the area and depth of the approved Wambo Coal open cut pit and a new open cut pit, all to be managed by United Collieries. Extraction is stated to be 176 million tonnes of coal at a maximum rate of 10 million tonnes per year over 23 years. The proposed project will utilise existing infrastructure including the coal handling and preparation plant and train loading facilities at the Wambo Coal Mine Site.

The IESC reviewed and discussed the information provided and considered the key issues as follows:

- changes to the quality of surface water, particularly in Wollombi Brook, and groundwater due to mine water discharges;
- altered surface water-groundwater interaction causing reduced baseflow to the Hunter River and Wollombi Brook.;
- the potential for one of the two proposed voids, Wambo void lake, to become a source of contamination to surface water and groundwater systems; and
- impacts to groundwater dependent ecosystems arising from drawdown in the alluvial aquifer.

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 Energy and the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment.

3. Bioregional Assessment Programme

3.1 Bioregional assessment update

An update was provided to the IESC on the delivery of bioregional assessments. This included a summary of feedback from Product Use and Design Workshops held with regulators and proponents; status and outcome of external review of draft products; and a preview of the upcoming impact and risk analysis products.

The IESC noted the update and provided advice on the communication of final assessment results.

4. Research

4.1 Research program update

An update was provided on key activities in the Research Program including the National Assessment of Chemicals Associated with Coal Seam Gas Extraction in Australia and the Eco-hydrological responses to coal seam gas extraction and coal mining project.

It was noted that the consultation paper to support the review of the IESC Research Priorities has been released for public comment, with submissions closing 14 November 2016.

The IESC noted the update.

5. Other Business

5.2 Deputy Secretary Malcolm Thompson

Mr Thompson thanked the IESC for their valued contribution as a trusted source of independent scientific advice to the Minister for the Environment and Energy, state governments, and through them the community.

Mr Thompson welcomed new members Dr Wendy Timms and Professor Joan Esterle.

The Chair thanked Mr Thompson and passed on the IESC's appreciation for the secretariat and technical support provided by the Department of the Environment and Energy.

5.3 Groundwater modelling for the Surat Basin

The IESC had a broad discussion on groundwater modelling for the Surat Basin.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 9-10 November 2016 in Canberra.

The meeting closed at 1.20 pm on Thursday 13 October 2016.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Andrew Johnson
IESC Chair
25 October 2016

Item(s)	IESC member	Disclosure	Determination
3.1	Dr Andrew Johnson	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to Agenda Item 3.1 Bioregional Assessments arising from Bureau of Meteorology's involvement in the Bioregional Assessment Programme.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Dr Johnson participated fully in the meeting.