

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

**MINUTES – Meeting 6
21-23 May 2013**

Old Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Lisa Corbyn (Chair)

Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington

Ms Jane Coram (by telephone on day 1; in person day 2 and 3)

Emeritus Professor Peter Flood

Dr Andrew Johnson (in person on day 1 and 2; by telephone on day 3)

Mr Jim McDonald (days 2 and 3)

Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda (days 2 and 3)

Professor Craig Simmons

APOLOGIES

Mr Jim McDonald (day 1)

Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda (day 1)

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Suzy Nethercott-Watson

Peter Baker

Robert Gehrig (days 1 and day 2)

Caryn Scott

Milica Milanja

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENT, WATER,
POPULATION AND COMMUNITIES (DSEWPaC) AND INVITED GUESTS

Kate Bayliss (Days 1-3: Items 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.9, 2.10, 4.1-4.4) Office of Water Science	Fiona Beynon (Days 1-3: Items 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.7, 2.9, 2.11) Office of Water Science
Yvette Blackman (Days 1-3) Office of Water Science	Rachel Ross (Days 1 and 3: Items 2.1, 2.7) Office of Water Science
Kelly Strike (Days 1 and 3: Items 2.2, 2.8) Office of Water Science	Kate Livett (Days 1-3: Items 2.1-2.11) Contractor (technical writer)
Phillip Rowland (Day 1: Item 2.1) Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Queensland	Lindsay Delzappo (Day 1: Item 2.1) Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Queensland
Stuart Cameron (Day 1: Item 2.2) Coordinator-General, Queensland Government	Bruce Edwards (Day 1: Item 2.2) Coordinator-General, Queensland Government

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

Crystal Bradley (Days 1-3: Items 1.1-1.7, 2.1, 4.1-4.3, 5.1, 3.1-3.3) Office of Water Science	Craig Watson (Day 1: Item 4.4) Office of Water Science
Carla Morgan (Days 1 and 3: Items 2.3, 2.9) Office of Water Science	Anu Datta (Days 2 and 3: Items 2.5, 2.11) Office of Water Science
Emily Turner (Days 2 and 3: Items 2.4, 2.10) Office of Water Science	Gayle Milnes (Day 1: Items 4.1-4.4, 2.5, 6.1) Office of Water Science
Liam Curtis (Days 1 and 3: Items 2.3, 2.9) Office of Water Science	Anna-Liisa Lahtinen (Day 2: Item 2.6) Office of Water Science
Edwina Johnson (Day 2: Items 3.1-3.3) Office of Water Science	Casa Dalton (Day 1: Items 4.1-4.4) Office of Water Science
Deborah Chen (Day 1: Items 4.1-4.3) Office of Water Science	David Parker (Day 2: lunch) Deputy Secretary, DSEWPaC

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on 21 May.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Committee members noting:

- apologies from Mr Jim McDonald on Day 1;
- apologies from Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda on Day 1;
- Ms Jane Coram will join the meeting by telephone on Day 1; and
- Dr Andrew Johnson will join the meeting by telephone on Day 3.

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, 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 6.

1.4 Action Items

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

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

1.5 Confirmation of Out-of-Session Decisions

The minutes of the Committee's fifth meeting (16-18 April) were agreed out-of-session and posted on the Committee website.

1.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 8 May 2013, and agreed to the arrangements proposed by the Office of Water Science (OWS) to manage Committee correspondence.

1.7 Environmental Scan

The following developments were reported by the OWS:

- Noted the status of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 (the Amendment Bill) in the Parliamentary process;
- the Committee Chair, Professor Simmons and Secretariat appeared as witnesses before the Standing Committee on Environment and Communications (legislation) Inquiry into the Amendment Bill on 18 April 2013; OWS summarised the two recommendations contained in the Standing Committee's report, released on 13 May 2013;
- representatives from OWS met with stakeholders in Queensland and New South Wales on 7- 8 May 2013, to discuss the Bioregional Assessments Program;
- noted for information of members a recent article published on The Conversation news website relating to the Committee's project advice;
- recent meetings between OWS representatives and the NSW Office of the Chief Scientist and the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS), respectively.

The Committee Chair reported:

- the Committee Chair met with the Minister, the Hon Tony Burke MP, on 14 May 2013 to discuss the work of the Committee. Feedback from the Minister on the work of the Committee was positive.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

2. Advice on Projects Referred by Governments

The Committee provided advice on four large coal mine proposals and one coal seam gas proposal.

2.1 Bowen Gas Project, QLD EIA (draft)

The Committee was referred the Bowen Gas Project, Queensland, for advice to the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, at the draft Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

The proposed project is a new coal seam gas field development project in Central Queensland, located approximately 150 kilometres south-west of Mackay, extending from Glenden in the North to Blackwater in the South. The project area is within the Isaac River and Mackenzie River sub-catchments of the Fitzroy River catchment, and the Belyando-Suttor sub-catchment of the Burdekin River catchment.

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project was available for public comment between 11 March and 23 April 2013.

Matters of interest to the Committee included the extent to which documentation was conceptual, connectivity issues, groundwater modelling, the presence/absence of the Rewan Formation in relation to interconnectivity and co-produced water.

The Committee's advice will be published separately on the Committee's website in the context of the regulator's decision.

2.2 Galilee Coal Project, QLD EIA (supplementary)

The Committee was referred the Galilee Coal Project, Queensland, for advice to the Queensland Office of the Coordinator-General, at the supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

The proposed project involves development of two open-cut mines and four underground mines in Central Queensland, with the mine site approximately 450 km west of Rockhampton and 35 km north-west of the Alpha township. The mine site is almost entirely located within the Belyando/Suttor catchment, a sub-catchment of the Burdekin River.

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project went on public display from 24 September to 19 December 2011.

Matters of interest to the Committee included potential impacts on the Great Artesian Basin, data modelling, regional water balance, drawdown and subsidence.

The Committee's advice will be published separately on the Committee's website in the context of the regulator's decision.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

2.3 Wallerah 2, Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, NSW EIA (draft)

The Committee was referred the Wallarah 2 Coal Proposal, New South Wales, for advice to the Commonwealth regulator, at the draft Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

The proposed project involves the development and operation of an underground coal mine using longwall mining techniques. The project is located on the central coast of NSW, 4.7 km north-west of Wyong in the Tuggerah Lakes Basin.

The project was originally referred under the EPBC Act in 2007 (EPBC 2007/3881 refers).

Matters of interest to the Committee included possible impacts from subsidence on the Gosford-Wyong Water Supply Scheme and water dependent species due to groundwater changes, and surface water runoff reduction.

The Committee's advice will be published separately on the Committee's website in the context of the regulator's decision.

2.4 Watermark Coal Project, NSW EIA (draft)

The Committee was referred the Watermark Coal Project, NSW, for advice to the Commonwealth regulator, at the draft Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

The proposed project involves the development and operation of an open cut coal mine, in a location approximately 25 km south south-east of the township of Gunnedah and to the immediate west of the village of Breeza. The project area is located within the Gunnedah Basin, which covers more than 15,000 square km in the north-western region of NSW.

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project was available for public comment until 26 April 2013.

Matters of interest to the Committee included increased risk of downstream salinity from mine voids, seepage, and overflow of storages; adequacy of groundwater modelling and insufficient assessment of cumulative impacts from the proposed mine on a regional scale.

The Committee's advice will be published separately on the Committee's website in the context of the regulator's decision.

2.5 Bengalla Mine Extension, NSW EIA (draft)

The Committee was referred the Bengalla Mine Project, NSW, for advice to the Commonwealth regulator, at the draft Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

The proposed project is the continuation of the existing Bengalla Mine, located in the Upper Hunter Valley region of NSW, approximately 4km west of the town of Muswellbrook. The project is located within the Hunter River catchment, which has a total area of approximately 4,200 km².

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project was available for public comment between 10 and 23 May 2012.

Matters of interest to the Committee included groundwater modelling, water quality monitoring, site water balance and potential impacts on Dry Creek.

The Committee's advice will be published separately on the Committee's website in the context of the regulator's decision.

2.6 Coalpac Consolidation Project, NSW EIA (draft)

The Commonwealth regulator withdrew the request for advice for this project. The Committee is expected to consider this project at its next meeting, in June 2013.

3. Bioregional Assessments

3.1 and 3.2 Proposed governance and quality assurance

The Committee was provided advice on the approach being taken regarding governance and quality assurance processes for the Bioregional Assessment (BA) Program and members agreed with the general approach, noting the importance of an effective stakeholder engagement strategy.

Following further discussion about its role in the decision points and endorsement on products of the BA Program, the Committee agreed that future endorsement should be sought from the Committee in the following circumstances:

- exception reporting: when there is divergence from the Bioregional Assessment Methodology, or where there are different pathways in the methodology;
- when there is a requirement for new data acquisition; and
- immediately following application of a decision point on the Bioregional Assessment Methodology (BRAM) diagram.

The Committee requested that the OWS:

- provide a monthly progress update on the BA Program at each Committee meeting;
- bring a paper to the June meeting for information on stakeholder engagement for the BA Program;
- develop a charter or Terms of Reference for each of the groups listed in the Proposed Technical Quality Assurance Process diagram, outlining their remit.

The Committee agreed it would be useful to have the opportunity to consider some draft products, as well as to have a series of science-based presentations and workshops at selected points throughout the BA Program to ensure a robust application of the Bioregional Assessment Methodology.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

3.3 Update on priority subregions for Bioregional Assessments

The OWS provided a short overview in the form of a table on how the status for the expected products for the Namoi and other priority sub-region bioregional assessments would be shown.

The OWS provided the Committee a draft chapter from one of the BRAM products for the Namoi sub-region, to give a feel for the type of document and associated level of information which was being developed.

4. Research and other issues

4.1-2 Priority Research Projects and the Research Plan

The Committee:

- reviewed the proposed research priorities;
- discussed the next steps including the merits of further targeted consultations with third party experts and the timeline for finalising the Committee's advice to the Minister on research priorities;
- emphasised the importance of managing potential conflicts of interest when selecting individuals/organisations to undertake the scoping and consultations;
- provided comment on the draft Research Plan;
- discussed the importance of clearly identifying the knowledge gaps, possible ways of addressing the gaps and reasons to why the projects were seen to be a priority; and
- discussed the difficulty in providing comments on the relative priority of projects without an understanding of the scale of the project.

Agreed next steps include:

- The OWS is to finalise a matrix showing information gaps and how they are being addressed, for Committee consideration at Meeting 7;
- The OWS is to develop a contextual statement outlining pathway and rationale for selection; and
- The Committee is to provide feedback to the OWS on potential relevant peer reviewers who could be utilised for any future research projects.

4.3 GAB Springs Survey – update on progress

The OWS provided an update on the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) springs survey, the purpose of which was to provide a literature review of existing information on springs in the Surat and Bowen basins, and to undertake a survey of selected spring attributes.

Agreed next steps for the OWS include:

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

- undertaking a final review of the project material and provide comments back to the authors for a final draft;
- providing the project dataset to the Environmental Resources Information Network within DSEWPaC for storage and mapping purposes
- seeking comments from respective Queensland and New South Wales(NSW) government representatives, from a quality assurance perspective;
- proceeding to peer review; and
- producing a fact sheet on this topic.

4.4 Peat Swamps – project update and proposal for future funding

The Committee discussed the status of the three peat swamps projects and:

- provided favourable comment on the final report for Project One (Ecology Monitoring), noting it was a priority to get this project finalised;
- agreed to peer review for this report;
- noted the project report which included consideration for further peat swamp research with the Committee indicating that although the proposed research into the hydrology of peat swamps is consistent with research priority Theme 4: Ecosystems and Water, any decision on an actual project would be a matter for the OWS; and
- discussed the capacity for any potential research to be able to be extrapolated to other peat swamps, and therefore provide information to aid future assessment of mining proposals that may impact peat swamps.

5. **Communications**

5.1 Communications

The Committee reviewed the proposed Committee website, Committee fact sheet – *About the Committee*, and a proposed list of technical fact sheets.

The Committee:

- endorsed the draft Committee Fact Sheet;
- agreed to the development of fact sheets based on the list of priority topics provided;
- endorsed the draft Committee website, subject to some minor Member profile updates; and
- noted that the Committee Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy will be provided for consideration at the June meeting.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 6, 21-23 May 2013**

Next steps include the OWS updating the proposed list of fact sheet topics for consideration at the June 2013 meeting.

6. Close

6.1 Review of Meeting and Forward Planning Agenda

The Committee considered the forward agenda and discussed possible topics for consideration at the June 2013 meeting including:

- advice on one large coal mining project;
- a presentation by the Queensland Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment on the draft *Underground Water Impact Report—Surat Cumulative Management Area*;
- commencement of a cumulative impacts discussion;
- the draft Committee communication and stakeholder engagement strategy;
- the first drafts of Committee fact sheets as scheduled; and
- the matrix on information/research gaps and how they are being addressed.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 26-27 June 2013 (exact timing within these two days to be confirmed) in Canberra.

The meeting will be chaired by Professor Craig Simmons in the absence of the Chair.

The meeting closed on 23 May 2013 at 12.00pm.

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 6, 21-23 May 2013**

Attachment A

Item(s)	Committee member	Disclosure	Determination
4.1	Craig T. Simmons	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 4.1 arising from the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training (NCGRT) being a potential provider of research.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Craig participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for the decision is that the Committee will not be making decisions or having discussions on funding for specific projects at this meeting.
3	Jane Coram	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 3, arising from Geoscience Australia's role in scoping and potentially undertaking components of the Bioregional Assessments. I note that Geoscience Australia has a Bioregional Program Director who is directly involved in this work. I am not involved directly.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Jane participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for the decision is that the Committee will not be making decisions or having discussions on funding for specific projects on Bioregional Assessments at this meeting.
3 and 4	Andrew Johnson	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda items 3 and 4 arising from discussion on Bioregional Assessment Program and research projects.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Andrew participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for the decision is that the Committee will not be making decisions or discussing funding for specific projects at this meeting.