**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and**

**Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)**

**Meeting 66, 11-12 December 2019**

**MINUTES**

**Canberra, ACT**

**ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Chris Pigram (Chair)

Professor Wendy Timms

Associate Professor Rory Nathan

Dr Andrew Boulton

Dr Catherine Moore

Professor Jenny Davis (by teleconference)

Dr Jenny Stauber (by teleconference Day 1 - 11 December only)

Professor Craig Simmons (by teleconference)

APOLOGIES

Dr Jenny Stauber (Day 2 - 12 December)

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE

Peter Baker

Jason Smith

Carol Nelson

Sarah Taylor (Items 2, 3.8, 3.9 and 4)

Mio Kuhnen (Items 2, 3.8, 3.9 and 4)

Ben Klug (Item 3)

Kelly Strike (Items 2 (part of), 3.8, 3.9 and 4)

Tia Stevens, Assistant Secretary Biodiversity Policy and Water Science (Items 3.8, 3.9 and 4)

INVITED GUESTS

Professor Graeme Samuel AC, Independent Reviewer of the EBPC Act, and two staff from the EPBC Act Review Secretariat (Item 3.6 by teleconference)

Declan O’Connor-Cox, A/g Assistant Secretary, Environment Approvals Division, Department of the Environment and Energy (Item 3.9)

Natasha Amerasinghe, A/g Director, Post Approval Strategies, Department of the Environment and Energy (Item 3.9)

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on Wednesday 11 December 2019.

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

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

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

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

1.2 Disclosure of Interests

Before the meeting commenced, Committee members completed the Meeting Specific Declaration of Interests and a project advice specific declaration for the Bulga Optimisation Project MOD3/Bulga Underground Operations MOD7 Project.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda

The Committee endorsed the agenda for Meeting 66 and noted that Item 3.5 was unable to be presented.

1.4 Confirmation of Out-of-Session decisions

The Committee noted that:

* advice on the Moranbah North Extension Project, the Russell Vale Revised Underground Expansion Project and the Maxwell Underground Coal Mine Project was provided to the regulator and published in accordance with agreed timeframes; and
* minutes of the Committee’s sixty-fifth meeting on 4-7 November 2019 were agreed out-of-session and published.

1.5 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 26 November 2019.

1.6 Action Items

Ongoing items were noted and an update was provided on the timing of completion.

1.7 Forward Planning Agenda

The Committee noted the forward planning agenda.

It was agreed the next meeting be scheduled for 29-30 January 2020 in Canberra.

1.8 Environmental Scan

Committee members and secretariat reported back on developments in recent months, including:

* the formation of a new Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment which will take place from 1 February 2020 from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment and Energy;
* Energy will be part of another Department, creating the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources;
* community engagement underway with the Hazelwood Rehabilitation and Closure Plan; and
* Committee members reporting back on their attendance and presentations at the following -
  + Australasian Groundwater Conference
  + The Ecological Society of Australia Conference
  + Australian Freshwater Sciences Society Conference
  + International Congress on Modelling and Simulation.

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

2.1 Bulga Optimisation Project MOD3/Bulga Underground Operations MOD7 Project

The proposed Bulga Optimisation Project MOD3/Bulga Underground Operations MOD7 Project (the project) is an extension of the existing Bulga Coal Complex located approximately 12km southwest of Singleton in the New South Wales Hunter Valley. The project includes mining deeper seams within the South Pit Area and relocation of tailings from the Deep Pit and Bayswater Pit tailing storage facilities to the Main Pit tailings storage facility which will require expansion to accommodate these tailings and those generated from the proposed additional mining. The project will disturb 20.2ha of previously undisturbed land including approximately 19.2ha of native vegetation. The project will extract an additional 63 million tonnes of coal from the Bulga Coal Complex extending the life of the open cut operations by about four years until 2039.

Key potential impacts from this project are:

* further drawdown in the Permian aquifers and a greater spatial extent of drawdown within the alluvial aquifers, both of which are predicted to reduce baseflow to surface water systems within the Hunter River Catchment;
* impacts to the Warkworth Sands Woodland CEEC if this community is found to be dependent on groundwater affected by the project;
* changed flow regimes (particularly frequency, duration and timing of zero- and low-flow periods) and altered surface water quality from changed catchment areas and controlled and uncontrolled discharges; and
* long-term and event-based declines in surface water and groundwater quality from the final void lake.

Consistent with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000*, advice will be published on the IESC’s website within 10 business days of being provided to the regulators.

**3. Other Business**

3.1 Independent Review of the EPBC Act

The Committee discussed potential input to the Independent Review of the EPBC Act in preparation for a discussion with Professor Graeme Samuel AC, the appointed Independent Reviewer, later in the meeting (refer 3.6).

3.2 IESC 2018-2019 Annual Review of Activities

The 2018-2019 Annual Review of Activities was published early December 2019 following approval by the Chair in November 2019.

Copies were tabled at the meeting. The Annual Review will be published on the IESC website on 16 December 2019 and be distributed to stakeholders as soon as possible.

3.3 Environmental Risk

Discussions took place around a review of the risk component of the IESC Information Guidelines. The Committee agreed to strengthen the dedicated section on risk assessment as part of the next regular update due in 2021.

3.4 NSW Site Visit

The Committee discussed areas of interest in New South Wales for a potential site visit.

It was agreed to consider suitable sites in the Hunter Valley area.

3.5 Presentation on OWS Visit to proposed Shenhua-Watermark Coal Mine

This presentation was unavailable and the item was withdrawn from the agenda.

3.6 Discussion with the Independent Reviewer of the EPBC Act

Professor Graeme Samuel AC, the Independent Reviewer of the EPBC Act, and two staff from the Review Secretariat joined the Committee by telephone to discuss IESC opportunities for input.

Discussions took place on issues relevant to the work of the IESC, including providing a formal submission in response to the discussion paper, due 14 February 2020.

Professor Samuel was invited to the next IESC meeting, to be held in January 2020, to discuss further.

3.7 Frequently Asked Questions Document

The Committee discussed the changes made to the Frequently Asked Questions document. It was agreed that the document be reviewed again by the Committee prior to being used as a web-based reference document for interested parties.

3.8 Preparation of First Draft of Project Advice

The Committee discussed the options in regard to the nature and direction of the first version of advice to be reviewed at IESC meetings.

3.9 Managing Cumulative Impacts to Water Resources in the Surat Cumulative Management Area, QLD

Staff from the Post Approvals Strategies Section of the Environmental Approvals Division in the Department of the Environment and Energy provided an update on work to date in better managing cumulative impacts to water resources in the Surat Cumulative Management Area in Queensland.

**Close of Meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting and for the past year’s diligence, professionalism and conscientiousness in delivering outcomes, informed conversations and enabling productive meetings.

The meeting closed at 1.10pm on Thursday 12 December 2019.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 29-30 January 2020, in Canberra, ACT.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Chris Pigram AM, FTSE

IESC Chair

18 December 2019