

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 7, 26-27 June 2013**

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26-27 June 2013**

Old Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor Craig Simmons (Acting Chair)

Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington

Emeritus Professor Peter Flood

Mr Jim McDonald

Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda

APOLOGIES

Ms Lisa Corbyn (Chair)

Ms Jane Coram

Dr Andrew Johnson

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Suzy Nethercott-Watson

Peter Baker

Yvette Blackman

Caryn Scott

Milica Milanja

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

Edwina Johnson (Day 1: Items 4.1-4.2) Office of Water Science	Craig Watson (Days 1-2: Items 2.1, 5.2) Office of Water Science
Anna-Liisa Lahtinen (Day 1-2: Item 2.1) Office of Water Science	Emily Turner (Day 1-2: Item 2.1, 7.1) Office of Water Science
Randall Cox (Day 1: Item 3.1) Queensland Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment	Sanjeev Pandey (Day 1: Item 3.1) Queensland Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment
Edwina Johnson (Days 1-2: Items 4.1-4.2, 5.2) Office of Water Science	Crystal Bradley (Days 1-2: Items 5.2,6.1) Office of Water Science
Fiona Beynon (Day 1-2: Item 3.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5) Office of Water Science	Kimberley Hammond (Day 1: Item 4.1; Day 2) Office of Water Science
Bruce Gray (Day 1-2: Item 3.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5) Office of Water Science	Casa Dalton (Day 1: Item 3.1) Office of Water Science
Ben Roundnew (Day 1-2, Item 3.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5) Office of Water Science	

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The meeting commenced at 12.30pm on 26 June.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Acting Chair welcomed Committee members noting:

- apologies from Ms Lisa Corbyn, Ms Jane Coram and Dr Andrew Johnson.

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 7.

1.4 Confirmation of Minutes

The Committee accepted the minutes of the sixth meeting (21-23 May) with minor revisions.

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

No out-of-session decisions were recorded.

1.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 14 June 2013.

1.8 Environmental Scan

The following developments were reported by the OWS:

- Protocol with NSW Government which is a milestone under the National Partnership Agreement on Coal Seam Gas and Large coal Mining is agreed;
- The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 (the Amendment Bill) has passed in the Senate and received Royal Assent on Monday 21 June 2013;
- The Bioregional Assessment Methodology and summary will be released shortly on the IESC website;

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- OWS met with the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA) on 18 June to discuss bioregional assessments;
- Emeritus Professor Peter Flood and Professor Craig Simmons presented sessions at a seminar on unconventional gas on 21 June 2013 (not in their capacity as IESC members);
- Representatives from OWS met with various stakeholders in Queensland and New South Wales to discuss the Bioregional Assessments Program; and
- OWS discussed with the Committee the steps to implement the new amendments to the Amendment Bill involving the transitional arrangements referenced in the legislation and what the new legislation might mean for IESC workloads.

2. Advice on Projects Referred by Governments

The Committee provided advice on one large coal mine proposal.

2.1 Coalpac Consolidation Project, NSW EIA (draft)

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

The proposed project is to consolidate and extend the coal mining operations of the Invincible Colliery and Cullen Valley coal mine near Lithgow in the NSW western coal fields. The project is located wholly within the upper catchment area of the Turon River, in the proximity of the sandstone escarpments and steep terrain associated with the western edge of the Great Dividing Range.

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project was available for public comment between 10 April and 1 June 2012.

Matters of interest to the Committee included lack of a groundwater model, which limits understanding of cumulative impacts in the regional water balance; potential subsidence impacts; acid mine drainage; water quality; and ecological impacts on creeks in the western part of the project area.

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

3. Presentations

3.1 Draft Underground Water Impact Report – Surat Cumulative Management Area

At the Committee's invitation, Randall Cox and Sanjeev Pandey from the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment (OGIA), Queensland, briefed the Committee on the Surat Underground Water Impact Report. The Committee was appreciative of the information presented which included:

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- Background information about OGIA, its functions and reporting obligations under Queensland legislation;
- The differences between the immediately affected area for an aquifer compared with long term affected area, and the legislation applicable to each;
- Information about building a regional data model, the process of data acquisition and compilation;
- The future direction of the organisation and its research program, which will be delivered in two phases and will result in publication of the next report in mid-2015.

As a second part to the presentation, the discussion moved to what research the Queensland office was pursuing. The Committee:

- noted that it was the role of the OWS to liaise with the Queensland Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment on potential collaboration of research projects.
- understood the value in ensuring that IESC research priorities didn't unnecessarily duplicate Queensland research.
- noted the benefits of sharing industry research data, and the constraints on accessing commercially sensitive business information provided to state regulators.
- discussed the value in better, more transparent linkages between industry and government to better support data and information flows between individual companies and public sector regulators.

4. Bioregional Assessments

4.1 Bioregional Assessment Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

The OWS summarised the key elements of the draft Bioregional Assessment – Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategy.

The Committee:

- Noted the principles underpinning the strategy, the target audiences and stakeholder categories.

4.2 Bioregional Assessment Program Update

The OWS provided the Committee with an update on the Bioregional Assessments Program which included the signature of the Collaborative Head Agreement and initial Project Agreement with the three Commonwealth science agencies and OWS were executed on 19 June 2013. The discussion moved to the draft products for the Namoi sub-region which had been provided for comment.

The Committee:

- Provided general feedback to OWS on the look, style and pitch of the draft products for the Namoi sub-region and provided some specific recommendations, for example regarding maps and referencing; and
- Agreed that they would be happy to continue to provide feedback on some future draft products, but would not seek to comment on the technical detail of all draft

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products. It was agreed that there would be further discussions as products neared finalisation on the endorsement role of the Committee.

5. Research

5.2 Cumulative Impacts – Scoping of Project

The Committee discussed the value in developing a framework to inform the provision of their advice on the potential cumulative impacts of proposed coal seam gas or coal mining development proposals that they received.

The Committee noted the need for the development of a conceptual framework to better support consistent, transparent, rigorous, and comprehensive evaluations of cumulative impact assessment processes. Committee members discussed the importance of concepts such as: various surface and groundwater modelling techniques, “Before, After, Control, Impact” (BACI) processes, the Ramsar Convention’s “Ecological Character” and “Limits of Acceptable Change”, water budgets (and associated changes to surface and groundwater quantity and quality), temporal variation and fluxes, and community assemblage assessment techniques.

Committee members also considered the difficulties being experienced in cumulative impact assessment, and discussed issues such as: who was best placed to undertake such assessments, or whether there are multiple roles.

The Committee agreed:

- to review their previous advices and provide information and discuss with OWS what individual methods members are using to assess cumulative impacts. Committee requested that OWS draft a conceptual framework describing the key attributes of assessing a cumulative impact assessment, for consideration at an upcoming meeting.

5.3 Terms of Reference for Research Sub-Committee

The Committee considered the *Draft Terms of Reference for the IESC Research Sub-Committee*, which had been revised following comment from the Committee at Meeting 6 (21-23 May). Several Committee members requested minor amendments to improve clarity and remove ambiguity.

The Committee:

- endorsed the Terms of Reference, subject to minor amendments as discussed.

5.4 Research Plan including Priorities and Matrix

The Committee:

- reviewed the draft Research Priorities;

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- spent considerable time examining the strategic mix of possible research projects that will be useful under the relevant research priority theme and the proposed projects priority;
- discussed next steps, including further consultations with third party experts to better scope individual projects;
- endorsed the proposed Research priorities, pending minor amendments and agreed that they should be communicated to the Minister.

5.5 Recently Commissioned Research Report

The Committee considered a report commissioned on advice from the Interim Committee which had undertaken a desktop analysis of recent CSG related research. The Committee endorsed publication of the report on the Committee website, subject to the inclusion of an introductory statement on the purpose, objectives, and limitations of the report. The Committee also suggested that the report be revised and published annually, and that future versions might consider more clearly separating national from international research.

The Committee also noted the Queensland Gasfields Commission's report *Collation of Water-Related Science and Research Activities in the Queensland Coal Seam Gas Sector*.

The Committee also considered the possibility of developing an online bibliographic database collating citations, and potentially abstracts, from the Committee's Critical Science Reviews and other research projects.

6. Communications

6.1 Communications

The Committee considered the draft hydraulic fracturing, and draft surface water and groundwater factsheets and provided feedback on the two factsheets. The Committee also provided guidance on the level of detail, scope, and intended audience for the fact sheets and indicated the fact sheets should be based on the best available science.

The housing of the Committee's website was briefly discussed in light of the Department's website restructure. It was agreed that further discussion was required and that the Office would look at options and report back to the Committee.

The Committee:

- agreed that the surface water and groundwater connectivity factsheet should be separated into two fact sheets: one focusing on coal seam gas, the second focusing on coal mining; and
- That revised fact sheets should be submitted to the Committee for further consideration at the Committee's next meeting (July 2013).

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7. Close

7.1 Field Trip Outline

The Committee agreed that a field trip to Queensland to view various mining operations would occur in July coinciding with the July meeting.

The OWS provided an outline of a proposed field trip containing various options for the Committee to consider.

Based on discussions, OWS was requested to develop a new itinerary taking into account the Committee's recommendations.

7.2 Review of Meeting and Forward Planning Agenda

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

- Cumulative impacts
- Significant impact on Water guidelines
- research projects in the Arckaringa Basin and Pedirka Basin;
- drafts of Committee fact sheets as scheduled;
- the terms of reference for Bioregional Assessment Governance Groups; and
- a presentation on the Information Platform for Bioregional Assessments.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 23-24 July 2013 (exact timing within these two days to be confirmed) in Brisbane.

The meeting closed on 27 June at 3.30pm.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Professor Craig T. Simmons

Acting Committee Chair

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Attachment A

Item(s)	Committee member	Disclosure	Determination
5	Craig T. Simmons	I consider that there may be a possible conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 5 arising from the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training may be a research provider for projects.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Craig participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for this decision is the Committee will not be making any decisions on funding for specific projects.