

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

**DRAFT MINUTES – Meeting 8
25 July 2013**

Roma Explorers Inn, Roma

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Lisa Corbyn (Chair)
Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington
Emeritus Professor Peter Flood
Dr Andrew Johnson
Mr Jim McDonald
Professor Dayanthi Nuggeoda
Professor Craig Simmons (by telephone)

APOLOGIES

Ms Jane Coram

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Suzy Nethercott-Watson
Peter Baker
Yvette Blackman
Edwina Johnson
Emily Turner

OTHER STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENT, WATER,
POPULATION AND COMMUNITIES (DSEWPaC) (the following staff participated by telephone)

Gayle Milnes (Items 3.1, 4.1-4.2) Office of Water Science	Crystal Bradley (Item 4.1-4.2, 5.1) Office of Water Science
Deborah Chen (Items 3.1, 4.1-4.2) Office of Water Science	Bruce Gray (Items 3.1, 4.1-4.2) Office of Water Science
Casa Dalton (Item 3.1, 4.1-4.2) Office of Water Science	

The meeting commenced at 9.05am.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Committee members noting:

- Apologies from Ms Jane Coram; and
- Professor Craig Simmons would participate in the meeting by teleconference.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners, 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 Chair introduced a request for comment from the Commonwealth regulator on the draft significant impact guidelines, to be discussed at item 1.9. The Committee endorsed the revised agenda for Meeting 8.

1.4 Confirmation of Minutes

The Committee accepted the minutes of the seventh meeting (26-27 June).

1.5 Action Items

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

The Chair noted at that June meeting (under item 1.8) the Committee was advised that the Bioregional Assessment Methodology (BRAM) and summary would be released shortly on the IESC website, but this was not recorded in the action items. The Chair asked for this to be added to the actions.

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 17 July 2013 and requested that outstanding correspondence be finalised before the August meeting.

1.8 Environmental Scan

The following developments were reported by the OWS:

- The Hon Mark Butler MP is the new Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Water and is also Minister for Climate Change;
- A set of fifteen Strategic Research Priorities were announced by the Australian Government on 21 June 2013 one of which (*Develop knowledge of the changing distribution, connectivity, transformation and sustainable use of water in the Australian landscape*) has a linkage to the remit of the IESC;

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

- The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has published draft significant impact guidelines which are intended to help understand what might be considered an action that should be referred in relation to the recently added new matter of national environmental significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) colloquially known as the ‘water trigger’; and
- The NSW protocol under the National Partnership Agreement has been uploaded on the NSW Planning website and a link is available on the Committee’s website.

1.9 Draft Significant Impact Guidelines

The Committee considered a letter from the Commonwealth regulator requesting IESC comment on the draft significant impact guidelines. Topics of discussion included:

- The role of the Committee and clarification that the guidelines are a policy document for the purposes of legislation and any comment from the IESC would be in relation to scientific expression;
- The extent that the draft guidelines addressed the Committee’s previous advice on significant impacts to the former Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, the Hon Tony Burke MP; and
- The importance of an improved understanding of cumulative impacts.

The Committee agreed:

- To respond to the letter, cognisant of the above points and a draft was reviewed during the course of the meeting with agreement that the Chair would provide the final sign-off out of session.

2. **Bioregional Assessments**

2.1 Update including draft Namoi products

The OWS provided the Committee with an update on recent activities relating to bioregional assessments. The OWS presented the draft context statement for the Namoi subregion and invited comments from the Committee. Key issues discussed included:

- That the context statement should be a statement of what is known in a region and what is not known; and
- There is a need for additional explanation about where the context statement sits within the bioregional assessment.

Given that the context statement is only one element of each bioregional assessment, it is expected that:

- The context statement should concentrate on baseline information;

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

- Interpretative text is likely to be more appropriate in other products from bioregional assessments; and
- If the context statement includes interpretative text, it should also indicate which product from the bioregional assessment will address the matter.

More generally, the Committee discussed:

- How to communicate the technical products from bioregional assessments;
- The incorporation of findings from bioregional assessment products into project advice; and
- The ongoing role of the Committee in reviewing bioregional assessment products.

The Committee agreed:

- To review one set of all bioregional assessment products to provide a benchmark;
- That products would be made available for review and members would provide feedback as they had the time and capacity to do so; and
- That an update would be provided at each meeting on any bioregional assessment products that had been made available for comment and any Committee comments summarised.

2.2 Terms of Reference for Bioregional Assessment Governance Groups

The OWS described the governance and quality assurance structures for the bioregional assessment program and provided the terms of reference for these governance groups.

The Committee noted:

- The governance and quality assurance structure for the bioregional assessment program; and
- The terms of reference/ role of the governance or quality assurance bodies for bioregional assessments.

2.3 Overview of Arckaringa Basin and Pedirka Basin Projects

The OWS provided an overview of findings from the first stage of the Arckaringa and Pedirka projects, which will be providing data and products that will be part of these subregions' bioregional assessments. The projects are co-investments with the South Australian Government, as are two other projects in the Lake Eyre Basin focusing on river monitoring and springs. The next stage of these projects, due to be completed by June 2014, includes data acquisition and the completion of regional groundwater flow models to address key regional knowledge gaps.

A short presentation covering the scope and deliverables of these projects was provided to the IESC.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

2.4 Overview of NRM Projects (assets and receptors for Bioregional Assessments)

The OWS provided the Committee with an overview of water asset identification projects being undertaken by NRM bodies across Queensland, NSW and SA, including examples of water assets identified in South Australian Arid Lands and the Namoi in NSW.

3. Research

3.1 IESC Engagement in Progressing Minister Agreed Research Projects

The Committee discussed the draft letter to the Minister conveying the Committee's advice on priorities for research projects and discussed whether the existing priorities were still relevant, if there were any additional priorities, as well as the wording of the letter and its attachments. The Committee considered the coverage of the advice relating to recharge estimation and provided editorial comments. The Committee agreed that these priorities are broad areas for future research and that individual projects would have to be scoped by the OWS in the future, potentially at a workshop with all interested organisations.

The Committee:

- Approved, with amendments and further advice on recharge coverage, the advice on research priorities to the Minister for sign off by the Chair.

The Committee discussed their ongoing role with respect to research projects and agreed that as well as providing initial advice on priorities, that the Committee should be involved in reviewing draft project material and milestone reports mid-way through research projects and have a review and endorsement role for research outputs after peer review.

4. Communications

4.1 Communications – Update on Factsheets

The Committee considered, provided feedback and sought further work on revised versions of the Hydraulic Fracturing and Groundwater and Surface water factsheets, and considered the draft factsheets on Subsidence and Seismicity. The Committee discussed their role in publishing factsheets on the scientific facts relating to coal seam gas and coal mining. The OWS clarified that findings from the critical science reviews were not included in these factsheets and that they were for background information only. Findings from the critical science reviews are to be discussed at the August meeting.

4.2 Communications – Committee Website Domain Name

The Committee considered the option of the establishment of the sub-domain of the department's website, iesc.environment.gov.au, to host the Committee's website content.

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 8, 25 July 2013**

The Committee endorsed the establishment of the sub-domain iesc.environment.gov.au to host the Committee's website content.

5. Close

5.1 Review of Meeting and Forward Planning Agenda

The Committee considered the forward agenda and discussed possible topics for consideration at the August 2013 meeting.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 20-22 August 2013 in Canberra.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.

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 8, 25 July 2013**

Attachment A

Item(s)	Committee member	Disclosure	Determination
3	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 IESC/OWS research projects.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exists and Craig participated fully in the Committee meeting. The reason for this decision is we are not deciding on research projects or funding as this is a decision of the government, not the IESC.