

Advice to decision maker on coal seam gas project

Proposed action: Coal Seam Gas Exploration

Requesting agency	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities
Date of request	11 April 2012
Project title:	Dart Energy, Coal Seam Gas Exploration Pilot Appraisal Program EPBC 2011/6154
Summary of request	<p>The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities (the department) has assessed a proposed project in accordance with the provisions of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>.</p> <p>The department sought independent scientific advice from the Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining (the Interim Committee) as to whether avoidance, management and mitigation measures would be likely to prevent significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance, specifically changes to water quality and hydrological character of the nearby Hunter Estuary Ramsar Wetlands.</p> <p>The Interim Committee was requested to provide its advice by 27 April 2012.</p>

Advice

1. The Interim Committee notes that:
 - a. given the extent and duration of the proposed action and the implementation of the proposed suite of mitigation measures, there are unlikely to be substantial or measurable changes in the hydrological regime or physio-chemical characteristics of the Ramsar site, nor is it expected or likely that the habitat or life cycle of a species dependent upon the Ramsar site will be substantially impacted.
 - b. as the exposure and activation of acid sulphate soils could cause acidic run-off into the wetlands site, the full implementation of the Acid Sulphate Soils Management Plan should be a specific requirement of any decision to approve the proposed activity.
2. The Interim Committee suggests that in light of the lack of data about potential impacts of coal seam gas operations on the Ramsar site, the proponent should be required to gather and make available to commonwealth and state regulators data on water quality, quantity and geochemistry characteristics, as well as flow rates in the area of their proposed action. This will provide important baseline information that could be used to measure any resulting changes and also assist with assessing the potential impacts of any proposed expansion of coal seam gas exploration or production in the area.

3. The Interim Committee would require further careful consideration of potential water related impacts should the proponent wish to seek additional approval for activities associated with coal seam gas production.
4. The Interim Committee notes that as part of its responsibilities for identifying the potential impacts of regional coal seam gas and coal mining activities, it will also be commissioning a bioregional study for the Gloucester region. It is anticipated that the information from this work would inform assessment of the vulnerability of water related assets in the area from the possible expansion of coal seam gas and/or coal mining activities in the region.

**Date of
advice**

19 April 2012
