

Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining

Advice to decision maker on referred coal seam gas and/or coal mining project

Proposed action: Mount Pleasant Project (NSW)

Requesting agency Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities

Date of request 16 February 2012

Project title: Mount Pleasant Project, Muswellbrook, NSW (EPBC 2011/5795)

Summary of request The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities has assessed the proposed project in accordance with the provisions of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The Department has developed draft conditions that are designed to mitigate potential impacts on matters of national environmental significance to an acceptable level.

The Department sought independent scientific advice from the Interim Committee on whether the department's conclusion, that there are not likely to be significant impacts on water resources or water-related impacts on matters of national environmental significance as a result of the proposed action, is appropriate.

As a final decision on the proposed action is due by 27 February 2012, the Interim Committee was requested to provide its advice as soon as possible (urgently, to minimise the period this decision may be late).

Advice

1. On the basis of the information provided, the Interim Committee agrees that there is unlikely to be a significant impact on the ecological character of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site as a result of the proposed action due to:
 - a. the state water quality controls already in place through the EPL and the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme
 - b. over 240 km in stream-distance connection (ie. dilution) between the action and the Ramsar site
 - c. the small volume of water (1–7 ML/day) to be extracted from the Hunter River, and
 - d. the significant dilution of the Hunter River flows between the action and the Ramsar site.
 2. The Interim Committee highlighted the difficulty of determining the adequacy of the proposed mitigation measures due to lack of detail on potential impacts from extraction of groundwater in dewatering the mine and the fact that these impacts could consequentially impact on the surrounding water balances.
 3. The Interim Committee recommends that the decision maker consider the inclusion (if appropriate) of conditions to address this matter.
 4. It is also suggested that in future assessments of mine projects, the decision maker should view the proposed water discharge from the mine as "pulse events" as opposed to "average discharge" and give consideration to the potential impacts on the water balance of any proposed offsets.
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Date of advice 24 February 2012
