

## Advice to decision maker on coal mining project

### Proposed action: Sonoma Coal Mine Extension

<b>Requesting agency</b>	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
<b>Date of request</b>	16 March 2012
<b>Project title</b>	Sonoma Coal Mine Extension – Diversion of Coral Creek, Collinsville, Queensland, (EPBC 2011/5800)
<b>Summary of request</b>	<p>The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department) has assessed proposed projects 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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether the relevant regulatory processes of the Queensland Government are adequate to ensure the continued provision of ecological services by Coral Creek upstream and downstream of the proposed diversion; or</li> <li>whether additional conditions are required to ensure the continued provision of ecological services by Coral Creek upstream and downstream of the proposed diversion.</li> <li>if there is likely to be a significant impact on water resources at the project site or in the vicinity.</li> </ol>

### Advice

- The interim committee noted that there was little information available to support the provision of robust advice either on the potential impact of the proposed development on the regional water balance, or the associated vulnerabilities of water-dependent assets. Additional information sought and provided from Geoscience Australia was unable to address the gaps in information, particularly in relation to potential impacts on groundwater.
- Despite this, the interim committee noted the proposed extension of the Sonoma mine is relatively small scale when compared to the existing mine, and when considered in relation to the number and size of other coal mines in the area. By inference, the potential impacts on water resources of this relatively small extension are anticipated to be relatively minor.

3. Based on the information available and the additional analysis provided by Geoscience Australia, the interim committee considers that:
  - a. surface water impacts from the proposal are likely to be transitory and manageable and that groundwater impacts are unlikely to be significant
  - b. residual risks are further reduced by the mitigation measures imposed by the Queensland Government.
  - c. significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance are unlikely, as the impacts to the offsite black iron box populations will be minimal and impacts to onsite populations are likely to be addressed by securing an appropriate offset.
4. The interim committee advised that should additional water-related information become available, it could review this information to determine whether substantial changes to its advice in relation to this project is warranted.
5. The interim committee requested that when referring projects to it for advice, the Commonwealth give careful consideration to the likely significance of impact on water resources and relevant matters of national environmental significance to ensure that only those projects that would benefit from the scientific expertise of the Committee are referred.

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<b>Date of advice</b>	21 May 2012
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