

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development
Minutes – Meeting 2, 30-31 January 2013 & 1 February 2013**

**MINUTES – Meeting 2
30-31 January & 1 February 2013**

Private Dining Room, Old Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Lisa Corbyn (Chair)
Professor Craig Simmons
Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington
Mr Jim McDonald
Professor Dayanthi Nugegoda
Dr Andrew Johnson (from 12.30pm on Day 1)
Emeritus Professor Peter Flood (Day 2)

APOLOGIES

Ms Jane Coram

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE - SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT

Suzy Nethercott-Watson
Peter Baker
Robert Gehrig
Jason Smith
Milica Milanja

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

Bernadette O'Neil (Day 1: Items 1.1-2.5) Office of Water Science	Kate Bayliss (Days 1-3: Items 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7) Office of Water Science
Pete Cotsell (Days 1 & 3: Item 2.1 and Research Workshop) Office of Water Science	Fiona Beynon (Days 1-3: Items 2.2, 3, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7) Office of Water Science
Kelly Strike (Days 1-3: Items 3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7) Office of Water Science	Emily Turner (Days 1-3: Items 3.5, 3.7) Office of Water Science
Ross McKinney (Days 1 & 2: Items 3, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) Environment Assessment and Compliance Division	Mahani Taylor (Days 1 & 2: Items 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) Environment Assessment and Compliance Division
Amanda Cox (Day 1: Item 2.3) Office of Water Science	Crystal Bradley (Day 1 & 3: Item 2.3 and Research Workshop) Office of Water Science
Kimberley Dripps (Day 1: Lunch) Deputy Secretary, DSEWPaC	Geraldine Cusack (Days 1-3: Items 3.6) Office of Water Science
Geraldine Cusack (Days 1-3: Items 3.2, 3.5, 3.6) Office of Water Science	James Hill (Days 1-2: Item 2.5) Water Reform Division
Emma Cully (Day 2: Item 3.4) Office of Water Science	Anna-Lisa Lahtinen (Day 3: Item 3.4) Office of Water Science

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Gayle Milnes (Day 3: Item 3.7 and Research Workshop) Office of Water Science	Ebony Coote (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science
Bruce Gray (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science	Sue Stefanoski (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science
Carla Morgan (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science	Casa Dalton (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science
Brendan Edgar (Day 3: Research Workshop) Office of Water Science	

The meeting commenced at 9.00am.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Committee members, the Secretariat provided by the Office of Water Science (the Office), and departmental staff to the meeting. The Chair noted that:

- Apologies were received from Ms Jane Coram
- Apologies were received from Emeritus Professor Peter Flood for Day 1 of the meeting
- Apologies were received from Dr Andrew Johnston for 9.00am-12.30pm on Day 1.

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, past and present, on whose land this committee meeting was held.

1.2 Conflict of Interest

Before the meeting commenced, Committee members completed the Meeting Specific Disclosure of Interests. No actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest that would preclude members from participating in this meeting were declared.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda

The agenda for Meeting 2 was discussed and endorsed, with some changes to scheduling.

1.4 Acceptance of Minutes

The minutes for Meeting 1 (17-20 December 2012) were endorsed with the following change:

- Item 7 line 1: 'draft Bioregional Assessment *Methodology*' was corrected to 'draft Bioregional Assessment *Framework*'.

The Chair signed off the minutes as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

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1.5 Action Items

The Office spoke to the Action Items list. The completed items were noted and other items were referred to agenda items for discussion later in the meeting.

The Committee discussed the process for capturing project discussions, especially surrounding potential areas for further research projects; it was agreed that such suggestions/topics could be included in the research workshop agenda.

1.6 Confirmation of Out-of-Session Decisions

The Office advised that, as agreed at Meeting 1, the Office of Water Science worked on the Research and Knowledge Projects document and published the information on the IESC website. Also as agreed at Meeting 1, the draft Information Guidelines document was circulated to Committee members and the draft Strategic Framework was revised per discussion at Meeting 1. The two draft documents were not finalised out-of-session, and the latest drafts were tabled for final comment by Committee members.

Action Arising

M2-01 Action: The Office of Water Science to finalise the Information Guidelines, based on feedback received at Meeting 2, and publish on the IESC website.

M2-02 Action: Committee members to provide feedback on the draft Strategic Framework out-of-session so that the Office of Water Science may prepare a final version for decision at Meeting 3.

1.7 Environmental Scan

The Office presented this item and highlighted the following item:

- ***Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Groundwater SDL Review Panel – Western Porous Rock – Terms of Reference and Section 6.06 of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan***

The Office drew the Committee's attention to the Terms of Reference, which state that *Section 6.06 of the Basin Plan requires the MDBA to arrange reviews of the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) and Baseline Diversion Limits (BDLs) of the Western Porous Rock ground water resource unit within 2 years of the commencement of the Basin Plan*. The MDBA has proposed the establishment of expert panels to undertake these reviews and both *Section 6.06 of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan* and the *Groundwater SDL Review Panel Terms of Reference* state that available members of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining will be invited to participate on the panel.

The Office noted that the Committee is not being asked to undertake the work, nor is it necessary for the Committee to be involved as a whole. The level of commitment is currently unknown and more information will be provided by the MDBA.

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Members acknowledged their interest for the Committee to be involved. The Chair, whilst acknowledging the additional workload, added that the SDLs and BDLs are fundamental issues and sought volunteers from the Committee to participate on the panel, noting that the MDBA is seeking involvement by people with groundwater qualifications in particular. Professor Simmons indicated that he was willing to participate. The Committee agreed to extend the invitation to participate on the panel to Ms Coram, Emeritus Professor Flood and Dr Johnson, who were not available during discussion of this agenda item.

2. Strategic Items

2.1 Introduction to Draft Bioregional Assessment Methodology

The Office provided the Committee with an overview of the Bioregional Assessment Framework (the Framework) and discussed its application in the context of conducting bioregional assessments. To support and guide the delivery of Bioregional Assessments, the Office of Water Science commissioned CSIRO to develop a scientific framework to underpin the assessment process. The Framework has been through an extensive peer review process, both nationally and internationally and the latest version of the draft Framework has had reviewer comments incorporated. Members of the Committee expressed interest in seeing some of the peer review comments.

The Committee discussed the document and noted a number of matters on which it would be useful to have further discussion. These included risk models, the enduring nature of the products from bioregional assessment, the potential perception of linearity of the stages of the Framework and the timelines used as model timeframes.

Members agreed that the document contains some useful information, although it is not suitable for publication as a Committee framework. Areas that the Committee identified for further elaboration included: defining the audience, outlining the policy context, and augmenting sections on communication, risk analysis, ecology and the scientific approach. Members acknowledged the fundamental work done by the panel to develop material which can be used to finalise a Framework. This will allow the Committee to re-analyse and further develop the framework and methodology.

The Office suggested that the Committee hold a one day workshop dedicated to the Bioregional Assessment Framework matters raised in this meeting. In addition members agreed that Mr McDonald would take the lead on working with the Office to develop the workshop content. The Committee also agreed to:

- undertake a detailed review of the current version of the Framework and provide comments;

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- read peer reviewers comments relating to ecological issues and provide feedback to the sub-committee;
- read the peer reviewers comments on risk and provide feedback; and
- contact Ms Coram, Emeritus Professor Flood and Dr Johnson out of session to gauge interest in participating on the sub-committee.

Members agreed of the importance of ensuring the scientific approach to bioregional assessments was robust.

Action Arising

M2-03 Action: *A one day workshop dedicated to working on the Bioregional Assessment Framework is to be arranged in the context of the February 2013 Committee meeting.*

2.2 National Harmonised Regulatory Framework

The Office provided some background information about the *National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Coal Seam Gas* (the draft Framework) which was publicly released by the Standing Council on Energy and Resources (SCER) in December 2012.

The Committee considered the need for a submission to be provided (either by the Committee or the Office of Water Science) during the public consultation period, which closes on 28 February 2013 in light of the inaccuracies in describing the Committee's role. Matters of interest to the Committee included water balance, faulting, risk assessment, and improvements to the functional description of the role of the IESC included in the draft Framework which seems to infer that the IESC has a regulatory role which is not accurate.

Action Arising

M2-04 Action: *A submission on the National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Coal Seam Gas to be finalised at Meeting 3.*

2.3 Communications

The Office informed members of the overarching communications strategy being prepared to coordinate the communication activities for the Committee and the Office of Water Science. It is expected that the communications strategy will be on the IESC Meeting 3 agenda in February 2013.

As part of the communications products linked to the communications strategy, the Committee noted the intention to produce short public videos on topics including Australian groundwater resources, bioregional assessments; and establishment and role of the Committee.

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The Committee noted that the material should be specific to the Committee's work and not duplicate general material that is already available. It provided comments to clarify that the video topics should cover 'surface water' and 'groundwater' and the connectivity and linkages between them. The Committee also commented on the need to cover off on where research activities fit into the Committee's role.

Action Arising

M2-05 Action: *The Office of Water Science to seek the nomination of individual Committee members to take part in video interviews.*

2.4 Forward Planning Agenda

The Committee considered the forward planning agenda, which was compiled to allow for effective and strategic forward thinking and workload planning. The Committee noted the items for discussion at future meetings, with the following changes to be incorporated:

- Publication of the Bioregional Assessment Framework is now expected to occur in March 2013
- Agenda items to be added include discussion of water balance, risk assessment/management and state protocols update
- Publication of the draft Research Approach/Strategy is not expected until March (rather than in February 2013).

The Committee considered the meeting schedule for 2013 and agreed to the proposed dates for IESC meetings for the remainder of the year. Members agreed to advise the Secretariat of their availability on the proposed dates by 15 February 2013.

The Committee discussed potential meeting locations and agreed that IESC Meeting 6 (May 2013) be held in conjunction with a field trip in Queensland.

Action Arising

M2-06 Action: *Members to advise the Secretariat of their availability for meetings by 15 February 2013*

M2-07 Action: *Office to further develop the itinerary for a field trip potentially for May 2013.*

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2.5 Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Assessment

An officer from the Water Reform Division, DSEWPaC, joined the meeting to present an overview on the Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Assessment (GAB WRA). The officer explained that the project was designed to assess current and future water availability and provide a framework to guide water policy and water resources planning into the future. A comparison was provided between the long-standing view of the GAB as a single large contiguous groundwater flow system, to the updated view that it contains an extensive groundwater system comprised of several geological basins.

The Committee discussed information gaps in relation to groundwater levels, regional water table, vertical leakage and groundwater modelling and agreed to add an item on information gaps to the Research Workshop (1 February 2013) agenda.

The Chair thanked the officer for a useful and interesting presentation and arrangements were made for the officer to return on Day 2 of the meeting, to present the information to the members who were not present.

The Deputy Secretary responsible for Environmental Assessment and Compliance, Heritage and Wildlife, Supervising Scientist and Marine Divisions, and for managing the department's relationship with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, joined the meeting briefly. The Deputy Secretary thanked members for accepting their positions on the Committee and provided a brief overview on her role and background before joining them for informal discussions over lunch.

3. Advice on Projects Referred by Government

3.1 Drayton Coal Proposal NSW

The Drayton Coal proposal site is located in the Upper Hunter Valley of NSW, 10 kilometres north-west of the village of Jerrys Plains and 13km from the town of Muswellbrook. The site is in the Sydney Geological Basin within the Sydney-Gunnedah-Bowen Basin. The proposal involves expanding the existing Drayton Coal Mine and the environmental assessment is on public exhibition.

Matters of interest to the Committee included the regional context, potential cumulative impacts in association with other mines in the area, regional water balance, creek rehabilitation, salinity and box gum and river redgum vegetation communities.

The Committee discussed the proposal and advice was developed, with the final version to be signed off by the Chair.

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

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**3.2 Moolarben Coal Mines Pty Ltd/Ulan Open Cut Mine and Two Underground Mines
(Moolarben Stage 2) NSW**

The Moolarben Coal Mine Stage 2 proposal site is located approximately 40km east of Mudgee, NSW in the northern part of the Western Coalfield. The site occupies the north-west margin of the Sydney-Gunnedah-Bowen Basin in NSW. It is located adjacent to the Goulburn River at its headwaters within the greater Hunter River catchment.

Three other coal mines occur within 40km of the site of the proposed Moolarben Stage 2. These are the Ulan, Moolarben and Wilpinjong coal mines. The proposal is adjacent to the Goulburn River National Park and Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve.

The proposal is an extension of the currently operating Moolarben Coal Mine. The proposal is being assessed via a bilateral assessment and the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure is currently preparing the draft assessment report.

Matters of interest to the Committee included the regional water balance, the extent of Matters of National Environmental Significance beyond the project site, ecological impacts, water dependency of box gums, groundwater draw down, salinity, void management and subsidence.

The Committee discussed the proposal and advice was developed with the final version to be signed off by the Chair.

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

3.3 Review Advice

The advice drafted for Drayton and Moolarben was examined and refined.

3.4 Kevin's Corner Coal Mine, QLD

The Kevin's Corner Coal Mine project site is located approximately 110km south-west of Clermont, 340km south-west of Mackay and 65 km north-west of the Alpha township, QLD. The project site is located within the Belyando/Suttor catchment, a sub-catchment of the Burdekin River. The project proposed is a new Greenfield and open cut coal mine. It was referred to the Commission by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments.

The supplementary Environmental Impact Statement for this project was available for public comment from 3 November-3 December 2012.

Matters of interest to the committee included subsidence, flooding, water quality, cumulative impacts, the Black Throated Finch and the Red Goshawk.

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The Committee discussed the proposal and advice was developed to be signed off by the Chair.

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

3.5 North Expansion Camden Gas, NSW

The Northern Expansion of the Camden Gas proposal site is located in the Camden and Campbelltown Local Government areas, approximately 55km south-west of the Sydney CBD. It spans several suburbs and semi-rural and agricultural lands with native vegetation. The proposal is located within the Hawkesbury-Nepean and Georges River catchments, with the boundary between the two catchments occurring at the centre of the project area. The proposal is an extension of an existing CSG facility, which currently has 143 wells, 86 of which are operational. It is at the referral stage to determine whether it is likely to have a significant impact on Matters of National Environmental Significance.

Matters of interest to the Committee included the regional and subregional water balance, groundwater systems, hydraulic fracturing information and monitoring.

The Committee discussed the proposal and advice was developed to be finalised by the Chair after the end of the meeting.

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

3.6 Mt Penny Coal Project NSW (Draft Environmental Assessment)

The Mt Penny Coal project site is located approximately 3km north-west of the village of Bylong north-east of Mudgee NSW. The project site occurs within approximately 0.25km of the Goulburn River National Park, and is also close to the Wollemi National Park and Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve. The project occurs in the Goulburn River Catchment.

The project is a new, open-cut mine and is at the draft environment assessment stage.

Matters of interest to the Committee included cumulative impacts, water balance and groundwater drawdown, ecological impacts of discharges, the Booroolong Frog, box gums, salinity, and acid sulphate soils.

The Committee discussed the proposal and advice was developed to be signed off by the Chair.

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

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4. Other Business

4.1 Review of Meeting Procedures

Professor Simmons was elected by the Committee to be the Acting Chair when Ms Corbyn is unable to perform the role of Chair. If a Committee member is unable to attend a meeting, they can provide comments beforehand for reference in the meeting. However, if the Committee feels that member's direct involvement is essential then an out-of-session meeting may be necessary, which will require an out-of-session protocol. Registers for correspondence and media engagements are to be brought to meetings. Videoconference meetings may be considered later in the year.

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their commitment and focus at this meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 19-20 February 2013 in Canberra with the 18 February a workshop on bioregional assessments.

The meeting closed at 4.15pm.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:



Ms Lisa Corbyn

Committee Chair

20 February 2013