

Interim Committee

Terms of Reference

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Interim Committee on coal seam gas and coal mining (the Interim Committee) is being established pending the formal establishment of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining (the Committee) under legislation.

The Interim Committee will:

- i. at the request of the Commonwealth Government or individual state and territory governments in accordance with their respective regulatory processes, provide expert scientific advice on coal seam gas and large coal mining proposals that are likely to have a significant impact on water resources;
- ii. provide advice on priority areas for early research relating to the interaction between coal seam gas and large coal mines on water resources that can be commissioned in 2011-12.

The findings from such research will be made publicly available and should provide a valuable resource to continuously improve the information base on which future planning and environmental decisions are made by Commonwealth and state governments.

Principles to guide the Interim Committee's decisions on research priorities for 2011-12 are at [Appendix A](#).

MEMBERSHIP AND OPERATION OF THE INTERIM COMMITTEE

The Interim Committee will as a minimum, comprise minimum of four and a maximum of six members with the Chair responsible for the operation of the Interim Committee and the finalisation of advice from the Interim Committee.

Following consultation with relevant parties, the Commonwealth Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities will determine the composition of the Interim Committee. Each member serves at the discretion of the Minister.

The Minister will appoint the members of the Interim Committee on a part-time basis and must appoint one of the members to chair the Interim Committee.

The Committee may cooperate and exchange information with other expert bodies as required and may seek the input of any additional experts required to assist the Interim Committee in its functions.

All advice provided by the Interim Committee and the results of any commissioned research or assessments must be made publicly available.

All activities in relation to the expenditure of public funds must be managed in accordance with the Commonwealth *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997*.

The Interim Board will operate only until such time as the Committee has been established.

Secretariat support for the Interim Committee

A dedicated office within the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities will provide support to the Interim Committee. This office will work with the members of the Interim Committee to assist them in the delivery of their functions, including by providing secretariat and technical support.

Interim Expert Scientific Committee

Guidelines for research in 2011-12

INTERIM COMMITTEE RESEARCH ROLE

The Interim Committee will advise the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities on research priorities and funding for scientific research to inform the regulation and management of coal seam gas and large coal mining impacts on water resources. The research findings will be shared with states and territories and made publicly available.

Scope of research

The Interim Committee will commission and coordinate:

- 'No regrets' research that leverages existing research work and capabilities; and addresses key scientific questions about the impact of coal seam gas and large coal mining on water resources;
- Regional scale water assessments for areas subject to coal seam gas and coal mining; and
- Research that enables the Interim Committee to provide scientific advice on specific projects currently under consideration or entering the states' regulatory processes, on an as-needs basis.

It is proposed that all research findings, including regional water assessments, will be made publicly available and should provide a valuable resource to continuously improve the information base and provide further support to decision making processes in relation to coal seam gas and large coal mining proposals.

PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH

The Interim Committee will prioritise the commission of research that:

- Leverages existing work and capabilities in relevant fields;
- Addresses key scientific questions and uncertainties associated with the potential impact of coal seam gas and coal mining on water resources; and
- Meets the informational needs of Commonwealth and state government regulators.

The Interim Committee will commission regional water assessments for priority areas that are subject to current or planned coal seam gas and/or large coal mining development and that:

- Are experiencing high levels of community concern about the potential impacts on water resources; and/or

- Host sensitive or significant ecosystems, water resources, ecological communities, or threatened species; and/or
- Accommodate multiple projects, with potential cumulative impacts.

PRINCIPLES FOR RESEARCH

The Interim Committee will commission applied, best practice research that:

- Has a strong public good focus;
- Addresses the needs of the Commonwealth and state governments to better understand the impact of coal seam gas and coal mining development on water resources;
- Is well regarded and peer reviewed;
- Builds on existing work;
- Leverages existing capability in relevant fields of research;
- Is independent and unbiased; and
- Is communicated clearly and made accessible to all stakeholders.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH AGENDA

In advising on research priorities, it is proposed that the Interim Committee should have regard to (but not be limited to):

- The views of the states and territories;
- The existing suite of relevant research activities being undertaken or that have been completed;
- Research that identifies key gaps in science and understanding of the cumulative impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mine developments on water resources;
- Regions under existing pressure in relation to cumulative impacts associated with existing and proposed coal seam gas and large coal mining developments; and
- How public perception of risk might be responded to through research.

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The Interim Committee may choose to consult stakeholders during its formulation of research priorities.