

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and  
Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)  
Meeting 69, 22-23 July 2020**

**MINUTES  
Videoconference**

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**ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Dr Chris Pigram (Chair)  
Dr Andrew Boulton  
Dr Catherine Moore  
Professor Craig Simmons  
Professor Jenny Davis  
Dr Jenny Stauber  
Associate Professor Rory Nathan  
Professor Wendy Timms

**OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE**

Peter Baker  
Jason Smith  
Praveen Sebastian  
Harrison Martin  
Alexandra Auhl  
Sarah Taylor (Items 1.1 - 1.4, 2, 4)  
Kelly Strike (Items 1.5 - 1.8, 3.2, 3.3)  
Benjamin Klug (Items 1.5 - 1.8, 3.1, 3.2)  
Dominica O’Dea (parts of Item 2.1)  
Tia Stevens, Assistant Secretary Biodiversity Policy and Water Science (parts of Day 1 of Item 2.1)

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on Wednesday 22 July 2020.

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed members of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC) to the meeting.

### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners, past and present, on whose land this meeting was held.

### 1.2 Disclosure of Interests

Before the meeting commenced, Committee members completed the Meeting Declaration of Interests and a declaration specific to the Fairhill Coal Project.

### 1.3 Confirmation of Agenda

The Committee endorsed the agenda for Meeting 69.

### 1.4 Confirmation of Out-of-Session decisions

The Committee noted that:

- advice on the Angus Place Mine Extension Project and the Isaac Downs Project was provided to the regulator and published in accordance with agreed timeframes.
- minutes of the Committee's sixty-eighth meeting on 4-7 May were agreed out-of-session and published.

### 1.5 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 8 July 2020.

### 1.6 Action Items

Ongoing items were noted and an update was provided on the timing of completion.

### 1.7 Forward Planning Agenda

The Committee noted the forward planning agenda.

It was agreed the next meeting be scheduled for 26-27 August 2020.

### 1.8 Environmental Scan

Committee members and secretariat reported back on developments in recent months, including:

- the Interim Report on the independent review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) by Professor Graeme Samuel AC including a survey, which the Committee will be completing;
- Chair's participation in the EPBC Act Review Roundtable: Science Discussion hosted by Professor Samuel; and
- the Australian Government's announcement that environmental approval processes are being further streamlined with states to ensure robust processes are in place to meet the infrastructure pipeline post COVID-19.

## **2. Advice on Projects referred by governments**

### 2.1 Fairhill Coal Project

The Fairhill Coal Project, proposed by Futura Resources Limited, is a new open-cut coal mine (448 ha disturbance area) to be located approximately 55 km northeast of Emerald in the upper reaches of Mackenzie River sub-catchment of the Fitzroy Basin.

Using strip mining, the project will access the thin coal seams of the Fort Cooper Coal Measures sub-Group within the Bowen Basin to produce approximately 1.7 million tonnes per annum of run-of-

mine (ROM) coking coal over a seven-year period. The open-cut pit will be progressively back-filled with overburden so that no final void will remain at the end of the project.

Much of the project area has been cleared for cattle grazing and consists mostly of non-remnant vegetation. Associated infrastructure proposed for the project includes office and ablution facilities, stormwater management structures, wastewater treatment facility, warehouse facilities, ROM stockpile area and main road access.

The IESC was hampered by the limited information provided by the proponent but it is inferred that the key potential impacts from this project are:

- changes to surface water flow due to altered catchment runoff as a result of diversions of runoff around the pit, water being caught and evaporating out of the pit and dams, and the final landform;
- poorer surface water quality due to controlled and uncontrolled releases of mine-affected water from the water management system into tributaries of Sandy Creek; and
- a decline in condition, persistence or both of groundwater-dependent vegetation along Cooroora and Sandy creeks caused by groundwater drawdown. Vegetation along the riparian corridor has been identified as potential habitat for species listed as threatened in the EPBC Act such as Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*), Ornamental Snake (*Denisonia maculata*) (also favouring associated gilgai) and Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*).

Consistent with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000*, advice will be published on the IESC's website within 10 business days of being provided to the regulators.

### **3. Other Business**

#### **3.1 Stakeholder Engagement**

The Committee received an update on the development of the 2019-2020 Annual Review of Activities and web-based Frequently Asked Questions. Arrangements for the IESC Explanatory Notes Symposium were also discussed, in particular, the postponement of the Symposium until 2021.

#### **3.2 Research Proposals**

Research efforts into the characterisation of existing and proposed coal mine final voids in Queensland were discussed. Research and PhD opportunities for the 2020-2021 financial year were also discussed and the Committee agreed to further investigate additional research and PhD/Masters proposals.

The Committee also agreed to develop minimum groundwater monitoring guidelines. These guidelines would review and standardise groundwater monitoring requirements across Australia.

#### **3.3 Faults Explanatory Note**

Discussions took place around updates to the draft Faults Explanatory Note and the Committee considered next steps in the Explanatory Note's development. The Committee agreed that the Explanatory Note could progress to an industry 'pressure test' phase, involving a peer review of the document by experts, followed by testing of the document with selected industry representatives prior to public consultation.

### **4. Close of Meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm on Thursday 23 July 2020.

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 26-27 August 2020, to be held via videoconference.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Chris Pigram AM, FTSE

IESC Chair

6 August 2020