

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)
Meeting 70, 26-27 August 2020**

**MINUTES
Videoconference**

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
Alex Hannan-Joyner (Items 1.1 - 1.6, 2, 3.4, 4)
Mio Kuhnen (Items 1, 3.3, 3.4, 4)
Harrison Martin
Alexandra Auhl (Items 1, 2, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4)
Kelly Strike (Items 1.5 - 1.8, 3.3, 3.4)
Benjamin Klug (Items 1.5 - 1.8, 3.3, 3.4)
Tia Stevens, Assistant Secretary Biodiversity Policy and Water Science (Items 1.4 - 1.8)

INVITED GUESTS

Professor Graeme Samuel AC, Independent Reviewer of the EPBC Act (Item 3.4)
Bruce Edwards, Assistant Secretary Environment Protection Reform (Item 3.4)
Jay Hender, Director EPBC Act Review (Item 3.4)

The meeting commenced at 9.00am on Wednesday 26 August 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 Isaac Plains East Extension Project.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda

The Committee endorsed the agenda for Meeting 70.

1.4 Confirmation of Out-of-Session decisions

The Committee noted that:

- advice on the Fairhill Coal Project was provided to the regulator and published in accordance with agreed timeframes;
- minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting on 22-23 July were agreed and published; and
- the Survey on the Interim Report of the Independent Review of the EPBC Act was completed and submitted.

1.5 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 17 August 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 to have a research discussion on 1 October 2020.

1.8 Environmental Scan

Committee members and the Office of Water Science reported back on developments in recent months, including:

- the work of the Biodiversity Policy and Water Science Branch in the development of a water National Environmental Standard (NES) and a soils NES in light of the release of the Interim Report on the independent review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act); and
- upcoming conferences and workshops.

2. Advice on Projects referred by governments

2.1 Isaac Plains East Extension Project

Isaac Plains East Extension (the 'project') is a proposed extension to the existing Isaac Plains East coal mine, 6 km east of Moranbah, Queensland, that will target the Rangal Coal Measures within the Bowen Basin. Both the project and Isaac Plains East form part of the Isaac Plains Complex. The proponent intends to extract approximately 2 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of run-of-mine (ROM) coking coal over four years. The project will use the existing Isaac Plains Complex mine infrastructure, including the coal handling and preparation plant (CHPP), but will require the construction of new haul roads and access roads, including connections to the existing Isaac Plains East road network. The proposed project is close

to a number of existing coal mining and coal seam gas operations including Grosvenor Mine, Moranbah North Mine, Moranbah Gas Project, Isaac Plains Mine and Poitrel Mine. Most of these projects have been operational for several years and have already altered the groundwater within the Permian coal measures, Tertiary sediments and Tertiary basalt, and impacted flows and water quality of the nearby Isaac River.

Key potential impacts from this project are:

- long-term and persistent impacts to the groundwater system post mining. The project's drawdown would contribute to the cumulative impacts of existing extensive drawdown. Groundwater modelling predicts drawdown in the Tertiary basalt of up to 4 m in the Smoky Creek catchment and up to 1 m in the Tertiary sediments near the perched Billy's Gully aquifer. The Leichardt seam, which forms part of the Rangal Coal Measures, is expected to experience a maximum of 100 m drawdown due to the project;
- likely ongoing water quality issues associated with sedimentation and erosion from the proposed haul road crossings;
- loss of Brigalow Threatened Ecological Communities (TEC) and impacts to the riparian corridors (e.g. disruption of longitudinal continuity by 80 m wide haul road crossings) and groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) which provide habitat for several species listed under the EPBC Act. Species potentially impacted include the Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*), Squatter Pigeon (*Geophaps scripta scripta*) and Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*), which have also recently been severely impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires in the region; and,
- long-term legacies associated with the final voids, including ongoing groundwater losses through evaporation from the surface of the voids, poor final void water quality, and, as the final voids are predicted to become regional groundwater sinks, the potential to influence ongoing losses from adjacent alluvial systems with associated impacts to riparian vegetation and their dependent communities.

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 IESC Operating Protocol

The Committee discussed and endorsed the minor updates made to the IESC Operating Protocol. The Committee was also informed of proposed minor updates to the Terms and conditions of holding office as a member of the IESC.

3.2 Editing Documents on GovTEAMS – A Trial

The Committee discussed and trialed the updated version of the GovTEAMS collaborative platform.

3.3 EPBC Act Review Interim Report

The Committee discussed the Interim Report on the independent review of the EPBC Act by Professor Graeme Samuel AC.

3.4 EPBC Act Review Independent Reviewer

The Committee was joined for further discussions by Professor Samuel and two Review executives from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. The Committee further discussed their statutory role and their involvement in the EPBC Act review process.

4. Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm on Thursday 27 August 2020.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 1 October 2020 as a videoconference with the sole purpose of discussing research.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Chris Pigram AM, FTSE

IESC Chair

6 September 2020