

**Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)
Meeting 74, 10-11 March 2021**

**MINUTES
Videoconference**

ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

IN ATTENDANCE

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

APOLOGIES

Dr Catherine Moore

OFFICE OF WATER SCIENCE (OWS)

Alison McMorrow, Assistant Secretary Biodiversity Policy and Water Science (Items 1.1-1.4, 2 *first session on day one*)
Peter Baker
Alannah Wood (Items 1, 2 *intermittent attendee* and 3)
Alex Hannan-Joyner (Items 1, 2 *intermittent attendee* and 3)
Annabel O'Neill
Benjamin Klug
Christina Fawns
Clara Tenniswood
Isabelle Francis
James Rae
Jason Smith
Kelly-Anne Lawler
Misty Dawn Thorose
Nicola Smillie
Praveen Sebastian
Timothy Hunt (Items 1.5-1.8, 2, 3 and 4)

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am on Wednesday 10 March 2021.

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 lands this meeting was held.

1.2 Disclosure of Interests

Before the meeting commenced, Committee members completed the Meeting Specific Declaration of Interests and a project advice-specific declaration for the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project.

No actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest were recorded for this meeting.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda

The Committee endorsed the agenda for Meeting 74.

1.4 Confirmation of Out-of-Session decisions

The Committee noted that:

- advice on Russell Vale Colliery Revised Underground Expansion Project was provided to the regulator and published in accordance with agreed timeframes; and
- minutes of the Committee's seventy-third meeting on 3-4 February 2021 were agreed out-of-session and published.

1.5 Correspondence

The Committee noted the status of correspondence to 24 February 2021.

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 that the next meeting be scheduled for 15 April 2021.

1.8 Environmental Scan

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

- OWS meeting with the New South Wales Government and the proponent on the Russell Vale Colliery Revised Underground Expansion Project;
- the introduction of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Standards and Assurance) Bill 2021 into Parliament;
- Central Queensland Coal's response to the Committee's advice on the Central Queensland Coal Project (IESC 2020-118); and
- upcoming conferences and workshops.

2. Advice on Projects referred by governments

2.1 Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project

The Mount Pleasant Operation (MPO) is an existing open-cut thermal coal mine and associated infrastructure located approximately three kilometres northwest of Muswellbrook in the Upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales, targeting multiple coal seams within the northern coalfield of the Sydney Basin. The proponent is seeking to modify the existing approval by mining deeper coal seams and so increase coal production from 10 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) to 21 Mtpa and to extend the life of the mine from 2026 to 2048. The proposed expansion (the 'project') would also involve upgrading the existing coal handling processing plant, workshops and other infrastructure as well as constructing new water management and storage infrastructure and developing an integrated waste rock emplacement landform. However, a significant area that is currently approved to be disturbed as part of the MPO will be relinquished, including some 490 ha of native vegetation. The project is close to the Dartbrook mine (currently in care and maintenance) and the operational Bengalla and Mount Arthur mines. Consequently, the project will contribute to the cumulative impacts of these mines and the current MPO.

Key potential impacts from this project are:

- a long-term (decadal) incremental increase in the cumulative take of water from Dart Brook and the Hunter River and their associated alluvium; and
- further reduction in baseflow and a change in flow regime in Sandy Creek, to the west of the MPO, resulting in potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitat.

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 Explanatory Notes Virtual Masterclass Series Update

The Committee were provided with an update on the preparations for the Explanatory Notes Virtual Masterclass Series, to be held across May-June 2021.

3.2 Hydrology Presentation

Committee member Professor Rory Nathan gave a presentation on flood modelling and incorporating climate change. The presentation provided an overview of the concepts involved in flood estimation relevant to the requirements commonly reviewed by the OWS and the Committee.

4. Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 12.45 pm on Thursday 11 March 2021.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 15 April 2021.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

Dr Chris Pigram AM, FTSE

IESC Chair

18 March 2021