

## **Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining**

### **Communiqué**

#### **Fourth Meeting: 18 - 19 April 2012, Canberra**

Attendees: Professor Craig Simmons (Chair), Emeritus Professor Peter G Flood, Professor Chris Moran, and Associate Professor David Laurence. Apologies: Professor John Langford and Ms Jane Coram.

The Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining (the committee) met in Canberra on 18 and 19 April 2012 to discuss the provision of advice on two coal seam gas projects referred to it by the Australian Government, its strategic framework, and progress of bioregional assessments and research priorities.

The committee reflected on the significant amount of work which has been achieved since its inception. Almost 20 projects - which will examine and fill research gaps for coal seam gas and coal mining - have been scoped, with a view to commence commissioning some of these projects in the next month. Engagement with natural resource management bodies, on a process of knowledge sharing and capacity building to deliver baseline information for bioregional assessments, has also been undertaken. Work is to commence in five sub-regions by June 2012 using the assessment methodology developed by the committee.

The committee provided advice on the Dart Energy Coal Seam Gas Exploration Project and was briefed on the Arrow Surat Gas Project.

Further refinements to the developing strategic framework, currently under development, were made to allow the committee to focus on the current situation and core activities to achieve its strategic objectives. The strategic framework will be progressed with a view to providing a full draft for consideration at the next committee meeting.

The launch of the committee's website has occurred and can be viewed at: [www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining](http://www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining). The new branding and identity logo have also been finalised and are ready for use. The importance of providing information to the public, industry and non-government organisations on the role of the committee, future direction and priorities is noted. The web presence and branding have been incorporated into a stakeholder engagement strategy which is currently under development. A draft of the strategy will be considered by the committee at its next meeting.

Using interactive technologies as a communication tool to demonstrate the research undertaken by and on behalf of the committee was also considered. A virtual system, which allows the user to walk through an underground mine and experience the entire mining process from their computer, was demonstrated. Further examination of other options for interactive communication will be pursued.

The importance of the committee members visiting selected coal seam gas and coal mining sites to enhance their knowledge and engage with stakeholders was discussed. It was agreed that field trips could be incorporated into the committee's meeting schedule.

The first five priority areas announced by the federal environment minister, the Hon Tony Burke MP, for bioregional assessments have been divided into a number of projects. These projects will be progressed through a range of models which include leveraging off the work of natural resource management bodies, conducting projects through consortia and engaging individual entities that comprise government, research organisations and consultants. Ongoing engagement with natural resource management bodies and other key stakeholders is a priority, and this is a critical component in achieving comprehensive bioregional assessments that reflect the assets and vulnerabilities of each region.

The Rapid Regional Prioritisation Process final report has been completed by Geoscience Australia and was presented to the committee. It is broadly consistent with the initial regions identified by Minister Burke. The committee did not see an immediate need to extend the initial regions at this time given the significant number of assessments which are already planned to commence. However, the committee did note a number of regions where future bioregional assessments are likely to occur and are therefore poised to move forward with additional assessments.

The status and progress of priority research projects was noted. Collaboration between the state governments and industry is also considered as critical for relevant research projects. Some projects may require installation of additional equipment in wells to allow monitoring of project-specific data, as these projects require real data to inform the project outputs.

### **Committee support**

The committee is supported by the Office of Water Science, a dedicated unit established in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The committee will continue to work closely with the Office of Water Science to progress its work.