

**MINUTES – Meeting 1**  
**17 January 2012**

Board Room, Hotel Kurrajong,  
8 National Circuit, Barton ACT

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**Attendance and Apologies**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Professor Craig Simmons (Chair)  
Ms Jane Coram  
Eremitus Professor Peter Flood  
Associate Professor David Laurence  
Professor Chris Moran

**APOLOGIES**

Professor John Langford

The Meeting commenced at 8.35am.

**Welcome & Introductions**

The Chair welcomed the members of the committee, the Secretariat (provided by the Office of Water Science) and departmental staff to the first meeting. Participants introduced themselves and provided a brief outline of their experience and background.

**1. Standing Items**

**1.1. Acceptance of minutes from previous meeting**

This being the inaugural meeting there were no previous minutes

**1.2. Action items report**

This being the inaugural meeting there were no previous action items.

**1.3. Out-of-Session decisions**

This being the inaugural meeting there were no out of session decisions to record.

**1.4. Conflicts of Interest**

Committee members completed the Conflict of Interest Register at Attachment A.  
The Committee noted that Professor Chris Moran tabled an extended Statement of Conflict Interest for filing.

**Action Arising**

**170112-1** *The Chair requested that the Conflict of Interest template be updated for use at every meeting.*

**1.5. Correspondence**

This being the inaugural meeting there was no correspondence to record.

**2. Governance and Meeting Arrangements**

**2.1. Terms of Reference**

The Committee noted its Terms of Reference including the appended *Guidelines for Research in 2011-2012*.

**2.2. Managing funding**

The Committee noted the process for managing funds allocated for expenditure on research.

**2.3. Meeting procedures - Supplements to the Committee Operating Protocol**

2.3.1. The Committee agreed that in relation to requests to attend meetings of the Committee as an observer:

- As a general rule, observers would only be permitted to attend the meeting where there is a strong case for them to do so (for example, where they could provide useful input to the discussion of a scheduled item on the agenda).
- Requests from people or agencies interested in attending as general observers only would not be permitted.
- The Office of Water Science may refer to the Chair for a decision, specific case by case basis requests to attend meetings.
- In all cases, any request to attend a meeting will need to be made in writing (including via email) and submitted to the Secretariat no less than three business days before the scheduled meeting date.

2.3.2. It was agreed that the Committee may choose to invite guests to provide expert advice and/or presentations to meetings.

2.3.3. It was agreed that the amended processes for Invited Guests and Observers will be incorporated into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.

**Action Arising**

**170112-2** *The amended processes for Invited Guests and Observers will be incorporated into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.*

2.3.4. The Committee appointed Emeritus Professor Peter Flood as an Alternate (Acting) Chair in the event that the Chair is unable to attend or where the Chair is unable to participate in the discussion of, and/or decision relating to an agenda item because of a declared conflict of interest.

2.3.5. The Committee noted that as the Committee has not been appointed on a representational basis, no attendance by proxy will be allowed.

2.3.6. The Committee agreed to the proposed process for taking a decision in the event that a consensus decision or majority vote cannot be reached and to incorporate the recommended processes into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.

**Action Arising**

**170112-3** *The amended processes for taking decisions in the event that a consensus decision or majority vote cannot be reached to be incorporated into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.*

2.3.7. The Committee noted the requirement for each committee member to sign the individual Biographical Consent Form prepared by the Secretariat and agreed to provide the Secretariat with current curriculum vitae.

**Action Arising**

**170112-4** *Each Committee member to sign the Biographical Consent form if they have not already done so and provide the Secretariat with a copy of their current curriculum vitae.*

2.3.8. The Committee noted the proposed process for providing a report of each meeting to the Commonwealth Minister for Sustainability, Population, Water, Environment and Communities.

**Action Arising**

**170112-5** *With the assistance of the Secretariat, the Chair will seek to develop a good working relationship and line of communication with the Minister's office.*

2.4. Process for meeting & out of session papers

2.4.1. The Committee agreed to incorporate the recommended processes for meeting papers and out of session items into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.

**Action Arising**

**170112-6** *The recommended processes for meeting papers and out of session items be incorporated into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.*

2.4.2. The Committee agreed that the Secretariat should aim to circulate draft minutes from the meeting on the second business day following the meeting and that Committee members would endeavour to provide comments on and/or clear the draft minutes within one week of the relevant meeting date.

2.5. Probity plan & managing conflicts of interest

2.5.1. The Committee agreed to incorporate, as a standing agenda item for each meeting, identification of potential conflicts of interest in relation to specific items of business for that meeting.

**Action Arising**

**170112-7.** *Secretariat to incorporate, as a standing agenda item, identification of potential conflicts of interest in relation to the business of that meeting. Ref 170112-1*

2.5.2. The Committee noted that a draft Probity Plan is being developed for discussion at the February 2012 meeting.

**Action Arising**

**170112-8** *A draft Probity Plan for the Committee to be available for discussion at the February 2012 meeting.*

2.6. Media & communications protocol

2.6.1. The Committee discussed a range of issues in relation to media and communications and agreed to the Media Protocol attached to the agenda paper and requested that it be incorporated the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.

**Action Arising**

**170112-9** *The Media Protocol be incorporated into the Committee's Operating Protocol and Systems and Procedures documentation.*

**170112-10** *The Secretariat to develop a draft communications plan for the Committee's consideration at its February 2012 meeting.*

**170112-11** *Secretariat to include, as a standing Information item on each agenda, a summary of issues reported via from the department's media monitoring service on coal seam gas and coal mining issues and on any media report that makes mention of the committee.*

**170112-13** *The Department to advise Committee members via email of any occasions where the Committee and/or its work have been mentioned in the media.*

## 2.7. Forward Plan for Meeting Dates and Locations

2.7.1. The Committee agreed to the following dates for future meetings and noted that final venues for each meeting will be determined by the Chair and advised by the Secretariat.

22 February 2012	Sydney
26 March 2012	Canberra (TBC)
18 April 2012	Canberra (TBC)
16 May 2012	Adelaide (TBC)
20 June 2012	Canberra (TBC)
18 July 2012	Canberra (TBC)
29 August 2012	Brisbane (TBC)
26 September 2012	Canberra (TBC)
24 October 2012	Canberra (TBC)
21 November 2012	Melbourne (TBC)

### ***Action Arising***

**170112-14** *Meeting locations will be determined by the Chair and advised by the Secretariat.*

## 3. **Big Picture' Overview and Objectives**

The committee noted the verbal presentations from David Parker, A/g. Secretary DSEWPac, Kimberley Dripps, Deputy Secretary DSEWPac and Alex Rankin, First Assistant Secretary, Office of Water Science DSEWPac.

## 4. **2011-12 Priority Research Program**

### 4.1. Requirements for developing the 2011-12 priority research program

4.1.1. The Committee noted the advice on issues and requirements for the Committee's role of providing advice on a priority 2011-12 research program and confirmed their role in taking a strong role in framing the scope and directions for this research program, including providing strategic oversight of processes for selecting preferred research providers.

4.1.2. The Committee agreed to convene a two-day workshop with the aim of gaining a good understanding of the scope of relevant research that has already been completed or commissioned; key questions that need to be answered; significant knowledge and information gaps as they relate to the Committee's terms of reference; and to develop a scientific framework to guide the identification of priorities for strategic research investment. Day one of the workshop will involve presentations from external parties and the Committee will use day two to focus on developing a proposed overarching science framework.

**Action Arising**

**170112-15** Secretariat to arrange a two-day workshop on developing a science framework to guide the development of a priority research program. The workshop is to be held in Brisbane as early in February 2012 as possible to accommodate Committee member's diaries.

**170112-16** Secretariat to consult with the Committee on the proposed agenda for the workshop and proposed invitees.

4.2. Bioregional assessments

4.2.1. The Committee approved the Secretariat organising a two day workshop in March 2012 to provide advice on leading theory, practice and methodology for conducting bioregional assessments. Day one of the workshop will involve presentations from external parties while day two will be used as an opportunity for the Committee to compile its views on the recommended scope and approach to undertaking the bioregional assessments envisaged by the Committee's terms of reference.

4.2.2. The Committee recommended that the Secretariat commission a desktop review to identify examples of bioregional assessments completed either nationally or internationally, in particular any bioregional assessments that are leading practice in consideration of coal seam gas, coal mining and/or water issues. The results from this review should be considered as part of the proposed March 2012 workshop.

**Action Arising**

**170112-17** Secretariat to arrange a two-day workshop to provide advice on leading theory, practice and methodology for conducting bioregional assessments. The workshop is to be held in Sydney at a time in March 2012 that suits most Committee members.

**170112-18** Secretariat to consult with the Committee on the proposed agenda for the workshop and proposed invitees.

**170112-19** By 25 January 2012, Professor Moran to provide the Secretariat with a one- page

*scoping proposal for a desktop review of good examples of bioregional assessments. Once commissioned by the Secretariat, this work would inform the proposed March 2012 workshop.*

4.3. Rapid risk assessment to identify priority areas for bioregional assessments

4.3.1. The Committee did not agree to the rapid risk assessment process as proposed (including the indicative budget) on the grounds that the project scope was considered to be too complex for the short time frame available and that the proposal was inadequate.

4.3.2. The Committee acknowledged the work undertaken to develop the proposal and considered that there may be benefit in further developing the proposed approach as a possible input to future bioregional assessments.

4.3.3. To assist the Committee in shaping its views on priority areas for bioregional assessments, the Secretariat was requested to ask that Geoscience Australia scope a revised regional prioritisation project that: is simple; uses a smaller set of key attributes for which data is already available; and can realistically be completed, with the results being reported to the Committee by end March 2012.

**Action Arising**

**170112- 20** Secretariat to directly commission Geoscience Australia to undertake a simple, quick and realistically scoped regional prioritisation project, with the results to be reported to the Committee by end March 2012.

**170112- 21** Draft outcomes from the Geoscience Australia work to be considered as part of the Committee's proposed March 2012 workshop.

**170112- 22** Further work be undertaken to refine the originally proposed rapid risk assessment approach (including seeking the input of individuals and/or agencies with expertise in risk assessment methodologies and undertaking risk assessments) on the basis that the Committee may wish to consider recommending use of this work for identifying subsequent priority areas for bioregional assessments.

4.4. Consultation with NRM bodies in preparation for bioregional assessments.

4.4.1. The Committee approved the Office of Water Science commencing a process of engagement with relevant NRM regions to discuss a range of issues associated with the Committee and its work, including potential involvement of regions in bioregional assessments and data availability and/or required at a regional scale to feed into those assessments. The Committee noted, however that substantive discussions with regional groups should only be held following the proposed Committee workshops, so that the regional discussions could be better informed by their outcomes.

4.4.2. The Committee considered that the following NRM bodies represented the highest priorities for initial consultation: QLD - Burdekin, Burnett-Mary, Fitzroy, South East, Border Rivers and Maranoa-Balonne, Condamine, Desert Channels and South West; NSW - Border-Gwydir, Namoi, Hunter, Hawkesbury-Nepean, Sydney, Southern Rivers and Northern Rivers; VIC – Gippsland.

**Action Arising**

**170112-23** Secretariat to commence the process of organising discussions with the agreed list of regional NRM bodies listed on a range of issues associated with the Committee's work, with substantive discussions to be scheduled following the Committee's proposed February and March 2012 workshops.

4.4.3. The Committee requested that the Agenda for the proposed meetings be revised to identify the need to invest in knowledge acquisition and collation by the NRM bodies.

**Action Arising**

**170112- 24** Secretariat to amend agenda for proposed NRM meetings to include discussion of needs for resources to acquire data that could feed into bioregional assessments.

4.4.4. The Committee advised that participation by Committee members in discussions with NRM groups would not be required, but Committee members may choose to participate if available.

**Action Arising**

**170112-25** Once available, the Secretariat to provide Committee members with the proposed scheduled of meetings with regional NRM bodies for information. Committee members to advise their interest in attending specific meetings.

**4.5. Potential priority research projects**

4.5.1. The Committee noted that the purpose of the Committee's proposed February 2012 workshop (**Ref 170112-15 & 170112-16**) is to develop a good understanding of the scope of relevant research that has already been completed or commissioned; key questions that need to be answered; significant knowledge and information gaps as they relate to the Committee's terms of reference; and to develop a scientific framework to guide the identification of priorities for strategic research investment.

**5. Committee's role in providing advice on specific coal seam gas & large coal mining projects**

**5.1. Snapshot of the EPBC process**

5.1.1. The Committee noted the presentation from Ms Kimberley Dripps outlining current processes for the Commonwealth taking decisions on referrals under the EPBC Act.

**5.2. Process for providing advice on proposed coal seam gas & coal mining projects**

5.2.1. The Committee discussed the most appropriate time for it to provide advice on potential projects, including its capacity to add value to current regulatory processes, noting the limited capacity of members to absorb and provide advice on the substantive technical details of proposed development projects.

5.2.2. The Committee advised that it considers the most effective option would be for it to be involved at an earlier stage in regulatory decision making processes where it has the potential to consider project risk assessment documentation and provide advice on additional work and/or research that may need to be undertaken during the development and assessment phase for a project to adequately address and mitigate risks.

The Committee requested earlier involvement:

- in the development of minimum standards for the information requirements; and
- in a comprehensive 'up front' risk assessment process that identifies gaps and informs knowledge acquisition processes for the Environmental Impact Statement.

***Action Arising***

***170112-26*** The Committee will develop minimum standards for the information requirements and work with the Office of Water Science on a comprehensive 'up front' risk assessment process that identifies gaps and informs knowledge acquisition processes for the Environmental Impact Statement.

5.2.3. The Committee also considered that they could also potentially add value to decision making processes by providing advice at the stage at which governments may be preparing draft conditions for projects.

5.2.4. The Committee noted that in the short-term, they may be asked by the Commonwealth government and/or state governments to provide advice on projects that are already well progressed and that their advice on such projects would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5.2.5. The Committee endorsed the proposal for the Office of Water Science to prepare for consideration at their February 2012 meeting, draft information guidelines outlining the Committee's proposed approach to providing advice on development proposals and the information it would need to have available to it to provide that advice.

5.2.6. The Committee noted that discussions about the timing and nature of advice to be provided by the ongoing Committee forms part of the current National Partnership Agreement negotiations.

**Action Arising**

**170112-27** *Office of Water Science to provide draft information guidelines on the Committee's development proposal advisory role for consideration at the February 2012 meeting.*

5.2.7. The Committee noted that prior to the February 2012 meeting, the Office of Water Science will work with committee members to prepare a template for the Committee's advice, along with a draft 'mock-up' of advice to assist the Committee's consideration of the style, length and type of advice it would be comfortable providing to governments.

**Action Arising**

**170112-28** *In consultation with Committee members, the Office of Water Science to prepare a template for the Committee's advice for consideration at the February 2012 meeting.*

**170112-29** *Office of Water Science to consult with the Environment Assessment & Compliance Division, DSWEPC with a view to providing Committee members with three or four relevant Environmental Impact Statements to help build understanding of the current level of practice in addressing impacts on water resources from coal seam gas and coal mine developments.*

5.3. EPBC projects likely to be referred to the Committee in the near future

5.3.1. The Committee noted the list of current EPBC referrals and/or projects that may require advice from the Committee over coming months, noting that further information is required on the anticipated time at which the Committee will be required to consider each project.

5.3.2. The Committee agreed that where they have been requested to provide advice on a specific development proposal, the lead departmental officer managing the project's assessment should attend the meeting at which the proposal is to be considered by the Committee. Attendance may be either in person, via phone or videoconference.

**Action Arising**

**170112-30** *Office of Water Science to advise the Environment Assessment and Compliance*

*Division, DSEWPaC of the request for relevant EPBC Act assessment staff to attend meetings when specific development proposals that have been referred to the Committee for advice are scheduled to be discussed.*

## 6. Other Business

### 6.1.1. Progress with developing the National Partnership Agreement

6.1.2. The Committee noted the progress in developing a National Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth and state governments and suggested a number of changes to the definitions drawn from the draft National Partnership Agreement including:

- Refer to impact on water table pressure levels rather than water table levels as a measureable Significant Impact
- Include a mention of diversion changes to surface water flows
- Include all coal mining in the definitions
- Remove the reference to 'salt' from the definition regarding persistent organic chemicals
- Refer to the research undertaken by the National Water Commission and use it to inform definitions of cumulative impact.

### **Action Arising**

**170112-31** The Office of Water Science to refer to the Committee's suggestions in negotiations with other Commonwealth agencies and state jurisdictions on the draft National Partnership Agreement.

**170112-32** An update on progress with negotiations on the National Partnership Agreement to be included as an agenda item for future meetings (until the Agreement has been finalised).

## 7. Upcoming Agenda Items

7.1.1. The Committee endorsed the following agenda items for future meetings:

- Draft communications strategy (February 2012)
- Outcomes from proposed Geoscience Australia rapid regional prioritisation project (March 2012)
- Update on progress with the National Partnership Agreement (at each meeting until Agreement has been finalised)
- Draft information guidelines (February 2012)
- Draft 'mock-up' and template for the Committee's advice on referred coal seam gas and large coal mining developments (February 2012)

7.1.2. The Committee noted that outcomes from this meeting included the organisation of two workshops for the Committee in addition to their normal scheduled meetings.

Early February – Research Priority Workshop

March – Bioregional Assessment Plans Workshop

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 22 February 2012 in Sydney (venue to be confirmed).

The meeting closed at 4.45pm.

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Craig T. Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Professor Craig Simmons  
Committee Chair

14 March 2012

### ATTACHMENT A: Meeting 1 disclosure of interests

Item	Committee Member	Disclosure	Determination
4.3	Ms Jane Coram	Rapid Risk Assessment to identify priority areas for bioregional assessments. Geoscience Australia is the provider.	Participation in discussion only.
4.5	Professor Craig Simmons	Potential research projects. National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training (NCGRT) is a potential provider of research and development.	Participation in discussion. No decision required
4.5	Professor Chris Moran	Potential research projects. Sustainable Mining Institute is a potential provider of research and development.	Participation in discussion. No decision required.
4.5	Ms Jane Coram	Potential research projects. Geoscience Australia is a potential provider.	Participation in discussion. No decision required.

