

MINUTES – Meeting 5
16 May 2012

Private Dining Room, Old Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance and Apologies

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor Craig Simmons (Chair)
Emeritus Professor Peter Flood
Professor Chris Moran
Ms Jane Coram
Professor John Langford

APOLOGIES

Associate Professor David Laurence

SECRETARIAT AND SUPPORT STAFF

Alex Rankin
Malcolm Forbes
Bernadette O'Neil
Angus Cole
Pamela Finger
Helen Vooren

GUESTS AND OTHER DEPARTMENTAL STAFF

Fiona Beynon (Office of Water Science)	Sarah Wilson (Office of Water Science)
Ruth Dewsbury (Public Affairs, DSEWPaC)	Rob McGregor (Hoffman Donohue)
Mark Hall (EACD)	Tony Boston (Bureau of Meteorology)
Amanda Matley (EACD)	Brendan Moran (Bureau of Meteorology)
Lisa Van Vucht (EACD)	

As there was a quorum the meeting commenced at 9.15am.

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Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed committee members, the Secretariat provided by the Office of Water Science (the Office) and departmental staff, and noted the apologies received from Associate Professor David Laurence.

1. Standing items

1.1. Conflicts of Interest

Before the meeting commenced committee members completed the Meeting Specific Disclosure of Interests and the following determinations were recorded.

Item	Committee Member	Disclosure	Determination
4.2 & 5	Professor Moran	The University of Queensland has a significant history of research into coal mining with industry funding and it intends to continue to do so. Item 4.2 includes an infrastructure offer from the university.	Participation limited to expert advice only and discussion in relation to Agenda Item 4.2 No decision was taken at this item.
5.1	Ms Jane Coram	R&D proposals may relate to Geoscience Australia. GA was involved in preparing advice relating to Item 5.1.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest was identified and Ms Coram participated fully in the meeting
General	Professor Craig Simmons	R&D projects <u>may</u> relate to National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training.	No actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest was identified.

The committee had a general discussion on how conflicts of interest are handled and how clear provision of conflicts can be put into the public domain. The Office of Water Science was requested to prepare guidelines and a template for an overarching conflict of interest declaration. This will provide better quality information on the website about committee members and how the committee is handling conflicts of interest. The Chair reiterated to members the importance of providing to the Secretariat a detailed summary of all potential conflicts of interests at the beginning of each meeting.

Action Arising

160512- 1 Action: For the June 2012 meeting , the Office of Water Science to prepare guidelines and a template for an overarching conflict of interest declaration which will be completed by each committee member and held on file and potentially published on the Committee's website.

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1.2. Acceptance of minutes from previous meeting

The content of the minutes for Meeting 4 were discussed and comment was made by some committee members about the extent to which the minutes should record general opinions rather than just a record of decisions. It was agreed that the minutes would be expanded to incorporate more information about the considerations that were taken into account when the committee has taken a decision. The minutes for Meeting 4 were endorsed without change and the Chair signed off the minutes as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

1.3. Action items report

Ms Rankin spoke to the Action Items list. The completed items were noted and other items were referred to agenda items for discussion later in the meeting. The Office of Water Science requested guidance from the committee on their thinking regarding 'sabbaticals and visiting scholars' (*Item 180412-7*)

1.4. Out-of-Session decisions

No out-of-session decisions were recorded for the period between meetings.

1.5. Correspondence

The Secretariat provided information regarding the nature of items received requesting access to the committee. These requests have been to attend committee meetings, to receive briefings by individuals on specific development proposals that have been referred to the committee for advice or to accept submissions from individuals either in support of or opposing the development. Ms Rankin provided a report on a meeting held with the Friends of the Earth following a request received by the Secretariat.

The correspondence received and action taken was noted.

1.6. Communications

The Media Analysis for the period 17 April to 15 May 2012 was noted.

Ms Ruth Dewsbury from the Public Affairs team in the department joined the discussion on the recent media about the committee's links with industry. Coal Seam Gas in particular receives a lot of media attention across the department. The committee acknowledged that the information on the website needs to clearly and assertively communicate the messages around the committee's roles, and the detailed arrangements in place to handle probity issues and real or perceived conflicts of interest.

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A series of briefings are being arranged by the Office of Water Science to inform stakeholder groups about the committee and its functions. These briefings will also outline the role of the Office in supporting the committee's work. The Office was requested to provide the committee with copies of the relevant supporting material prepared for these briefings series in particular the Q and A's.

Action Arising

160512- 2 Action: *Copies of stakeholder briefing Q and A's to be provided to the committee.*

Mr Cole tabled the draft version of fact sheets currently being prepared for the committee. These will be the first in a series being developed as a communication tool and will be uploaded onto the website when complete. The committee provided positive feedback on the design of the factsheets (clear and concise) and undertook to provide out of session feedback on content.

Action Arising

160512- 3 Action: *Committee to provide feedback on factsheet content by 28 May 2012.*

The draft stakeholder engagement strategy was noted and committee members were requested to identify any gaps. Regional bodies such as the catchment management and natural resource management groups were identified as important stakeholders with significant influence. Further discussion was deferred until the June meeting when the Office is requested to provide a presentation on the content. Significant elements of this strategy would be informed by the committee's Strategic Framework once completed.

Action Arising

160512- 4 Action: *Presentation about the content of the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy to be included as an agenda item for June 2012 meeting.*

1.7. Update for June Field trip

The Secretariat provided a verbal update on planning for the proposed field trip. The committee agreed to defer further action on the field trip until the appointment of the statutory committee has been made.

The Secretariat is requested to identify and develop a program of places that the committee may seek to visit as part of future field trips. This should be included as part of the stakeholder engagement strategy.

Action Arising

160512- 5 Action: *For the June 2012 meeting, identify and prepare a program of places for inclusion in future field trips planned for consideration by the statutory committee.
Program to be incorporated into the stakeholder engagement strategy.*

2. Strategic framework

2.1. Strategic Framework

Mr Rob McGregor from Hoffman Donohue joined the meeting and led the discussion on the draft Strategic Framework under development. The committee were requested to provide comment on the balance, weighting and emphasis of content so far. Direction was also sought on options for ongoing development including an editorial subgroup or full committee comment.

Positive feedback was provided by the committee on the tabled drafts with general agreement on readability and appearance. Discussion centred on the diagrammatic representation of the committee's role with general agreement that it needed to be simplified. It was suggested that a 2 or 3 phase diagram may better represent the current role of the committee, the transformative phase and the forward looking 3-5 year aspiration.

The Chair requested an opportunity to have additional discussions out of session with Mr McGregor. Other committee members will provide additional feedback out of session through the Office. It was requested that Mr McGregor present the next iteration of the Framework at the meeting in June.

Action Arising

160512- 6 Action: *Opportunity for out of session discussions before the June 2012 meeting between the Chair and Mr Rob McGregor to be sought.*

160512- 7 Action: *Presentation and discussion on the Strategic Framework to be included as an agenda item for June 2012 meeting.*

2.2. Progress of the request for tender

Ms Finger provided the committee with a verbal update on the request for tender process. Contracts are currently being signed with approved suppliers identified in the request for tender process. Some research projects identified by the committee have already gone to market for quoting.

Progress on the tender process was noted and the committee thanked the Office for the speed with which the process has been undertaken. A further progress report is requested for the June meeting.

Action Arising

160512- 8 Action: Progress report on the Tender process to be included as an agenda item for June 2012 meeting.

3. Bioregional assessments

3.1. Update on management and resourcing

This item was not discussed due to time constraints. Item to be included on Agenda for June 2012 meeting.

4. Research Projects

4.1. Status of projects previously recommended by the committee.

Mr Brendan Moran and Mr Tony Boston from Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) joined the meeting to discuss the bioregional assessment water data project.

Clarification is being sought from the committee on their vision for the data platform and its potential future use. There is an understanding that the bioregional assessment process will generate a large amount of data and that a coordinated approach to data gathering will be required. The committee acknowledged the ongoing work that the Bureau has been undertaking in standardising terminology and agreed with the importance of this work.

It is the committee's vision that the final product will be public data. It is hoped that it will become a trusted source used by a broad cross section from industry to small regional bodies. The large quantities, wide variety of formats and various platforms that can be found in the data available create a high level of complexity to project.

The committee agreed that a partnership between the Bureau and the Office of Water Science be established to develop the dataset requirements (people and infrastructure), how the information is collected in different regions and different disciplines. This should result in standardised approaches to the collection and storage of the data.

Action Arising

160512- 9 Action: The Office is requested to work with the Bureau to develop standardised approaches to the collection and storage of data that is likely to be generated through the bioregional assessments by December 2012.

4.1.1 Chemicals assessment project

The project proposal for the National Assessment of Chemicals Associated with Coal Seam Gas Extraction was reintroduced by Mr Forbes. The importance of commissioning a project to look at this issue had previously been discussed.

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The committee queried why the project was proposing to limit examination to approximately 95 chemicals that potentially could be used in the fracking process. While it does go past the assessment of the chemicals in their own right, it does not appear to address the issue of transformation when these substances are injected into wells under pressure. The knowledge gaps identified did not appear to be covered and it lacked a communication plan. Understanding the chemical composition of liquids coming from dewatering sites is an important starting point, as was produced water from both fraced and unfraced wells. It was noted that this is a part of the proposed project scope. The project plan to Milestone 16 was acceptable to the committee with some modification.

The committee did not support the project in its current form and the following recommendations were made.

1. That the project is broken into a series of parts
2. Part One - Cost and deliver Literature Review. Compare and contrast with overseas models.
3. Part Two – Project to undertake testing of dewatering sites, fraced and unfraced wells.
3. Part Three – Workshop with committee to examine the literature review, outcomes from the water testing and plan next steps.

It was agreed that an invitation is extended to the Office of the Chief Water Advisor within the USA Environment Protection Agency through the Office. There are synergies between work already undertaken by this agency and proposals before the committee. It was considered that it would be beneficial to establish links early in the project.

Action Arising

160512- 10 Action: The Office to work with the Department of Health and Aging in rescoping the literature review and seek approval from the Minister to commence work to deliver Phases 1A -1E of the project.

160512- 11 Action: Chair to provide contact details to the Office for the Office of the Chief Water Advisor within the USA Environment Protection Agency.

4.2 Budgetary implications of project commitments

This item was not discussed due to time constraints.

5. Advice on Projects referred by Governments

5.1. Codrilla and Sonoma

The officers from EACD presented updates on existing projects and project outlines on the new referrals. The Geoscience Australia reports providing additional hydrological information on both Codrilla and Sonoma were tabled and discussed.

Sonoma

The Sonoma proposal was discussed. There was agreement that the supplementing information provided by Geoscience Australia was still unable to address the gaps identified earlier by the committee particularly in relation to groundwater. The lack of access to the 2006 Environmental Impact Statement was noted and the committee requested that the officers from EACD obtain this as soon as possible. Geoscience Australia will be requested to examine the additional information and prepare an addendum if any issues are highlighted.

Draft advice was prepared and will be circulated out of session for committee approval.

Codrilla

The Codrilla proposal was discussed and draft advice was prepared. This will be circulated out of session for committee approval.

It was noted that there were publication limitations on the Geoscience Australia report and requested the Office seek permission for these to be waived to allow the publication of the document in conjunction with the advice.

Action Arising

160512- 12 Action: Officers from EACD to try to obtain a copy of the 2006 EIS report for Sonoma. If this becomes available the Office will send to Geoscience Australia for examination.

160512- 13 Action: The Office to seek Geoscience Australia permission to publish the supplementary reports on Sonoma and Codrilla.

160512- 14 Action: Advice to the decision maker on the Sonoma and Codrilla projects will be prepared and circulated out of session for approval.

5.2. North Surat Coal – Taroom and Collingwood

Both of these projects are currently in their early approval stages and the committee has been requested to provide comment on the Terms of Reference for the Environmental Impact Statements of both projects.

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The proposals were discussed and draft advice was prepared. This will be circulated out of session for committee approval.

Action Arising

160512- 15 *Action: Advice to the decision maker on the Collingwood and Taroom Coal Projects will be prepared and circulated out of session for approval.*

5.3. Future EPBC project referrals

It was noted that the three projects are likely to be referred to the committee for advice at the June 2012 meeting. These are likely to have a significant body of supporting documentation. Managing the requirements and balancing increasing workloads were discussed. The Committee requested the Department considers only referring those projects for advice where there is likely to be significant impact on water resources or water dependant matters of national environmental significance.

6. Other Business

The following items were raised during the meeting and captured here for recording purposes.

6.1. Forward Agenda – Meeting 6

At Item 1.6, the forward agenda for the June meeting was also discussed. It was suggested to set aside some time for the committee to self reflect and stock take on progress so far. All agreed that it would be a valuable opportunity to provide feedback on the committee's functioning and the Office's procedures for supporting the committee's activities.

Action Arising

160512- 16 *Action: Secretariat to allocate time on Day 2 of the June 2012 meeting for a feedback session.*

6.2. University of Queensland invitation

Professor Moran advised committee members that the University of Queensland is currently organising a forum for the science community and others on coal seam gas. The University hopes that this event will help de-mystify some of the science and inform the broader community about the current science thinking. The University will be inviting the committee to attend and participate at some level.

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6.3. Project proposals

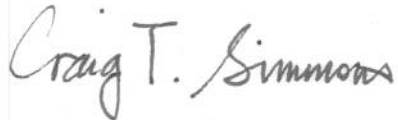
Four infrastructure project proposals have been received by the Secretariat in the past month and were circulated to the committee. Due to time constraints the committee were unable to discuss and further consideration of these projects was moved to Meeting 6.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 20 -21 June 2012 in Canberra (venue to be confirmed).

The meeting closed at 5.35pm

Minutes confirmed as true and correct:



Professor Craig Simmons
Committee Chair

June 2012