

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

**Bioregional Assessment Workshop**

**19 – 20 March, 2012**

**Sydney**

**Summary of Proceedings**

## **Background**

The Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining (the interim committee) held a bioregional assessment workshop in order to gain a better understanding and discuss the leading theory, practice and methodology for conducting bioregional assessments. The Bioregional Assessments Workshop was held 19-20 March, 2012 in Sydney. Attendees included representatives from federal and state government agencies and regional natural resource management bodies (NRMs).

## **Day 1**

On day one of the workshop, Professor Craig Simmons, chair of the interim committee, gave a brief presentation to attendees outlining the Australian Government's initiative; introducing the other committee members and providing a description of how the committee operates.

Attendees participated in a series of round-table discussions, covering a range of topics in relation to what a bioregional assessment will look like, how it is constructed, and the challenges and constraints involved.

Professor Simmons presented the following draft documents for discussion at the workshop:

- Framework for Bioregional Assessments
- Committee Advice Framework
- Water Balance Framework; and
- Asset-Aggravated Conceptual Water Balance.

Professor Simmons led a Q&A session covering progress to date on the draft documents.

Attendees received presentations about the lessons learnt from previous strategic assessment undertaken and the following presentations were delivered:

- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* Strategic Assessments – Steve Mercer
- CSIRO Sustainable Yields – Bill Young
- Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) Marine Bioregional Planning – Paul Garret
- Strategic Catchment Planning in New South Wales – Brian Gilligan

## **Workshop Discussion – Broad and Strategic Issues**

Each table group at the workshop reviewed these documents provided and discussed the workshop presentations in order to provide feedback to the whole audience. Feedback from each table indicated it is important that bioregional assessments embrace cumulative impacts, and that existing projects and proposals are taken into account as part of the

assessment and in quantifying cumulative impacts. This brought on discussion in relation to what would be an appropriate timescale for cumulative impacts.

As part of the feedback from individual tables, groups outlined their thoughts around potential constraints, frequently raised concerns - including coordination between NRM regions - alignment of bioregional assessments with existing regional planning, and the working relationships between state agencies and NRMs in developing assessment procedures and undertaking assessments in the field. Discussion took place around the challenges involved in keeping the community well informed and engaged in the process; and it was agreed that bioregional assessments should be as comprehensive as possible to maximise the effectiveness of partnership agreements, and to minimise the workload impact on the committee.

The method of taking a water-balance approach was also discussed and found to be favourable amongst the group. There was agreement that this is the best option, and that we now have to “nail the process” in order to move forward.

Participants agreed that it is essential that the bioregional assessment process is transparent; producing clear outcomes that can be easily communicated to stakeholders. It was noted that this would be done through the Committees website and regular forums to discuss and present results as they become available. Participants also agreed that data would be most valuable in a visual format and that the possibility of using existing tools, such as those used by the Bureau of Meteorology should be explored.

## **Day 2**

### **Workshop Discussion - Operational and Implementation Issues**

Day two of the workshop consisted of an in-depth discussion on how a bioregional assessment will be delivered; the best implementation approach, potential constraints and how to develop a consistent national approach. Discussion took place on who will use the bioregional assessment results, and how they will be used. It was recognised that a key outcome is to improve the scientific knowledge base, resulting in increased community confidence in the decision making processes of the bioregional assessments. Participants agreed that the catchment management authorities may be able to assist in delivering some of the messages to the community.

Participants identified that a lack of human resources may be a major constraint, and suggested that we need to consider that the downsizing of state agencies was having further impacts on the capacity of state and territory governments.

It was agreed that consistency will be very important throughout the bioregional assessment implementation process and that highly skilled technical steering groups would be required. Participants agreed that the process must be open, transparent and accountable.

It was identified that industry data is critical to the process, and that work will need to be done to overcome commercial issues involved in receiving their input. It was agreed that the implementation of bioregional assessments should not be rushed; and that a lot of thought needs to be put into the methodology of conducting these assessments.

### **Post-workshop**

Based on the outcomes of this workshop, a Bioregional Assessment Framework has been adopted. It has been requested that the Office of Water Science prepare a methodology paper; taking into consideration and linking to the strategic framework document, currently under preparation.

Workshop attendees were appreciative of the level of engagement the committee has had with NRM groups and government agencies, and indicated they look forward to further engagement with the committee.

## Attendees

### Interim Committee Members

Professor Craig Simmons (Chair)  
Jane Coram (Day 1)  
Professor John Langford  
Emeritus Professor Peter G Flood  
Associate Professor David Laurence

### Secretariat & Office of Water Science support staff

Malcolm Forbes  
Peter Baker  
Bruce Gray  
Peta-Joanne Derham  
Ben Roudnew  
Tony Rosling  
Steve Mercer  
Paul Garret  
Bernadette O'Neil

### Invited Guests

#### **Attendee**

Dr Bill Young  
Dr Dan Metcalf  
Dr Glen Walker  
Dr Kriton Glenn  
Mr Warwick McDonald  
Mr George Gates  
Ms Megan Knight  
  
Mr Keiran Thomas  
Ms Meagan Kanaley  
Ms Carmen Dwyer  
Mr Brian Gilligan  
Ms Francesca Adreoni  
Ms Anne Pye  
Mr Randall Cox  
Mr Sanjeev Panday  
Mr Gordon Guymer  
Mr Greg Claydon  
Mr Glen Brown  
Professor Bob Miles  
Mr David Brown  
Mr Geoff Penton  
Ms Lucy Richardson  
Mr Ben Bruce  
Mr Lloyd Sampson  
Mr Neil Power  
Mr David Leek

#### **Organisation**

CSIRO  
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Geoscience Australia  
Bureau of Meteorology  
NSW Office of Water  
NSW Office of Agricultural Sustainability and Food Security  
NSW Office of Water  
NSW Dept of Planning and infrastructure  
NSW EPA/ Dept of Premier and Cabinet  
NSW Natural Resource Commission  
Namoi CMA  
NT DNRETAS  
Qld Water Commission  
Qld Water Commission  
DERM  
DERM  
DERM  
Qld Fitzroy Basin Association  
Desert Channels  
Qld Murray Darling Committee  
Condamine Alliance  
SA Dept of Water  
SA Dept of Water  
Goyder Institute  
SA Arid Lands NRM