

# **SENATE RURAL AFFAIRS & TRANSPORT LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

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**7 February 2012**

**CANBERRA**

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# Tony Burke MP

## Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

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# The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

## Interim committee to advise on coal seam gas and large coal mining

Media release  
27 January 2012

Environment and Water Minister Tony Burke has appointed an interim committee of experts to provide independent scientific advice on coal seam gas and large coal mining.

The interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee has been formed pending formal establishment of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development by legislative amendment to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The Committee is part of a new science-based framework announced by the Gillard Government in November last year, to provide more certainty for regional communities around coal seam gas and large coal mining developments, jobs and investment and the protection of water resources.

The Government is investing \$150 million to establish the new Independent Expert Scientific Committee that will provide scientific advice to governments and relevant coal seam gas and large coal mining projects; and commission and fund water resource assessment for priority regions.

The interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee has had an initial meeting which endorsed the Terms of Reference and commenced development of a work plan.

Members of the interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee are:

### **Professor Craig Simmons (Chair)**

Professor Simmons is Professor of Hydrogeology at Flinders University and Director of the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training. He is a leading international authority in hydrogeology and is considered one of Australia's foremost groundwater academics. Professor Simmons has been a significant contributor to global advances in the science of hydrogeology for many years.

### **Professor John Langford**

Professor Langford has had a 35-year career in the Australian water industry, serving as Chief Executive of the Rural Water Commission from 1989 to 1994. He is a Fellow, Australian Academy of

Technological Sciences and Engineering and a Fellow, Institution of Engineers, Australia. Professor Langford has been the recipient of many awards including a Churchill Fellowship, the Peter Hughes award for contribution to Australian water management, a Centenary Medal and was made a Member of the order of Australia in 2005.

**Ms Jane Coram**

Jane Coram has a Master of Hydrogeology, is a groundwater expert at Geoscience Australia and she is a current member of the Expert Panel on Coal Seam Gas. She has provided high-level technical advice on groundwater issues, including dryland salinity, groundwater sustainability, uranium mining and wetlands management, to Federal and State government agencies and regional catchment managers.

**Associate Professor David Laurence**

Associate Professor Laurence has a PhD in Mining Engineering and a MBA in international Business. His research interests include sustainable mining practices; mine closure; community engagement and mine simulation; mining methods and mine design; mining law and mine management. He is a consultant to industry, government and aid organisations in sustainable mining practices. He is the inaugural Director of the Australian Centre for Sustainable Mining Practices.

**Professor Chris Moran**

Professor Moran is the Director of the Sustainable Minerals Institute at the University of Queensland, Interim Director of the UQ Centre for Coal Seam Gas and a current member of the Expert Panel on Coal Seam Gas. He was previously the founding director of the Centre for Water in the Minerals Industry at UQ. Prior to that he worked as a natural resources and soil scientist in the CSIRO and has more than 20 years experience in landscape and water research.

**Emeritus Professor Peter G Flood**

Professor Flood is an Emeritus professor, retired Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of New England. He is a geologist with 44 years experience in Basin Studies, including within the Gunnedah, Bowen and Surat Basins and a member of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. He has been a consultant to state and Commonwealth governments and the mining and oil/gas industry and has studied the impacts of mining and coal seam gas extraction on water resources.

“Independent expert scientific advice to provide quality recommendations for the protection of underground water has formed part of federal approvals where they have been given,” Mr Burke said.

“To date, this quality independent advice has been limited to the extent of environmental powers in relation to matters of national environmental significance set out under the EPBC Act.

“With this new Independent Expert Scientific Committee the scientific rigour will be more broadly applied to consider the impact on underground water more generally.

“The interim committee will provide independent expert scientific advice to the Commonwealth in relation to projects impacting on water resources which need assessment under national environment law.

“This independent assessment process will help build community confidence in coal seam gas and coal mining developments in sensitive areas.”

In addition to establishing the new Independent Expert Scientific Committee, the Government will also enter a new National Partnership Agreement with the states through COAG, under which the

Commonwealth and states agree to take the Committee's advice into account in their assessment and approvals decisions. In addition, the Commonwealth will provide \$50 million in incentive payments to the states to deliver this outcome.

The advice of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee will be publicly disclosed to ensure local communities have all the best information available to them.

Until formal arrangements for the ongoing Committee are agreed by COAG, state and territory governments, it is anticipated that state and territory governments may elect to seek the interim committee's advice on coal seam gas and coal mining proposals that are subject to their regulatory processes.

Under these arrangements state and territory governments will remain the primary regulators, applying this framework to future assessments and approvals for coal seam gas and coal mining projects which have significant impacts on water resources.

For more information go to <http://environment.gov.au/epbc/about/coal-seam-interim-committee.html>

