

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 151
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1.5
Programme: Environment Assessment and Compliance Division (EACD)
Topic: Environmental Assessments
Hansard Page: 20
Question Date: 11 May 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Larissa Waters asked:

Ms Stagg: The IESC indicate that the proponent could do that work. But in terms of how that is addressed, that is a decision for the minister when he considers this project and whether to give his approval. He would then also consider how those matters should be addressed. **Mr Knudson:** If I may add, I think it is important to note a couple of key things that came out of IESC's advice. **Senator WATERS:** I am across that and I am afraid I have only got three minutes. So if you do not mind—and I do not mean to be rude—if you could give that to me in writing at another time, that would be great. I will read that. **Senator Birmingham:** We can certainly make sure that information is provided because I think it is important to highlight.

Answer:

The advice of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC) on the Watermark Coal Project was provided on 27 April 2015, and is available at: <http://iesc.environment.gov.au/committee-advice/proposals/watermark-coal-project-new-development-project-advice-2015>

Key findings from the IESC's April 2015 advice are that:

- a number of issues previously raised by the IESC in their 2013 advice have now been addressed by the proponent in their documentation, or are expected to be addressed through the NSW government's conditions of approval;
- the proponent's groundwater conceptualisation and numerical groundwater model is sufficiently robust to draw conclusions on the most likely range of groundwater drawdown impacts;
- the extent of groundwater drawdown is unlikely to extend beyond that described in the EIS; and
- there is no likelihood that impacts to groundwater from the proposed action will be transmitted to the Great Artesian Basin.

In the IESC advice of April 2015, a number of matters were raised that require further consideration. The IESC advised these could be addressed through the collection of additional data before and during operations, with subsequent updates to predictions in the modelling, and regular reporting, review and action taken. These matters include:

- a targeted monitoring program and finer-scale numerical groundwater modelling to improve the understanding of impacts over time, and for this to inform the future stages of the mine;
- identification and assessment of potential impacts to ecosystems and salt sensitive biota that are not wholly dependent on groundwater;
- further investigation into local connectivity in conjunction with other proposed mining operations (ie Caroon Coal Project) to inform the future stages of the mine; and
- assessment of long-term impacts associated with the final landform to improve the understanding of impacts over time and plan for the worst case scenario.