

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

Question No: 61
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Programme: Science
Topic: Water connectivity
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN: ... Then, when that is done, I would like to know why the science has not been done on the connectivity, which is unique, between the Namoi aquifer and the Great Artesian Basin. So go for your life. Until you can answer that, there should not be an approval for the mine.

....

Senator Birmingham: There is no doubt that you have a consistent position on this. We will take on notice the question you have just asked. As I said before, we do not have the actual scientific panel here at estimates tonight, and you have asked a very scientific question. We will do the best we can—

Senator HEFFERNAN: The sad part is I know the answer, they do not know the answer.

Senator Birmingham: If that is the answer then that will be what is provided, but we will get you what we can.

Answer:

As part of the assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) of the Watermark Coal Project, the Minister for the Environment has made two requests for additional advice from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC).

These requests, made on 26 February and 23 March 2015, include seeking advice on the potential impacts of the Watermark Coal Project on the Upper Namoi Alluvium and Great Artesian Basin, including the hydraulic connectivity and impacts to the Gunnedah Formation, Narrabri Formation and Permian 'hard rock' aquifers. The Minister's requests for advice are available from www.environment.gov.au.

The IESC is required to provide advice to the Minister within two months of receiving a request, and publish this advice on the Internet within 10 business days of providing it to the Minister. Advice of the IESC is made available at www.iesc.environment.gov.au.