

BREAKFAST put a series of questions to the Federal Department of Environment about groundwater extraction, and the role of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee.

The following written response is from an IESC spokesperson:

1) Have the resources available to the Independent Scientific Committee (IESC) been reduced since it has come more directly under the control of the Department of Environment?

The IESC was established as a statutory committee in 2012 by the Australian Government under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* <<http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2013C00539>>. The IESC provides independent, scientific advice to regulators on the impact that coal seam gas and large coal mining development may have on Australia's water resources.

The IESC continues to be supported by a dedicated Office of Water Science in the Department of the Environment and Energy. The Office of Water Science provides expert scientific analysis and technical support to the IESC as well as secretariat and administrative support.

IESC members possess strong scientific qualifications and expertise in the fields of hydrogeology, hydrology, ecology, geology, ecotoxicology and environment protection.

2) Does the IESC consider the cumulative impacts of the various projects it is asked to evaluate?

Yes, when relevant cumulative impact information is available the IESC will consider it in the preparation of their advice.

The Bioregional Assessment Program was established to strengthen the science underpinning future decisions about coal seam gas and coal mining activities. The Bioregional Assessments are assessing the potential impacts, particularly focusing on regional scale and cumulative impacts, due to coal seam gas and open-cut and underground coal mining developments (in the past, present and foreseeable future).

The IESC was involved in the development of the scientific framework which provides guidance on how bioregional assessments should be undertaken. When the Bioregional Assessments are finalised later this year the IESC will, where relevant consider their results in the preparation of their advice.

3) Does the IESC consider the science it reviews in the context of community expectations and a 'social licence' for proponents or projects?

No, Part 505D of the EPBC Act <<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013C00539>> specifies the functions of the Committee.

4) After critical comments on the early groundwater modelling for the ADANI Carmichael mine, was the IESC subsequently asked to review the modelling again after further work was done by the company? If not, why not?

The interim IESC provided advice on the Carmichael Coal Mine in June 2012 and the IESC provided advice in December 2013. Both pieces of advice are available on the IESC website. <<http://www.iesc.environment.gov.au/>>

BREAKFAST asked for clarification of this point:

Was the IESC asked to look again at the groundwater modelling work that Adani did following the committee's Dec 2013 advice?

Response from a spokesperson for the Department of the Environment and Energy:

Further advice from the IESC was not required at that time. All advice of the Committee was addressed in making the decision and the conditions of approval fully responded to the recommendations in the IESC advice.

- The approval of this project followed a rigorous environmental assessment undertaken by the Queensland Coordinator-General under a bilateral arrangement with the Commonwealth. In making the decision, the Commonwealth Environment Minister considered all relevant new information, as well as the previous assessment of the project.

OTHER QUESTIONS:

From a spokesperson for the Department of the Environment and Energy

5) Was crucial data on the ACLAND/NEW HOPE extension proposal withheld from the IESC? What is the response of the Minister to claims from various sources that the Committee made its decision on the NEW HOPE proposal without all the relevant material?

Data regarding the Acland/New Hope proposal was not withheld from the IESC. The IESC was provided the most up to date technical data available to the Department at the time.

The IESC is not limited in its consideration to the information referred to the Committee. The IESC's role is to provide advice to enable the regulator's decisions about coal seam gas and large coal mining developments informed by the best available science about the potential water related impacts associated with those developments.

Reports, transcripts of evidence and submissions expressing the opinions of various parties in an ongoing Land Court hearing, that does not result in additional technical information, is not required by the IESC to be able to undertake an independent analysis of the project.

- 6) Does the Minister consider the LAND COURT in Queensland or similar bodies in other states the appropriate forum for argument and adjudication over complex technical issues like groundwater in mining proposals?**

This is a matter for the Minister.

- 7) Is the government considering an expanded brief for the IESC to better help bodies like LAND COURTS resolve argument over issues like groundwater?**

This is a matter for the Minister.