

Inquiry into Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development) Bill 2012

Answer to Question on Notice

By: Naomi Hogan of The Wilderness Society and Carmel Flint of the Northern Inland Council for the Environment

The Question

Senator McKENZIE: You can take this on notice, but it goes again to research. With this particular body conducting research under its own auspices, how do you see that interplaying with the Commonwealth Water Commission's role in taking the national perspective on water resources and looking at the science and research? I would be interested in how you see that from a national perspective. From what you were saying, it sounded like there might already be a body that does that (Proof Committee Hansard, pp 10–11).

Our Response

The National Water Commission plays a very broad advisory role to Federal Government. It does not undertake or commission the detailed scientific research that is hoped will be driven by the Independent Expert Scientific Committee. The National Water Commission does identify where gaps, issues or shortcomings are found in water research and corresponding policy, and recommends where additional work would be best placed.

For example, in their 2010-2011 annual reportⁱ, in regards to coal seam gas and large coal developments, the National Water Commission stated,

“Further work is required to manage dewatering and the cumulative effects of mining activities. There is also a need for greater coordination and alignment of regulatory settings. The coal-seam gas sector is quickly emerging as a significant component of the economy in key regions of Queensland and New South Wales. The Commission considers that co-production of water during extraction presents risks for sustainable water management in those regions, because of the volumes involved and the uncertainties associated with predicted impacts.”

Ideally, the new Scientific Committee will be able to take this broad analysis provided by the National Water Commission to go the next step and enact the need for better understanding of the impacts of these developments on water systems and interrelating landscapes.

ⁱ http://nwc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/18431/2011-NWC-Annual-Report.pdf accessed 14 June 2012