

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
Legislation Committee**  
Answers to questions on notice  
**Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio**  
Budget Estimates, May 2013

**Program: Division:** Office of Water Science **Question No:** 191

**Topic:** OWS - Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development

**Proof Hansard Page and Date** Written

**or Written Question:**

**Senator Waters asked:**

What are the current major pieces of work that have been identified as still needing to be done to ensure we have the info needed to make informed decisions about the individual and cumulative impacts of coal and coal seam gas on water?

a. How long will it take to complete this work?

**Answer:**

The research that has previously been commissioned on the advice of the interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining is available at:  
<http://www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/research/index.html>

It is expected that these projects will be completed progressively over 2013-14.

The statutory Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development is currently finalising their suggested research priorities to enable further decisions on the most relevant and priority research areas relating to coal seam gas and large coal mining.

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| <b>Program: Division:</b>                               | Office of Water Science  | <b>Question No:</b> | 192 |
| <b>Topic:</b>   | OWS - Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development |                     |     |
| <b>Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:</b> | Written  |                     |     |

**Senator Waters asked:**

Has the Dept (or IESC) been asked to provide any advice on the likely risks of other onshore unconventional gas developments on Australia's water resources?

**Answer:**

See answer to Question on Notice 193.

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**Topic:** OWS - Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development

**Proof Hansard Page and Date** Written

**or Written Question:**

**Senator Waters asked:**

On Tuesday 28 May at APPEA's conference in Brisbane a major international unconventional gas consultant, Colin Jordan, from oil and gas advisory company, RISC, highlighted that much more work needs to be done to understand unconventional gas development in Australia, that we can't simply super-impose the North American shale gas experience. Based on IESC's experience with CSG, would IESC and/or the Department agree with this? What work does IESC/ the Dept think is needed for us to be on the front foot in managing shale and its impacts on Australia's water?

**Answer:**

Shale and tight gas is currently beyond the remit of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development and the Committee is therefore not in a position to comment.

The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the Department) agrees that the North American shale gas experience cannot be super-imposed onto Australia due to differences in geology, geography and infrastructure.

On 5 June 2013, the Australian Council of Learned Academies released its report titled '*Engineering Energy: Unconventional Gas Production*'. The report reflects the sixth research project in the series *Securing Australia's Future*, a strategic research program selected by the Prime Ministers Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC). The report provides a comprehensive look at: resources, technology, monitoring, infrastructure, human and environmental impacts, issues communication, regulatory systems, economic impacts, lessons learned from the coal seam gas industry, and impacts on greenhouse gas reduction targets.

The report recognises the need to understand Australia's shale oil and gas resources, and consider and respond to the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of their development. The report highlights the need for Australia to: better assess its own shale gas and tight gas resources and reserves; consider and respond to the potential, economic and environmental impacts; and ensure a transparent regulatory and monitoring regime whilst the industry is still at a relatively early stage of development.

The department is working collaboratively with the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism and the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education in response to the Australian Council of Learned Academies report.

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**Program: Division:** Office of Water Science **Question No:** 194

**Topic:** OWS - Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development

**Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:** Written

**Senator Waters asked:**

Resourcing – how many staff does IESC have, how will the additional staffing resources to support the water trigger’s implementation be allocated between IESC support area or to SEWPaC’s assessments areas?

**Answer:**

The Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (the Committee) consists of eight members employed in a part time capacity.

The Committee is supported by the Office of Water Science (OWS) in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department), which currently has 42 staff.

The OWS has been provided with funding for an additional four staff to support the water trigger’s implementation, while the Environment Assessment Compliance Division has been allocated an additional 42 staff.

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**Program: Division:** Office of Water Science **Question No:** 197  
**Topic:** OWS – Report into CSG Nov 2011  
**Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:** Written

**Senator Waters asked:**

What work has been done to respond to the recommendations in the interim report into CSG undertaken by the Senate inquiry into the MDB in (Nov 2011)

**Answer:**

A draft response has been prepared and is currently being considered. A final response will be tabled in due course.