

COMMUNIQUE

Meeting Four, Wednesday 22 May 2019, Darwin, Northern Territory

Purpose of the meeting:

- The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the progress of implementing the recommendations from the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory, receive a briefing on the Commonwealth governments approach to environmental assessments, receive a briefing on the NT Governments progress to support NT business to capture the maximum benefit from onshore gas, and to receive detail on the approach to be used to formulate Strategic Social Impact Assessments, a component of the Strategic Regional Environmental Baseline and Assessment (SREBA).

Fourth meeting of the Community and Business Reference Group:

- The Community and Business Reference Group (the Reference Group), held its fourth meeting on 22 May 2019 in Darwin.
- Forthcoming correspondence from the Chief Minister to extend the term of the Reference Group until June 2020 was noted, with existing members invited to continue in their roles.
- The appointment of two new members was noted: Mr Greg McDonald representing the Northern Land Council and Mr Keld Knudsen, representing the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association

Progress and Reporting

- A presentation was provided to the Reference Group by the Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry Implementation Taskforce on the status of progress of recommendations from the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing Implementation Plan.
- Dr David Ritchie, the Independent Officer overseeing implementation of the recommendations from the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing, provided his assessment of the progress of the Implementation Plan. Some members raised concerns about whether various recommendations have been implemented to the full extent intended by the Inquiry, Dr Ritchie offered to meet with those members.
- Dr Ritchie discussed the significant regulatory reform that had been achieved to date, including transfer of regulatory responsibility under the *Petroleum Act 1984* from the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources to the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, and the task ahead to ensure the new regulatory framework in place is backed up by on the ground capability to regulate.
- The Reference Group noted the March 2019 Quarterly Update on Hydraulic Fracturing Implementation was recently finalised with pre-exploration recommendations nearing completion.
- The Reference Group provided the following feedback:
 - Further consideration of the Regulations for the Environment Management Plan (EMP) process for drilling and hydraulic fracturing exploration activities, including clarifying the public comment process around revised versions of EMPs for activities relating to hydraulic fracturing is recommended.
 - Implementation of Recommendation 11.6, the Aboriginal Information Program, is a high priority to ensure that accurate information is received by Aboriginal people within communities that may be impacted by the development of the industry.
 - The pace of reform is challenging for stakeholders to thoroughly engage with the consultation process.
- Members discussed the draft Code of Practice. Issues and concerns were raised in relation to waste water transport and storage tank design including enabling evaporation, well integrity, requirements for rehabilitation, and mandatory monitoring noting that the Code of Practice is yet to be finalised.

- Water allocation planning was discussed and it was noted that the Commonwealth Geological and Bioregional Assessments Team was concurrently in Darwin to progress a range of Beetaloo Sub-Basin planning activities, including contributing to water baseline information
- The Reference Group noted that a new information booklet has been released, outlining the new elements and changes to regulation of the Northern Territory's onshore petroleum industry.

No Go Zones

- A representative of the Department of Primary Industry and Resources provided an update on the implementation of Recommendation 14.4, declaration of reserved blocks under Section 9 of the *Petroleum Act 1984*.
- The Reference Group noted that a Consultation Paper: Proposed Reserved Blocks (No-Go Zones) for Petroleum Activities in the Northern Territory will soon be released for public consultation, incorporating maps identifying parks, reserves, areas of high tourism value, Indigenous Protected Areas, Sites of Conservation Significance, and areas of no petroleum potential.
- The Reference Group discussed the need for detailed criteria and a defined process for determining areas of high ecological, cultural and tourism significance, with members encouraged to put forward submissions for areas they would like to see covered under declared reserved blocks, noting there is a four week consultation process to take place once the consultation paper is released.
- Some concern was expressed about the timeline for community consultation.

Commonwealth Approach to Environmental Assessments

- A presentation was provided to the Reference Group by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE) on the Commonwealth Approach to Environmental Assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (Cth) 1999*.
- The Reference Group noted that the DoEE had been engaged early by the Northern Territory Government and both governments were working collaboratively on environmental approval requirements for activities proposed in the Beetaloo Sub-Basin.

Local Content

- A representative of the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation (DTBI) delivered a presentation on the Territory's gas industry followed by discussion of progress on implementing recommendations involving maximising opportunities for local business.
- The Reference Group noted that DTBI has supported several delegations to the USA to identify gas industry opportunities, has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth to support development of the Northern Territory Gas Industry and is commissioning an infrastructure requirements study for the Beetaloo Sub-Basin.
- The Reference Group requested a further detailed update from DTBI at its next meeting regarding its actions undertaken to prepare for and identify skills gaps, engagement with industry and development of support mechanisms.

Strategic Regional Environment and Baseline Assessments (SREBA) Framework

- A presentation was provided to the Reference Group by the Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry Implementation Taskforce on the development of the Technical Guidance Note of the Strategic Social Impact Assessment of the SREBA Framework.
- The Reference Group was invited to provide feedback on the principles and categorising indicators proposed noting that guidance note is drawing on best practices from across Australia and the world, but tailored to suit the NT context.
- The Reference Group noted the importance of ensuring health related issues are considered, potentially in addition to the Public Health Guidance Note, which is also being developed under the SREBA.

- The Reference Group will continue to be consulted as SREBA development progresses.

Next Meeting

The Reference Group agreed the next meeting to be scheduled for August 2019.



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Denys Stedman
Chair
29 May 2019