

Meeting Date: Wednesday 2 April 2025

Meeting objectives:

To seek the CERG's feedback on a variety of community perspectives on specific matters of interest to NOPSEMA or members of CERG, relevant to offshore energy environmental management, to help guide NOPSEMA's approach to regulation of environmental management.

Meeting details:

The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams at 10:00am AWST on Wednesday 2 April 2025.

Attendees included representatives of NOPSEMA and members of the Community and Environment Reference Group (CERG), as listed in Attachment 1.

Meeting record:

Agenda Item 1 – Introduction and welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all participants.

The agenda and objectives for the meeting were confirmed.

The record of the meeting of 15 May 2024 were accepted.

The action items were reviewed and updated as appropriate.

ACTION: NOPSEMA to follow up on previous action to find and circulate Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) research on impacts from seismic surveys to pearl oysters and other marine life and circulate to CERG members when published.

Agenda Item 2 – Conflict of Interest Declarations

Members were asked by the Chair to provide any relevant information to the Secretariat.

No new conflicts of interest were declared by members.

Agenda Item 3 – CERG Members Update

Agenda Item 3.1 – Introductions and community interactions update

CERG members provided a brief overview of their individual perspectives and shared updates of offshore energy industry engagements undertaken since last CERG meeting.

Common themes included:

- Community and stakeholder concerns being raised around **marine heatwaves**: increased prevalence of coral bleaching, significant decline in coral health and ecosystem damage; concerns on potential significant impact on fisheries / fish population
 - o CERG members raised queries on how NOPSEMA evaluates and regulates in this space, and NOPSEMA reiterated that assessment teams take into account existing pressure(s) to marine environment as part of their assessment process.

- Examples of First Nations Elders raising concerns of marine heatwaves through incidences of fish washing up onshore and highlighted significant cultural impact and implications of incidences like this. CERG members reflected to us that First Nations Coastal Groups have responsibility for care for country in this space but additionally First Nations Inland Groups have songlines that relate to or culminate in coastal locations. It is important to understand that incidences like this can lead to tensions; cultural harm and pressure within the respective First Nations communities – and can in turn, affect how Relevant Persons engage with EP consultations.
- Engagements by CERG relating to **decommissioning** concerns, including increased interest understanding the science regarding infrastructure decommissioning and implications for the environment. Multiple CERG member feedback also raised concerns on the vagueness and high-level nature of titleholder engagements relating to decommissioning EPs.
- **Cumulative cultural and environmental impacts** of multiple offshore energy projects, both oil and gas and future offshore wind – concerns surrounding habitat destruction; disruption to First Nations cultural heritage and practices and the impact on local industries such as fishing and tourism.
- Consultation on EPs is limited and/or consultation processes often have no obvious close-out communication, leaving communities to wonder if they were heard and hope that their concerns were addressed. CERG members agreed that engagement on EPs by titleholders needs to be earlier in the project pipeline and this was reinforced by the Chair as advice that is regularly provided to industry.
- There continues to be a general lack of understanding of oil and gas industry projects, the EP assessment process and NOPSEMA's role. CERG members referred to publicly available NOPSEMA resources, such as guidance documents and the oil spill animation, and shared insights that these resources are useful, where available. Concern that general misinformation and disinformation is abundant making it more difficult to educate and consult with communities, and a general consensus that there is a strong need and an opportunity for NOPSEMA to fulfill this education role as the regulator rather than reliance on titleholders to do so as a part of their overall EP submission process.
- Communities are keen to understand the progress of **offshore wind** feasibility studies and the timeline for projects.

Agenda Item 4 – Meeting Discussion Topics

Agenda Item 4.1 – CEO Update: Key updates since the CERG

NOPSEMA CEO provided a brief overview of key updates as part of her CERG welcome at start of meeting.

ACTION: NOPSEMA Secretariat to share CEO Update Talking Points with CERG for their noting.

Agenda Item 4.2 – Environmental Protection legislation update

CERG members noted the discussion paper presented. No questions were raised.

The Chair committed to providing an update at the next CERG meeting on this topic.

Agenda Item 4.3 – Safe and efficient offshore resources decommissioning

CERG members noted the discussion paper presented.

Common themes from the discussion included:

- Understanding the difference between international conventions and Australian law when it comes to decommissioning; NOPSEMA confirmed that the base case for removal of oil and gas infrastructure comes from Australian guidelines and that international conventions are not automatic.
- CERG members mentioned the *Rigs-to-Reefs* program that is an initiative that allows decommissioned offshore oil and gas platforms to be converted into artificial reefs through approvals and sponsorship/custodianship from relevant State and Federal government agencies. The program enables operators to leave structures with the intention of enhancing marine habitats and has been implemented in various countries with limited support from recreational and commercial fishers.
- CERG members indicated that it would be beneficial to understand the science behind decommissioning. Work needs to be done to educate and communicate to stakeholders and community on what decommissioning means and the potential risks AND benefits of leaving infrastructure behind.
- CERG members noted that NOPSEMA guidance on decommissioning should be clearer in stating that regulatory decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and some of the considerations that are undertaken when making decisions including on concerns relating to mercury; structural integrity of pipelines; microplastics.
- Concerns were raised regarding outcomes of removal of offshore infrastructure from the ocean and the impacts of disposal on land (in Australia and overseas).

ACTION: NOPSEMA notes the CERG's interest in understanding decommissioning of offshore energy projects and will revert back to members via email with relevant information.

Agenda Item 5 – Review and close out

Agenda Item 5.1 – Recap actions and other business

The Chair sought general feedback and questions from CERG members:

- CERG members agreed that the format of the meeting works well, with specific feedback on the usefulness of the sharing of engagement insights in an open forum and the targeted discussion areas (and their ability to generate positive discussion)
- Keen interest from CERG in hearing information on progress of offshore wind developments and the regulation of these projects

ACTION: NOPSEMA to review Terms of Reference – including to consider updating to include Offshore Infrastructure Regulator (OIR) scope in CERG and bring updated draft to next meeting for discussion.

ACTION: NOPSEMA to schedule an OIR Update in the next agenda and to ensure an OIR representative is present at the next meeting (currently scheduled for November 2025).

- Education and communication as a critical piece of engagement was a strong theme in discussions directly, CERG members commented that community and stakeholders want to hear from NOPSEMA – and that the engagements that NOPSEMA has undertaken to date are building trust. CERG members reiterated **plain English** and **accessibility** of language used in communications and engagement materials are key, and the inclusion of independent experts to provide information also adds weight to the information being shared.

Agenda Item 5.2 – Date of next meeting

Next meeting scheduled Wednesday 12 November 2025 at 10am.

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting at 12pm.

Attachment 1

Attendees list

NOPSEMA representatives
Sue McCarrey, Chief Executive Officer (Chair)
Cameron Grebe, Deputy CEO – Strategic Regulation and Improvement Division
John McGuire, Director Regulatory Stakeholder Engagement
Susan Weary, Stakeholder Engagement Specialist – Regulatory Engagement
Community representatives
Jacqueline Hine
Stuart Field
Andrew Levings
Sander Scheffers
Luke Skinner
Terry Atkinson
Danielle Hartshorn
Sean-Paul Stephens
Apologies
Jason Froud
Piers Verstegen
Jess Lerch