Communicating with government – what’s the message?
1. Understand the language

Politicians operate in a political economy, where the currency is the vote.

The corporate sector operates in a commercial economy, where the currency is the dollar.

A successful project understands and respects both.
2. Understand the drivers

- All project decisions will ultimately be “political” decisions
- Politicians are less interested in what the science says and more interested in what their constituents think the science says
- Science can sometimes be the fall guy
3. Understand the stakeholders

- Every nearby neighbour is a vulnerable species
- Every local politician (local, state and federal) is an endangered species
- At election time, every local politician is a critically endangered species
4. Understand the “other” process

- Scientific and technical assessments are relatively simple:
  - An impact either can or cannot be mitigated in accordance with the rules

- Social impact and community engagement assessments are much greyer:
  - Sentiment, not empirical evidence, can influence an outcome/approval
Recent examples

- Metgasco, NSW:
  - Licence to drill suspended by Minister because “the company hadn’t properly consulted the community”

- Boral, Qld:
  - P&E Court appeal judgement confirmed community and stakeholder engagement process helped mitigate against two, potentially catastrophic technical oversights
What decision-makers want

- Reliable information
- Facts
- Early warning
- Solutions
- Linkages to government frameworks or priorities
What decision-makers don’t want

- Surprises
- Political advice
- Threats
- Problems with no (proposed) solutions
What should be in the message?

- Society depends on our knowledge and advice
- Our work must always be done in context
- Respect should be the foundation of our work
- It is the best way to influence decision-makers