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1. DEVELOPING THE PROJECT

1.1 Introduction

The foundation for the CO₂CRC Otway Project was established as long ago as March 1998, when it was first proposed to the Board of the then Australian Petroleum Cooperative Research Centre (APCRC) that a programme be established to look at the opportunities in Australia for “geologically disposing” of carbon dioxide, with an initial focus on high-CO₂ natural gas, but with the intention to also look at the opportunities for applying the technology more broadly, to address what was perceived as Australia’s looming greenhouse gas issue. In 1998, this was not an issue of broad community or political import and therefore it was not possible to get funding from the CRC Programme, despite attempts to do so. Nonetheless the Board continued to support the concept. A workshop was held in Perth, Western Australia to discuss geosequestration in late 1998, under the aegis of Chevron (who was at that stage increasingly interested in the technology for the proposed Gorgon Project) and subsequently, a number of oil and gas companies (BHPB, BP, Chevron, Shell,

Woodside), together with the Australian Greenhouse Office, agreed to provide some funding to get work underway.

In 1999, the GEODISC (Geological Disposal of CO₂) Project was initiated by the APCRC, with the specific objective of assessing on a continent-wide basis, what the opportunities were likely to be for the geological storage of carbon dioxide in Australia (Cook et al. 2000). In order to make that assessment, a team of earth scientists was assembled by the Centre, drawing on the original participants in the APCRC (CSIRO, Curtin University, University of NSW, University of Adelaide), together with new members of the team from Geoscience Australia. The outcome of that work, which extended over 4 years, was to convincingly show that there were indeed opportunities to apply the technology in Australia and, as part of the GEODISC Project, a very preliminary analysis of the storage potential of Australia was undertaken, the first such exercise attempted for an entire continent. The results, which were summarised in a series of publications and APCRC reports, clearly suggested that Australia did indeed have the potential opportunity to apply what was then known as geosequestration (carbon capture and storage, or CCS) on a large scale. By 2001–02, greenhouse gas concerns in government and the community at large were increasingly evident and the GEODISC findings had a