

**Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee**  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Department of Industry, Science and Resources  
**Inquiry into the Protecting the Spirit of Sea Country Bill 2023**  
26 August 2024

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**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** Department of Industry, Science and Resources

**TOPIC:** Information provided to proponents

**REFERENCE:** Question on Notice (Hansard, Page 11)

**QUESTION No.:** 1

**Senator COX:** Who are under DISR as well—same ministry. So essentially it's not consultation; it would be more of a mapping exercise that possibly Geoscience Australia could undertake, should it be funded to—to not just look for gas as it does under the Future Gas Strategy, which we've established at Senate estimates, under the Future Made in Australia push that this government are now taking. We actually have to provide maps that show these are high-value areas in subterranean waters and in Commonwealth waters, that before the two ice ages that we survived there was cultural heritage that exists there, because what we've heard in some of the information that two industry proponents have provided is that they're doing some of that mapping, they're aware of these things, but no one's talking about them. There are no publicly available maps to show that proponents have a responsibility to make sure this is in their environment plans. They should also make sure that they're acutely aware before they go into a process of bidding. It's like walking into a house. I wouldn't pitch to go and look at a house if I didn't think it had all the rooms to facilitate for my kids to sleep in, would I? And if I knew that there was someone's dog buried in the backyard, I might think twice about what that might look like if I'm going to dig it up and put a swimming pool there. Am I correct?

**Mr Waters:** Largely what you're speaking about there is beyond NOPTA's remit. It's probably something that—

**Senator COX:** I'm just trying to map it out, Mr Waters, so that people get a bit of a clear picture around that.

**Mr Waters:** As I said in the earlier part of my answer, NOPTA is in between two functions here of consultation. The first part is handled pre-competitively and is not within NOPTA's remit.

**Senator COX:** But, just to clarify, it's not done. Are we correct? There's no information that's provided to proponents currently under DISR and under Geoscience or to proponents who want to go into the offshore acreage bidding process. There is no information provided to them in relation to—

**Mr Waters:** I don't know the answer to that. It is before NOPTA's—

**Senator COX:** But NOPTA doesn't have any of that? You don't have any line of sight of that?

**Mr Waters:** No.

**Senator COX:** Okay, thank you. Maybe DISR could answer that question if possible.

**Ms Urquhart:** I don't believe that there is mapping work of the type that you describe, Senator, that is provided to proponents. But there is obviously engagement, and there is another part of our department, under my group—and I'm afraid I'm not across the details—that does do some interaction. Certainly I'd be happy to bring you back more information on notice. But, insofar as Geoscience Australia being charged with mapping cultural heritage, no, that's not the case currently. Department of climate change colleagues might have information on the status of mapping of cultural heritage in the way that you describe. Then we might be able to bring back on notice what if any of that is provided to proponents.

**Senator COX:** That's great, thank you.

## **ANSWER**

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources and Geoscience Australia do not provide First Nations cultural heritage maps to proponents as part of the offshore acreage bidding process.

States and territories have established databases registering cultural heritage sites.