

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-15
23 October 2014

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: Australian Institute of Marine Science

TOPIC: Research on the introduction of species into the Great Barrier Reef

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 23 October 2014, page 32-33)

QUESTION No.: SI-17

Senator WATERS: Thank you. Can we move on to the Great Barrier Reef specifically. Is there any research being done by AIMS or that you are aware by any other body about introducing species into the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr Gunn: Not that I am aware of but I can certainly take that on notice and do some searching for you

Senator WATERS: Thank you. I raised this with the departmental officials the other day and they were aware of some research, I recall, by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. Does that sound familiar to you or jog your memory in any way?

Mr Gunn: This may be off course, but one of the projects that AIMS collaborates on, both through the foundation and through some international collaborations, is one that is essentially called 'Assists Evolution'. For many years AIMS researchers have been looking at variability in various species of coral and other organisms on the Great Barrier Reef and their ability to adapt to climate change....

Senator WATERS: Can you take on notice to provide me a bit more detail about the scope of the impacts of any such introduction or relocation, whatever term is appropriate, and whether or not your research is also looking at the impacts that will have on the ecosystem?

Mr Gunn: I can certainly do that...

Senator Ronaldson: Just so Mr Gunn is clear, are you talking about indigenous movement as well as introduced species?

Senator WATERS: I think Mr Gunn has clarified that there were not any plans to introduce species. He was talking about—

Mr Gunn: None that I know of, I think is what I said.

Senator WATERS: That he knows of but he was going to check on that.

Mr Gunn: I was.

ANSWER

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) is not conducting any research in which species will be introduced to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), nor are we aware of any research being carried out by other bodies on this subject.

All of the current “Assisted Evolution” research at AIMS is being undertaken in the highly secure and controlled environment of the National Sea Simulator as proof-of-concept. The theories being explored, if applied, would not involve introducing new species into the GBR, or the translocation of existing GBR species outside their current areas of location.

The limited work completed to date and the future proposed work (refer SI-124) are all very early phase research focused on technical viability. Many more steps, including further research on ecological risk and impact would occur before AIMS would consider making any recommendations regarding adoption.