

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Additional Budget Estimates, February 2012

Program: Division or Agency: 1: GBRMPA **Question No:** 039

Topic: Risk analysis on the increase of shipping in the Great Barrier Reef

Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: 91 (13/2/12)

Senator Waters asked:

Senator WATERS: ...In response to questions at the last estimates about shipping increases through the reef you provided me with a very helpful table which said that shipping movements for Abbot Point, where there is a multicargo facility proposed, would increase from 190 ships per annum to between 1,120 and as much as 3,425, an increase in shipping of between six and 18 times on an annual basis. Has GBRMPA done any risk analysis on the increase of shipping in those ports and on the implications for the reef and what are both the likelihood and the consequences of those risks—namely, how often can we expect a grounding or an oil spill?

Dr Reichelt: It is under way as we speak. The marine park authority, in partnership with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Maritime Safety Queensland, has initiated a three-part cooperative review of shipping in the Great Barrier Reef looking at many aspects that were generated in the review, including on the back of the extension of the vessel traffic service that occurred last year. That risk assessment was high on our list of priorities for that group and is under way now. It is not completed but, yes, we are working on that issue because it looks set to happen.

Senator WATERS: If you could table anything you are able to at this point before it has been finalised, that would be much appreciated.

Answer:

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Maritime Safety Queensland and other relevant agencies is initiating a review of shipping in the Great Barrier Reef and adjacent areas in the light of the expected increase in shipping activity. This review is in its early stages and nothing can be tabled at this stage.

Documents most relevant to a review of shipping risks in the Great Barrier Reef are:

- The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009
http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/3867/Ports_and_shipping.pdf
- A report for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority "Final Report on the Assessment of the Risk of Pollution from Marine Oil Spills in Australian Ports and Waters" dated 14 December 2011
http://www.amsa.gov.au/Marine_Environment_Protection/National_plan/Reports-Fact_Sheets-Brochures/documents/DNV_Final_Report.pdf

- A report by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority "Improving safe navigation in the Great Barrier Reef" dated April 2010
http://www.amsa.gov.au/Shipping_Safety/Great_Barrier_Reef_and_Torres_Strait/documents/AMSA%20report%20of%20safe%20navigation%20in%20the%20GBR.pdf

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Program: Division or Agency: 1: GBRMPA **Question No:** 040

Topic: Cooperative review of shipping in the Great Barrier Reef

Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator Waters asked:

1. In the February 2012 additional estimates hearings Dr Reichelt advised that a cooperative review of shipping in the Great Barrier Reef is underway. Please advise what are the three parts of the cooperative review? When will each part be concluded? Will they all be made publicly available?

Answer:

1. The three-part review refers to the involvement of the three agencies predominantly responsible for managing shipping in the Great Barrier Reef. They are the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Maritime Safety Queensland. The project is in its early stages and a timetable for completion is not yet available. The work is being led by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1: GBRMPA **Question No:** 041
Topic: Western Basin Dredging project
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

1. In the February 2012 additional estimates hearings Dr Reichelt stated that he had reviewed the original approval of the spoil ground for the Western Basin Dredging project, and found it to be highly retentive compared to some on other parts of the Queensland coast. Please advise:
 - a. What makes the Western Basin Dredging project spoil ground “highly retentive”?
 - b. Which other parts of the Queensland coast was Dr Reichelt referring to, that are less retentive?
 - c. What makes these other areas less retentive?
2. In response to a question on notice following the October 2011 Estimates GBRMPA advised that spoil material dumped at the Western Basin Dredging spoil ground was to the greatest extent retained on the site and did not affect areas 2km off the site. If dredge spoil not travelling more than 2km is considered “highly retentive” how far can dredge spoil travel when dumped in less retentive locations?

Answer:

1. The statement that the East Banks Spoil Disposal area was highly retentive was based on hydrographic and benthic surveys conducted in 1992-1996 which showed that material placed at this location had not moved more than 2 kilometres from the site. Following implementation of an 80 metre buffer zone inside the East Banks Spoil Disposal area, hydrographic and benthic surveys have indicated that material placed at the East Banks site is largely retained within its boundaries. Modelling of spoil disposal in the East Banks Spoil Disposal area indicated that there would be a temporary increase in the levels of suspended sediments and sediment deposition around the East Banks Spoil Disposal area. The department, in consultation with Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, developed water quality and dredging conditions for the Western Basin Dredging project to ensure the impacts of disposal at the East Banks site are acceptable.
 - a. The East Banks Spoil Disposal area is highly retentive due to: the low current velocity (approximately 0.25 to 0.75 knots) across the spoil ground that is not sufficient to mobilise the dredge material; it is an area where natural sediment deposition occurs; it is clear of shipping transit lanes and anchorage areas; and it is clear of the area trawled by professional fishermen.

- b. Any area along the Queensland coast that is subject to: high current velocities; is not an area where natural sediment deposition occurs; shipping transit lanes and anchorage areas; or areas that are actively trawled by commercial fishermen.
 - c. The resuspension of dredge material is directly related to current velocity and physical disturbance through shipping and other commercial activities.
2. The distance that the dredge spoil can travel is largely governed by the hydrodynamic conditions at the disposal location and the sediment particle size. All dredge spoil areas require Australian Government approval. Approval is only granted where it can be demonstrated that the disposal of dredge spoil will not significantly impact on the receiving environment away from the spoil disposal area. Guidelines for determining the level of potential impact on the receiving environment are provided in the National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging 2009 and the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality 2000 and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's own Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Guidelines.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1: GBRMPA **Question No:** 042

Topic: UN report "Resilient People, Resilient Planet"

Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator Waters asked:

1. Regarding the UN's recently released "Resilient People, Resilient Planet":
 - a. Was GBRMPA part of drafting this input? Was the Department of Environment, or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade the lead contributor?
 - b. When was this input submitted to the UN High-level panel on Global Sustainability?

Answer:

1. a. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority was not part of drafting this input. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was the lead agency supporting Mr Rudd's participation in the UN High-level Panel on Global Sustainability (GSP), with assistance from other Commonwealth agencies, including the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.
- b. The input on the Great Barrier Reef was submitted to the GSP Secretariat on 14 December 2011 (New York time).