

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio**

Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2010

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

**Broad Topic:** Talisman Saber exercises –  
role of GBRMPA

**Proof Hansard Page and Date** 107-108 (18/10/10)  
**or Written Question:**

**Senator Ludlam asked:**

Senator LUDLAM—Is it the case that the authority distributed copies of the TS2009 public environment report and other materials related to this massive joint military exercise within your domain of the marine park including show bags with balloons?

Dr Reichelt—I am not aware of what sort of materials were involved at that function.

...

Senator LUDLAM—Are you able to take that on notice and provide us with the show bag, if such a thing existed? I am referring specifically to the TS2009 open day in Rockhampton, so that might give you some point of reference to start with. I would have thought that promotion is actually a conflict of interest with your core objective of protection of the marine park.

Dr Reichelt—I will look into it and inform you of what that involvement was. Our involvement is as a reviewer of their material and directions for ensuring the environmental safety of the marine park.

Senator LUDLAM—Which I think is appropriate, so let us turn to that. What role do you have in monitoring and assessing the impacts of these exercises? I think they are the largest that are undertaken in Australia at any given time. They occur every two years and it is a huge deployment of American air, sea and land forces and armour and all sorts of other stuff, including live fire exercises and so on. When the war games are actually occurring, what role does the authority play in monitoring and assessing those impacts?

Dr Reichelt—I am aware we attend the initial briefings of all the offices and countries involved at the outset. We are involved in, as I said, assessing their environmental impact and public environment report. We have a number of staff in the field in Shoalwater Bay during the exercise who attend the daily briefings and visit various parts where they are able to visit, given that it is a military exercise.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you provide us with some material on notice, anything at all about the activities of those offices, in particular the ones who were on site at the time?

Dr Reichelt—Yes, I can.

**Answer:**

[Material distributed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority at the Talisman Sabre Exercise Open Day](#)

The Authority attended the Talisman Sabre 2009 Exercise Open Day which was held in Rockhampton on 5 July 2009.

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The Authority and Department of Defence had a shared space which contained information products to hand out to the public.

Department of Defence information products included the State of the Environment Report for Shoalwater Bay Training Area 2008 and other materials, including a bag containing printed material and balloons.

Authority products handed out at the event included:

- Marine Park Zoning Maps
- Specific information on Marine Park zoning in Shoalwater Bay
- Information on Water Quality
- Information on Climate Change
- Information on Coral Bleaching
- Information on Marine Animals, and
- Posters of Marine Animals.

The Authority did not have a show bag at the open day in Rockhampton in 2009.

At the end of the day Defence staff still had some information material to hand out and Authority staff assisted in handing out the remaining bags of Defence material to the general public as all Marine Park information had been handed out.

The objectives of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* specifically refer to ecologically sustainable use and providing public education about the Reef. The Act also encourages engagement with communities and industry to achieve its primary objective – which is the long term protection and conservation of the Great Barrier Reef.

As Defence activities have a high profile within the Rockhampton region, it was anticipated that questions from the general public would be asked regarding possible environmental impacts of Talisman Sabre on the Reef.

Authority staff were present on the day to answer questions from the public about measures taken to mitigate possible impacts on the marine environment and marine animals in the region.

GBRMPA's role in environmental management of Talisman Sabre exercises

The Authority is involved in the management of Defence use of the Marine Park at a number of levels. This includes via legislative instruments, such as the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2004* specifically Part 5.2(d), which provides for use of the Marine Park by Defence following notification to the Authority; and, through the Authority's participation on the Department of Defence/Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Executive and Working Committees and Shoalwater Bay Training Area Environmental Advisory Committee.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment of Defence Activities in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area was conducted in 2006 and this document identifies Defence activities with the

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potential to impact World Heritage values and describes measures to mitigate impacts. This assessment covers routine Defence activities within the Marine Park and a Management Agreement between the Authority and Defence (2008) sets out the framework for its implementation. Maritime Activities Environmental Management Plans and Standard Operating Procedures set out more detailed environmental management requirements.

For activities outside the scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Department of Defence prepares Public Environment Reports. A Public Environment Report is currently being developed for Talisman Sabre 2011.

The Authority has been involved in the planning of Talisman Sabre exercises conducted in 2005, 2007, 2009 and for the upcoming Talisman Sabre 2011 by providing advice in relation to preparation of the Strategic Environment Assessment and Public Environment Reports. The Authority is a member of the Shoalwater Bay Training Area Environmental Advisory Committee.

The Authority also participates in activity specific forums such as the Talisman Sabre 2011 Environmental Risk Management Workshop.

Activities of Authority and Marine Parks officers on site during military exercises

Authority staff observed Talisman Sabre field operations in 2005, 2007, 2009 and will be present again in 2011. Safety requirements limit the scope of field operations, however, the Authority plays a significant role in ensuring the key aspects of the marine environment are managed within the exercise. This includes requirements for marine fauna spotters on vessels, reduction of speeds in shallow water and management of amphibious landings to minimise benthic disturbance. These requirements are set out in the Maritime Activities Environmental Management Plan, Standard Operating Procedures and Environmental Clearance Certificates.

Authority staff, when conducting site inspections, attend the required daily briefing and observe operations from supervised positions. This includes, for example observations of amphibious landings at Sabina point (2007) and Freshwater Beach (2009).

Authority staff, together with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Marine Parks staff, also undertake site inspections at various times throughout the exercise cycle. Observations from these inspections are then fed back into exercise planning.