

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio  
Additional Budget Estimates 2009  
26 February 2009

**Question:** AR-11  
**Topic:** NTIRP activation levels  
**Proof Hansard Page:** E50

**Senators Ronaldson, Bushby and Eggleston asked:**

**Senator RONALDSON**—The activation level, which I understand is the threat level, has not been downgraded or changed since October 2005. Are there any plans to review that to a green level or something?

I do not pretend to fully understand the activation level.

**Dr Tucker**—The purpose of our consultations with the members is to gather their views about the impact—I refer to the bushfires in particular here—of the bushfires on the tourism industry and make a decision about whether the level of activation needs to change.

**Senator BUSHBY**—What is the current level of activation?

**Dr Tucker**—The current level of activation is green, but it is under review.

**Senator BUSHBY**—Which means what?

**Dr Tucker**—The information that we have received is that there is clearly international media coverage about the fires. There is no evidence of media coverage deterring people from coming to Australia, but clearly people reading about the fires might be postponing their travel arrangements.

**Senator BUSHBY**—Was the activation level set at green because of the Victorian bushfires?

**Dr Tucker**—No, it has been at green for some time.

**Senator BUSHBY**—What does green mean in terms of the plan? If you set something at green what is that saying?

**Ms Madden**—There is a formal description, which we can provide on notice. But it means ‘status normal, travel to Australia’, and the perception of travel to Australia is positive.

**Senator BUSHBY**—So, green is like a green traffic light in a sense?

**Ms Madden**—Going to the bushfire example again, which is currently under discussion, there is a proposal that the green be moved to a more amber setting, at least for some parts.

**Senator BUSHBY**—There are three levels, are there?

**Ms Madden**—Yes, there is green, amber and red.

**Senator EGGLESTON**—Can you give us any examples of when the system warning has been red?

**Ms Madden**—To my knowledge, it has never been red.

**Dr Tucker**—To my knowledge, it has not been red, but perhaps we could take on notice to investigate whether it has been red.

**Answer:**

The National Tourism Incident Response Plan (NTIRP) actually has four levels of activation: blue, green, amber, and red. Blue is the base or lowest level of activation and indicates that there is no or a low threat. As the plan is always active, there is always a level of NTIRP activation.

The NTIRP is currently, and has been since 2005, activated at the green level in recognition of the continued threat of an outbreak of Avian Influenza. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is currently at phase 3 of alert in the Global Influenza Preparedness Plan. The WHO is concerned that an avian influenza virus and a human influenza virus might mix, resulting in a new strain of influenza virus that could be easily passed from person to person. This could trigger an “influenza pandemic”, where the disease spreads rapidly around the world, infecting many people.

Australia is currently at Overseas 3 level of pandemic threat alert, where there is human infection overseas but no human to human spread. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing states that "Health authorities are concerned about the possibility that an entirely new form of influenza could develop and cause an influenza pandemic if bird flu were to evolve into a form that is able to be transmitted easily between people and cause widespread disease and severe illness". This would, of course, have major implications for the Australian tourism industry and therefore requires on-going monitoring.

A green activation level indicates that there is a guarded risk and requires a watching brief. As per the NTIRP, the following are the recommended actions for an activation level of green (recommended actions for each activation level are indicative only and are not a prescriptive or exhaustive list):

- convene Monitoring Group (via teleconference/email) to assess activation level;
- convene Tourism Communicators' Network;
- commence a watching brief; and
- Tourism Communicators' Network to brief ASCOT regarding latest media and market intelligence.

In 2003, during the SARS crisis, the NTIRP was known as the National Tourism Crisis Response Plan which did not have the same activation levels as the current NTIRP. However, subsequent actions as a response to the SARS crisis were equivalent to the NTIRP's red – high risk level. The Central Crisis Management Group (equivalent to the current Central Incident Management Group) initially met daily and progressively became weekly and then fortnightly.

Scenario planning has also indicated that incidents such as a bomb attack on a major international airport within Australia, or the emergence of a contagious disease with cases in Australia may raise the activation level to red.