

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2009-10
10 February 2010

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Coral Bleaching

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 10 February 2010, E46-47)

QUESTION No.: AI-96

Senator McGAURAN—The Australian Institute of Marine Science, in short, says that there is no threat to the Great Barrier Reef.

Senator Carr—That is not true. That is your opinion. That is not true and you have the chance to pursue that. If you are relying on the *Australian* newspaper for a source of advice, I suggest that you ask the officers directly instead. That statement, in short, is not true.

Senator McGAURAN—I am asking: do you agree and support the in-a-nutshell comment that mass coral bleaching is unlikely this summer, was not there last summer and is not likely in the future—except for certain areas, but that is not due to human climate change effect?

Dr Clark—The area of marine science is one where we have a number of researchers working and we have our expert here today to cover all of those questions.

Dr Johnson—May I get clarity from you as to the exact question you are asking. It is not clear to me what information you are seeking from me.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you agree with the comment reported in the *Australian*, quoting someone from AIMS, that there was no coral bleaching last year and that there is none predicted this year? Of course, this was confirmed at yesterday's estimates by GBRMPA as well. I think Senator McGauran's question is: do you agree with it?

Dr Johnson—I have not seen the report that you refer to. If you are asking me for comment on it, I would be happy to have a look at the report and take that question on notice. But, without having seen the detail of the report, I am not in a position to comment.

ANSWER

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) statement on its website "Climate change and the tropical marine environment" does not indicate coral bleaching in the last two years. A review of AIMS' response to the *Australian* article confirms little bleaching has occurred in the past two years. It is important to note that high Sea Surface Temperatures and high sunlight over a sustained period causes bleaching, but that wind and cloud conditions can reduce this threat. While there was bleaching predicted for the summer of 2008-09 cyclones Hamish and Ellie greatly affected weather conditions in GBR region averting the predicted bleaching event. In the summer of 2009-10 the risk of bleaching was predicted to be low but the potential for doldrum conditions to increase this threat were noted. During this period doldrum conditions were affected by cyclones Olga and Neville.