

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2009-10
01 June 2009

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: STATE OF FISHERIES – MORETON BAY

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard 1 June 2009, E40-41)

QUESTION No.: BI-50

Senator ABETZ— ...Can I ask a question in relation to Moreton Bay and the CSIRO making a report available just before the Queensland state election in relation to the state of fisheries in Moreton Bay, which attracted some publicity?

Dr Clark—Senator, Dr Johnson could cover that.

Senator ABETZ—I understand a scientist from the CSIRO Wealth From Oceans Flagship, a national research flagship, reported they had almost completed the first stage of a three-year collaboration and then started to make commentary on it before they had actually finished. Are you able to tell us about that Dr Johnson?

Dr Johnson—I am just seeking your guidance, Senator, as to exactly what you would like to know.

Senator ABETZ—Is it usual for the CSIRO to release unfinished studies into the public arena?

Dr Johnson—I am not exactly sure what data information you are talking about in terms of what was released. All I know is that our scientists would not be talking in the public domain unless the science that they were talking about had been peer reviewed. It may well be part of a long-term study, which is not unusual, but I would be surprised. I can take that on notice if you like, but to the best of my knowledge that is the case.

Senator ABETZ—I do not like mentioning individuals at these estimates but the *Australian*, Friday 27 February 2009 on page four, had an article at the bottom of the page referring to the project leader in relation to that. Possibly if we could be provided with a response to what the article was talking about and if you could provide that on notice, I would be much obliged.

ANSWER

The Australian newspaper published an article on 27 February 2009 claiming that CSIRO had weighed into the Queensland state election by declaring the government's decision to rezone Moreton Bay a success even though the evaluation wasn't complete.

CSIRO issued a media release on 26 February 2009 regarding a three-year monitoring program CSIRO scientists are conducting in conjunction with the Queensland EPA to evaluate the effectiveness of expanded 'green zones' in the Moreton Bay Marine Park. The new zonings had been released by the Queensland government as draft in March 2008 and finalised in October 2008, to come into effect on 29 February 2009.

In October 2008, CSIRO and the Queensland EPA agreed to issue a media release shortly before the new zoning took effect (i.e. before 29 February 2009). At the time of this agreement, CSIRO had no knowledge of the possible date of the Queensland state election. However, recognising that an election had been called at the time the media release was due to be issued, CSIRO consulted closely with the Queensland EPA to ensure that caretaker conventions were not breached.

The purpose of the media release was to:

- alert the public that CSIRO's research vessels would be operating in the new green zones, catching, tagging and releasing fish;
- seek public assistance with research by asking them to phone a 1800 number if they sighted tagged animals;
- communicate results of work to date which found that fish and crabs in existing protected 'green zones' in Moreton Bay are both bigger and more abundant than those outside the green zones.

The media release did not make any comment on the decision of the Queensland government to expand the green zones in the Moreton Bay Marine Park, or declare the decision to expand green zones a success, as was reported in *The Australian* newspaper. Rather, CSIRO stated "research has confirmed that fish and crabs in existing green zones of Moreton Bay are bigger and more abundant than those outside the zones".