



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Question on Notice, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Inquiry into the Torres Strait, 18 June, 2010.

Note: There is no Hansard available as at the time of this response and the question is a paraphrase of the Senator's actual words. The question was asked in the session at 11.10am, witnesses including the Departments of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Art; Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

Question (asked by Senator Alan Ferguson):

With regard to the Torres Strait, what are the continuation arrangements of the CERF, particularly the MTSRF?

Answer:

The four year \$40 million Marine and Tropical Science Research Facilities (MTSRF) is the largest component of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts' (DEWHA) \$100 million Commonwealth Environment Research Facility (CERF) program. MTSRF has funded research in the Torres Strait throughout its duration. MTSRF concluded its research program (with the exception of some research synthesis products currently being developed) on 30 June 2010. MTSRF is administered by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre on behalf of DEWHA.

The four year National Environmental Research Program (NERP) is replacing the CERF (and MTSRF) program. It is intended to continue funding environmental research in the Torres Strait through a Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Hub. Expressions of Interest against specific research areas were received from interested research institutions in May 2010. The research areas included the Torres Strait. These are in the process of being assessed by DEWHA and an expert scientific panel. It is intended that the successful applicants will be contracted to commence this research by the end of 2010. Up to \$7 million per year will be allocated to this hub.

To bridge the gap between the end of the CERF/MTSRF programs and the commencement of NERP, Minister Garrett directed that a Transitional program be implemented. The Transition is extending all CERF hubs, including MTSRF, for a period of up to six months. MTSRF research providers have proposed a research program for the Transition. This has been approved by Minister Garrett and is in the process of being contracted.