

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**  
**Legislation Committee**  
Answers to questions on notice  
**Environment portfolio**

**Question No:** 18

**Hearing:** Supplementary Budget Estimates

**Outcome:** Agency

**Programme:** Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)

**Topic:** GBRMPA Sea Dumping Proponent

**Hansard Page:** 53-4

**Question Date:** 18 November 2013

**Question Type:** Spoken

**Senator Waters asked:**

Senator WATERS: ..... I have asked you previously whether or not you seek detailed information from the proponent about whether or not they have looked at those alternatives to offshore dumping and the extent of the evidence base that you seek from proponents before approving offshore dumping. Has there been any change in approach since the last time I asked you about this?

Dr Reichelt: I do not believe so. The sea dumping act applies in the park and we have delegation on that. The act of dredging that we are referring to generally occurs outside of GBRMPA's jurisdiction but involves transport into the marine park and in that space our policies remain the same.

Senator WATERS: Okay. So you continue to have the approach of not seeking a detailed evidence base from the proponent about what the alternatives and whether they have considered those alternatives and done a cost-benefit analysis.

Dr Reichelt: No. Our approach has been the opposite of that. There have only been a couple. I am speaking about my term, which is six years. I can only recall a couple. The approach taken was to suggest at the first pass of the PER document that more effort should be put in to describing the alternatives. We did that two years ago. I could give you the fine detail on that.

Senator WATERS: If you can give me as much—

Dr Reichelt: But I believe that we have spoken about that before.

Senator WATERS: We have. I was under a different impression. If you can give me as much information about the evidence base that you require from proponents before you determine that offshore dumping is indeed the last resort that you will approve, that would be very helpful.

**Answer:**

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority requires the proponent to include in the Public Environment Report or the Environmental Impact Statement an analysis of alternatives to ocean disposal of dredged materials. This is consistent with the London Protocol, the *Environment Protection (Sea Dumping) Act 1981* ("the Sea Dumping Act") and the *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging 2009*.

The *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging 2009* contain an Assessment Framework, of which the first step is to evaluate alternatives to ocean disposal, including consultation with stakeholders on the environmental, social and economic impacts of each disposal option. The *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging 2009* state that "a permit shall be refused if the

determining authority finds that appropriate opportunities exist to re-use, recycle or treat material without undue risks to human health or the environment or disproportionate costs.” The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority implements the information requirements and assessment framework of the *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging 2009* by including this requirement into the guidelines for the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement provided to the proponent.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has recently commissioned a study to look at the viability of land-based dredge material re-use and disposal options. It is available online at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/7beff474-15b0-4033-84d7-193d984fabb2/files/gbr-dredge-material-management-appendixa.pdf>.

When determining whether ocean disposal can be considered, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority ensures that the proponent has rigorously evaluated alternatives to ocean disposal. If the proponent concludes that the alternatives to ocean disposal are not feasible, then the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority requires a sound justification or explanation. For example, the proponent may be asked to submit further evidence on the impacts of the alternatives if they have not already done so.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority then uses the proponent’s evaluation of alternatives to assess whether alternatives to ocean disposal are feasible based on social, environmental and economic impacts. In making this determination, matters regularly taken into account include:

- Particle size – Coarser sediments such as sands and gravels are generally more feasible to use on land, whereas finer sediments such as silts are more difficult to re-use.
- Cost – Proponents are required to submit costings of alternatives and explain their reasons for concluding that these costs are disproportionate.
- Available and appropriate land – Many ports have constrained land supply and are surrounded by sensitive coastal wetlands.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority uses qualified staff, many of whom have strong scientific backgrounds, to assess the information submitted. In some cases, independent advice is sought from contractors or researchers to inform the agency’s own assessment.