

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

Question No: 47

Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates

Outcome: Outcome 5

Programme: Environment Assessment and Compliance Division

Topic: GBRMPA Advice Concerning Gladstone Harbour

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Question Date: 18 November 2013

Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters asked:

Senator WATERS:My specific question was: what specific action did the department take when GBRMPA warned that, if there was not a strategic assessment done for Gladstone, EPBC processes would in effect be flawed? Was any action taken or not?

Mr Knudson: Again, I think, going back to Ms Cameron's comment, we will have to take that on notice.

Senator WATERS: Okay. Did the department inform the minister of GBRMPA's warning in that respect?

Mr Knudson: That would be in the same category as the previous question: we will have to take that on notice.

Answer:

Strategic assessments are one of a suite of approaches that may be appropriate for assessing the impacts of actions upon matters of national environmental significance. Strategic assessments consider impacts associated with implementing a specified 'plan, policy or program.' Major considerations pertinent to determining the suitability of undertaking a strategic assessment include:

- a willing strategic assessment partner;
- a statutory or planning basis for implementation of the 'policy, plan or program' and associated 'classes of actions'; and
- the ability of the strategic assessment to align, or build on, other Commonwealth, State or Territory processes.

During 2008 and 2009 the Department received individual development proposals for four proposed LNG plants on Curtis Island and for the Western Basin Dredging and Disposal Project (WBDDP). Under the EPBC Act, any person can refer a development proposal at any time for consideration and the government has an obligation to respond. Strategic assessments cannot switch off the project assessment provisions of the EPBC Act that allow proponents to refer actions for individual assessment.

During the assessment of these proposals, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority provided comments on the assessments which were considered by the Department.

Since 2011 the Australian Government has undertaken an Independent Review of the Port of Gladstone. The four experts on the Review Panel found that “existing approvals for projects in the Port of Gladstone were made consistent with the world heritage protection provisions of the EPBC Act at the time of the approvals”.