

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Answers to questions on notice

Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Inquiry: Regulation of farm practices that impact water quality outcomes in the Great Barrier Reef

Question No: 1

Hearing Date: 28 August 2020

Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Topic: Additional written QoNs from Senator Rennick

Question Date: 2 September 2020

Question Type: Written

Senator Rennick asked:

- a) Can you describe how your organisation assesses proposals and received reports that are intended to contribute towards policymaking? Please provide an example checklist if you use one.
- b) Do you specifically check for: a) different interpretations of data and b) the significance of the differences in interpretation, regarding choosing between options for addressing the issue or designing future policy.
- c) For such reports, do you request specific things to ensure that you receive what policymakers might require? What are these things?
- d) For received reports, do you check against any standard requirements? If you so, please outline what these checks are.
- e) Please provide full detail of the above checks performed within your organisation for the following three documents:
 - The Outlook Report 2019,
 - the 2017 “Scientific Consensus Statement” - Land use impacts on Great Barrier Reef water quality and ecosystem condition
 - the “Reef 2050 Long–Term Sustainability Plan”?
- f) The inquiry has received scrutiny from Dr Larcombe (submission 46) of the above 3 key documents (Outlook Report 2019, Consensus Statement 2017, Reefplan 2050). Have you considered this evidence? In this light, has the existing process of document production successfully delivered documents that meet all the needs of policymakers? Please explain your answer, including reference where appropriate to applicable state and federal codes of conduct and similar documents.
- g) Please define what you and your organisation understand by the term “ecologically relevant” in the context of the GBR targets on riverine supply of sediments and nutrients and of water quality.
- h) Please provide the logic and evidence that you and your organisation consider indicate that the targets for sediments given in Reef 2050 are “ecologically relevant” to the marine environment. Presumably, these refer to an understanding of processes in the marine environment – please provide details.

Answer:

1. The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment considers a range of information sources in the formulation of its policy advice to Government in relation to the Great Barrier Reef. This includes:
 - Evidence based reports on the health, pressures and likely future of the Great Barrier Reef, from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The 2019 Outlook Report synthesised information from multiple lines of evidence and cited 1488 references, comprising peer reviewed science, long-term monitoring program information and statistics from government databases.
 - The most current scientific understanding of land use impacts on Reef water quality and ecosystem condition detailed through the Scientific Consensus Statement. In making its conclusions, the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement draws upon an evidence base of over 1600 peer-reviewed published papers and technical reports to justify its conclusions.
 - Advice from Australian Government funded science agencies including the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. In conducting their research, these agencies partner with public, academic and private entities to ensure the best capability is brought to bear on a problem. Partnerships range from long-term, multi-partner strategic relationships through to short-term research and testing.
 - Advice from the Reef 2050 Independent Expert Panel and the Water Quality Independent Science Panel - a working group to the Independent Expert Panel.
 - Australian peer-reviewed research, including Australian Government funded research, that is helping to improve our understanding of Reef ecological systems and the surrounding catchments, such as that under the National Environmental Science Program.
2. Information regarding the term ecologically relevant can be found in the following document link https://www.reefplan.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/46096/gbr-water-quality-targets-june2017.pdf.