

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Budget Estimates

28 May 2012

Question: BR13
Topic: Agencies Consulted Prior to Acreage Releases
Proof Hansard Page: 128-129

Senator Siewert asked:

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of the process, do you actually write to the industry and to other government agencies letting them know the timeframe and that you are seeking their advice or input?

Dr Pigram: Geoscience Australia does not, but I will pass it on to Martin Squire.

Mr Squire: Senator, we do write to other Commonwealth agencies prior to the acreage release seeking their comments on potential issues that may impact potential applicants for those areas. Our state equivalents also undertake similar consultation with their consultation agencies as well.

Senator SIEWERT: So you write to the Commonwealth and state agencies?

Mr Squire: To be perfectly clear, the Commonwealth writes to the Commonwealth agencies. The state member of the joint authority writes to the state agencies. But both state and Commonwealth agencies are consulted prior to acreage release.

Senator SIEWERT: Which agencies do you write to? You would not write to all of them?

Mr Squire: No. We write to agencies, particularly at the Commonwealth level, who may have a particular interest. So at the Commonwealth level it is the department of the environment. It is also Customs, Defence and telecommunications. I am happy to provide a full list of those agencies we consult with.

Answer:

Prior to inclusion into the Annual Acreage Offshore Petroleum Acreage Release, all areas are subject to a rigorous assessment process, including technical assessment of prospectivity by Geoscience Australia. This process takes into account the multi-use nature of the areas and the potential impact of exploration on the marine environment and other users of the area. To ensure assessment thoroughness the process involves consultation with a number of Australian Government agencies whose stakeholders may have an interest in these waters, as well as telecommunication companies and relevant state governments.

There is consultation with the following agencies:

- Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities;
- Department of Defence;
- Australian Fisheries Management Authority;
- Australian Maritime Safety Authority;

- Attorney-General's Department;
- Border Protection Command;
- Australian Customs and Border Protection Service;
- Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy;
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade;
- Telstra and Reach; and
- The relevant state government (depends on areas location)

Concerns that may be raised during the consultation process are taken into account by the Government in finalising areas for inclusion in the release. Details on issues specific to certain areas, such as marine animal migratory routes, that potential explorers need to take into account when assessing and determining how to explore an area, are included in the Acreage Release information package.