

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

Question No: 201
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Program: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Topic: Shen Neng
Hansard Page:
Question Date: 01 November 2019
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority confirmed in Senate estimates on 21 October 2019 that the damages payment awarded in relation to the grounding of the Shen Neng 1 on Douglas Shoal ('the grounding') had been finalised.

What was the final amount of damages received by GBRMPA?

When was the payment received by GBRMPA?

Has a remediation plan been developed to rehabilitate damage caused by the grounding?
Please provide a copy of any remediation plan.

What is the timeframe for implementation of the remediation plan?

Nearly 10 years has passed since the grounding event. Has this delay made the damage more difficult to remediate? What efforts have been made to mitigate against further damage during this period?

Is it possible to fully rehabilitate the ecological values of damaged areas to their status prior to the grounding?

What is the estimate of the full amount required to rehabilitate all damage caused by the grounding?

Is there a shortfall between the estimated rehabilitation costs and the payment received? If so, what is the amount of the shortfall?

If the payment received will not cover the full cost of rehabilitation has GBRMPA requested, or will GBRMPA request, additional funding from:

- a. the Commonwealth government?
- b. the Queensland government?
- c. other sources? If yes, which funding bodies have been or will be approached?

If the full cost of rehabilitation cannot be secured, how will GBRMPA prioritise rehabilitation efforts?

What efforts are being made to involve traditional owners in rehabilitation activities?

What is the timeframe for implementation of the remediation plan?

Please outline actions taken by GBRMPA to prevent a similar grounding event from happening in future.

Answer:

Out-of-court settlement

Following legal action brought by the Commonwealth of Australia, in September 2016 the Commonwealth secured an out-of-court settlement with the ship's representatives. As part of this settlement, in October 2016 the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) received \$35 million for the purposes of remediation.

Remediation planning

Since settlement funds were received, detailed planning has been undertaken including site surveys, baseline monitoring and an evaluation of the feasibility of remediation options to inform the procuring and managing of remediation contractors. The approach to market for remediation works is planned for early 2020 and it is anticipated that remediation will be conducted in 2021-2022.

The project's aim is to support natural recovery of the shoal, rather than to attempt to return the shoal to pre-incident condition. The focus is on removing contamination, stabilising loose rubble and improving habitat complexity. These actions will lay the foundation for corals, algae, sponges and other diverse marine life to re-colonise damaged areas. Substantial portions of the shoal were not directly impacted and continue to provide highly diverse ecological functions; these undamaged areas will contribute 'seed source' to re-colonise damaged areas, if the basic conditions for life are restored.

Changes over time

While the continued presence of material is preventing natural recovery at the site, it has not made the damage more difficult to remediate. The detailed planning and site assessment undertaken will facilitate the most cost effective remediation possible.

Remediation costs

Recent site surveys have identified the priorities for remediation. The full costs of remediation will not be known until after tenders are called; however, the Authority is of the view that the project's objective can be achieved within the budget available. The Authority has no plans to seek further funds from government or other sources. Funds have also been set aside for long-term monitoring of recovery.

Traditional Owner involvement

The project has an objective to enhance Traditional Owner values and opportunities. All procurement activities have included evaluation of tenderers' experience working with Traditional Owners and required tenderers to commit to Traditional Owner participation, employment and training outcomes. For example, the remediation planning contractor (Advisian Pty Ltd) has preferentially employed Traditional Owner sea rangers as crew on site surveys and is working with Traditional Owners to provide a professional internship for a tertiary student in environmental science.

Avoiding future incidents

The Authority works closely with other agencies to manage shipping in the Great Barrier Reef Region. Initiatives to improve vessel management in the region since the Shen Neng grounding include the following.

In July 2011, the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Vessel Traffic Service (REEFVTS) was extended to include the area from Mackay to the southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, near Bundaberg.

The North East Shipping Management Plan was released in 2014, and a review was finalised in July 2019. The Authority is an active member of the working group and assists in progressing actions. Some of the major achievements under this plan include:

- A pollution response fund of \$50 million was established and is managed by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.
- A two-way shipping route was implemented in 2014 from the Torres Strait to the southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, reducing the risk of collision.
- The National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies was reviewed in 2012, and all outcomes are being implemented through an agreed work program with states and the Northern Territory.
- The Australian Government, through the International Maritime Organisation, extended the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait 'Particularly Sensitive Sea Area' to cover part of the Coral Sea. In 2016, additional protective measures came into effect to minimise the risk of shipping incidents in this area.