

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

Question No: 246
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Potential Coral Bleaching
Hansard Page: 70
Question Date: 08 February 2016
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Siewert asked:

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of potential coral bleaching, have you done or got any assessment of the impact so far of current ocean warming? Have you done any assessment of both the existing marine parks that are not part of the review process and those parks that are subject to the review process?

Ms Barnes: I understand that, in the review process, there has been quite a lot of discussion around corals and the importance of protecting corals. I am not sure whether there has been assessment of the bleaching of the corals, but I can get back to you on any information we have.

Answer:

The Director of National Parks has supported assessments of coral cover and condition across a number of Commonwealth marine reserves, both existing and new, to assist in detecting changes from environmental impacts, including coral bleaching.

Pre-bleaching surveys have been conducted at selected reefs for the predicted 2016 bleaching event, however, we won't have an assessment of the impacts until follow up surveys are completed in April.

Tropical and temperate reef systems have been surveyed across eight reserves including Elizabeth and Middleton, the Coral Sea, Ashmore Reef, Mermaid Reef, Oceanic Shoals, Arafura, Wessel and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Indirectly, we support aerial monitoring that can be accessed by research institutions and other agencies to assess bleaching events.

The Director of National Parks is also in contact with the National Coral Bleaching taskforce, which is coordinating efforts across Australia to assess the impacts of coral bleaching.