

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

Question No: 22
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division
Topic: MARINE DEBRIS ON CETACEANS
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 10 June 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

1. How much work has been done that directly applies to the impact of marine debris on Cetaceans? - marine mammals commonly known as whales, dolphins, and porpoises?
2. What has been the result of that work?
3. Is dealing with the possible impacts of marine debris on Cetaceans a priority for the Department?

Answer:

1. Under the Government's Reef 2050 Plan election commitment, \$700,000 over two years has been committed for marine debris clean-up activities. This funding will be delivered through the Reef Trust.

The marine debris clean-up activities will improve the quality of coastal and marine habitats along the Great Barrier Reef. Activities will include the physical removal of marine debris, including ghost nets (abandoned fishing nets), and community engagement and awareness-raising. Activities will be selected and undertaken in accordance with the Reef 2050 Plan, the Reef Trust principles and objective, the Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan and the *Threat abatement plan for the impacts of marine debris on vertebrate marine life*.

Details on the delivery arrangements will be finalised following consultation with relevant groups and community organisations.

The Department has funded the following research that directly applies to the impact of marine debris on cetaceans:

- *Understanding the types, sources, and at-sea distribution of marine debris in Australian waters.* (Hardesty BD and Wilcox C. 2011) <http://www.environment.gov.au/node/18284>
- *Impacts of plastic debris on Australian marine wildlife* (C&R Consulting Pty Ltd 2009) <http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/impacts-plastic-debris-australian-marine-wildlife>
- *Pilot investigation of the origins and pathways of marine debris found in the northern Australian marine environment* (Centre for Australian Weather and Climate Research 2008) <http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/pilot-investigation-origins-and-pathways-marine-debris-found-northern-australian-marine>

Australia is engaged with international initiatives related to the impact of marine debris on cetaceans and other migratory marine wildlife that are being progressed through the

International Whaling Commission and the Convention on Migratory Species. The Department is also engaged at a regional level in the Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Program.

International Whaling Commission: Australia is participating in the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) work to better understand and mitigate the impacts of marine debris on whales and other cetaceans, including ongoing research under the Scientific Committee and a two-stage workshop process during the 2012-14 intersessional period. The two marine debris workshops, jointly led by the IWC's Scientific and Conservation Committees, were guided by an informal Steering Group of which Australia is a member. The workshops are bringing together world leading scientists, technical experts, and representatives from national governments and international organisations, including from Australia and our region.

The first IWC scientific preparatory workshop was held in May 2013 and identified actual and potential threats to cetaceans from marine debris. The report is available at: <https://events.iwc.int/index.php/scientific/SC65a/paper/view/277/267>

The second IWC workshop will be held in August 2014 and will identify a range of marine debris impact mitigation measures that can be applied locally, regionally and at a global level through IWC-led actions and partnerships. The report of the second workshop will be submitted to the IWC's 65th meeting in September 2014.

The IWC also supports a large whale entanglement adviser and trainer who coordinates the IWC's Global Whale Entanglement Response Network and capacity building programme. Information on the IWC's entanglement response work is available at: <http://iwc.int/entanglement>

Convention on Migratory Species: At the 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in 2011, Australia proposed a resolution, which was subsequently adopted, on marine debris and its impacts on migratory marine wildlife including birds, turtles, sharks and marine mammals. Following adoption of Resolution 10.4 – Marine Debris, Australia provided a \$AU75,000 voluntary contribution to the CMS to implement three key actions outlined in the resolution, mainly:

- identify knowledge gaps in the management of marine debris and its impacts on migratory species;
- identify best practice strategies for waste management used on board commercial marine vessels, taking into account the extensive work being undertaken by the International Maritime Organization, FAO and the International Standards Organization to avoid duplication, identify existing codes of conduct and determine the need for the improvement and/or development of new codes of conduct; and
- facilitate an analysis of the effectiveness of current public awareness and education campaigns to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

2. The first International Whaling Commission workshop report is available at: <https://events.iwc.int/index.php/scientific/SC65a/paper/view/277/267>

The report of the second workshop will be submitted to the International Whaling Commission's 65th meeting in September 2014.

The reports arising from the three projects undertaken through the Convention on Migratory Species will be presented to the CMS Scientific Council meeting for consideration meeting (1-3 July 2014) with a view to submitting the reports to the 11th Conference of Parties for endorsement. The reports will then be available for wider circulation.

3. The impact of marine debris on cetaceans is a priority for the Department. *Injury and fatality to vertebrate marine life caused by ingestion of, or entanglement in, harmful marine debris* was listed as a key threatening process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) in 2003. The listing advice identifies twenty EPBC Act listed threatened marine species that are adversely affected by marine debris, including species of birds, sharks, turtles and marine mammals.

The *Threat abatement plan for the impacts of marine debris on vertebrate marine life* was developed in 2009 to address this key threatening process.