

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

Question No: 205
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Oil and gas expanding into parks
Hansard Page:
Question Date:
Question Type: Written

Senator Siewert asked:

1. On 15 April 2015 it was revealed in nationwide media that a number of the new Commonwealth Marine Reserves (CMRs) had become subject to new oil and gas permissions (eg: new acreage, seismic permits, new exploration leases etc).
 - a. Was the Environment Department consulted by the Resources portfolio on this?
 - b. How many of the new CMRs have either new acreage opened up for bidding, or new oil and gas operating rights of any type approved in them post their declaration in December 2012?
 - c. How many of these are in (set-aside) zoning within the CMRs that prohibit mining?
 - d. Does the Environment Department consider that this undermines and pre-empts the Review by allowing allocation of new uses in parks whilst they are being reviewed? If so, what is being done to rectify it?

Answer:

- a. There is no requirement for the Department of Environment to be consulted on individual permits. The Department is regularly consulted through the process of developing new acreage releases.
- b. Fifteen, with the majority being in areas that allowed oil and gas activities (being Multiple Use Zones or Special Purpose Zones)
- c. Two involving Special Access Titles which intersected with a Marine National Park (Abrolhos) and a Habitat Protection Zone (Gascoyne). No new releases or access will be provided for exploration over marine reserves proclaimed as IUCN Cat. I (sanctuary zone), II (marine national park zone) or IV (habitat protection zone).
- d. The 'no-change on the water' policy that was introduced following the 2012 proclamation has been continued to allow the independent review to consider management and zoning arrangements, including what activities should be allowed in different zone types. Once the review is completed, new management plans will be prepared and set in place. The 'no change on the water' policy does not pre-empt the findings of the review and any subsequent response by Government.