

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

Question No: 216

Hearing: Budget Estimates

Outcome: Agency

Programme: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Topic: Indigenous rangers involved in compliance

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Question Type: Spoken

Senator WATERS asked:

Senator WATERS: So, moving quickly to staffing, how many of your staff are involved in on-ground compliance and enforcement and how many are doing assessments and approvals as at today or as close to today as possible compared with September 2013?

Mr Elliot : I cannot guarantee I will be 100 per cent accurate with these figures, but our field management compliance unit has approximately 22 or 23 staff. They are employees of GBRMPA whose main focus is compliance and, in particular, zoning plan compliance. That field management program also funds Queensland staff and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services, some of whom do compliance work, but I would not be able to give you a figure for that. Our environmental assessment and protection section has approximately 21 staff in it and approximately half of those are dedicated to, if you like, the permit assessment process. Then between the compliance work for the environmental management charge and the post-permits compliance that would be the other half of those staff.

Senator WATERS: I am sorry, what was that last bit?

Mr Elliot : The post-permits compliance—once you issue a permit the compliance work on that permit. Between the EMC and the post-permits compliance you have probably got six staff dedicated to that at the moment.

Senator WATERS: How does that compare with previous years?

Mr Elliot : That is more staff on post-permits compliance than in previous years, and it is an area that we are looking to strengthen over the next few years.

Senator WATERS: How many more given that you only have six?

Mr Elliot : It will probably only change in terms of staff allocation by one or two. It is in the systems that we are developing to assist them.

Senator WATERS: It is still pretty low, but it is going up.

Dr Reichelt : I do not have the numbers here, but over the next two years we have been allocated \$1.2 million under the Turtle and Dugong Protection Plan for an Indigenous ranger compliance enhancement project.

Senator WATERS: I do have some questions on that. Firstly, how many of the rangers and other compliance staff are doing the day-to-day on-water compliance and management activities?

Mr Elliot : Did you ask how many of the field compliance staff are actively out in the field?

Senator WATERS: Yes.

Mr Elliot : That would be at least three-quarters of them, so you are probably talking about 15 or 16 whose main job is to be out in the field.

Senator WATERS: How many of those are Indigenous rangers?

Dr Reichelt : I do not have the exact figure. If I could give that to you on notice? I just need to check that.

Senator WATERS: Is that the same pool of folk from whence the turtle and dugong Indigenous rangers will be sourced or is that a separate category?

Dr Reichelt : We have Indigenous people employed within the group as well as the additional funding program. I would need to check the number of Indigenous people doing that part.

Senator WATERS: For both of those aspects of their role.

Dr Reichelt : Yes.

Answer:

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has officers and partner agencies that deliver different compliance and enforcement functions related to the Marine Park. These compliance and enforcement functions are:

GBR Field Management Compliance unit

GBRMPA's Field Management Compliance Unit currently comprises 15 GBRMPA staff, 1 Queensland Parks and Wildlife officer and 1 Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officer.

GBRMPA assessments and approvals

There are 4 staff in GBRMPA's Environmental Assessment and Protection section whose role covers Environmental Management Charge (EMC) and permissions compliance. This is an increase from 2 in the 2013/14 financial year.

GBRMPA Indigenous Compliance

GBRMPA's Indigenous Compliance Team is made up of 3 staff, including 2 Senior Indigenous Compliance Officers (who are indigenous people) and 1 Manager- Indigenous Compliance. This group supports GBRMPA's compliance and enforcement activities and works with communities to improve compliance, particularly through compliance awareness training.

Next financial year under the governments Specialised Indigenous Ranger Programme GBRMPA will to employ four additional Indigenous rangers to progress training of community indigenous rangers to improve their compliance and enforcement skills and capabilities. These people are yet to be appointed.

GBRMPA works closely with the Indigenous Community Rangers groups who are connected to the GBRWHA. GBRMPA understands that there are 11 Indigenous Community Ranger Groups with Great Barrier Reef connections in the region from the Northern Peninsula Area to Bundaberg, employing a total of 143 rangers. GBRMPA understands that the Commonwealth Government *Working on Country* program delivered by Department of Prime Ministers and Cabinet employs about 125 rangers and provides funding to 10 of the 11 Ranger Groups; and the Queensland Government, through the *Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger* Program employs about 18 rangers and provides funding to 5 of the 11 Ranger groups.

GBRMPA maintains partnerships with both State and Commonwealth Departments to facilitate compliance training and field activities with Indigenous Community Ranger programs. In 2014-2015 the Indigenous Compliance Team delivered training to 204 participants.

Marine Park inspectors

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority works with many other partner agencies which are an essential part of compliance and enforcement in Great Barrier Reef. This includes through the long standing joint Field Management Program with Queensland.

As at June 2015, there are 183 appointed Marine Park inspectors, made up of 29 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority staff, 70 Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff, 25 Queensland Police Service staff and 59 Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol staff. These numbers have been relatively stable of past years.