

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

**Question No:** 222

**Hearing:** Budget Estimates

**Outcome:** Agency

**Programme:** Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

**Topic:** Coal Spill

**Hansard Page:**

**Question Date:**

**Question Type:** Written

**Senator Waters asked:**

1. We're very lucky that when the *Shen Neng* ran aground in 2010 the cargo of 68,000 tonnes of coal didn't end up on the sea floor, given what we know about coal's toxicity. I understand that one recommendation of the North East Shipping Management Plan (NESMP) was that ---

*Actions:*

- *AMSA to maintain a pollution response reserve of \$10 million and line of credit of \$40 million to ensure immediate access to funds in the event of a marine pollution incident.*
  - *GBRMPA and AMSA to investigate means of securing funding for restitution of non-pollution damage to coral reefs following a ship incident*
2. To clarify – would non-pollution damage to coral reefs would include remediation of the Shen Neng contamination?
  3. Would it include a coal spill?
  4. What's the progress on the above actions?
  5. Can you explain what you've done so far?
  6. How many FTE have you got working on the second of those two actions?
  7. What would the procedure be in the event of a coal spill?
  8. How much research have we got to draw on about the consequences of a big coal spill?
  9. What is GBRMPA's understanding of the risks of a large coal spill on the Reef?

**Answer:**

The National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies (The National Plan) sets out national arrangements, policies and principles for the management of maritime environmental emergencies.

The North-East Shipping Management Plan (NESMP) describes measures currently in place to manage the safety of shipping in the sensitive marine environments of Australia's north-east region and propose additional protective measures to further minimise the environmental impacts of these activities in the short, medium and long term.

1. Actions identified under the North-East Shipping Management Plan (NESMP) that are referred to are:

- *AMSA to maintain a pollution response reserve of \$10 million and line of credit of \$40 million to ensure immediate access to funds in the event of a marine pollution incident.*
- *GBRMPA and AMSA to explore mechanisms to fund high priority restoration and rehabilitation of reef habitats (and the removal of antifoulant paints) immediately following a ship grounding.*

2. To clarify – would non-pollution damage to coral reefs include remediation of the Shen Neng contamination?

One of the overarching principles of the National Plan is that the response and recovery is funded on the basis of the polluter pays. Remediation of non-pollution damage (including damage to the coral reef from the physical impact of the ship's hull) to coral reefs is not covered under the scope of the National Plan.

3. Would it include a coal spill?

The pollution response reserve is available to respond to pollution from both oil and hazardous and noxious substances as defined in the National Plan. Hazardous and noxious substance is defined in the National Plan to be any substance which, if introduced into the marine environment, is likely to create hazards to human health, to harm living resources and marine life, to damage amenities or to interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea.

4. What's the progress on the above actions?

Action 1 – In 2012-13 AMSA established a \$10 million pollution reserve for responding to pollution of the sea or harm to the marine environment by oil or hazardous and noxious substances, as set out in the National Plan. This was further supplemented in 2013-14 by a further \$40 million unsecured commercial line of credit, resulting in a total pollution response capability of \$50 million being available to meet the immediate costs of pollution response.

Action 2 – There have been a number of high-level meetings between GBRMPA and AMSA to discuss and investigate means of securing funding for non-pollution damage. This action will continue.

5. Can you explain what you've done so far?

See response in 4 above.

6. How many FTE have you got working on the second of those two actions?

GBRMPA does not specify FTE to work directly on this action – components of it are addressed by a number of staff across the agency.

7. What would the procedure be in the event of a coal spill?

The National Plan provides for a single comprehensive and integrated response arrangement to minimise the impacts of maritime emergencies. Consistent with the National Plan, any response to a maritime emergency within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park would be a coordinated approach between the GBRMPA, AMSA, the Queensland Department of Transport Main Roads (Maritime Safety Queensland), and other key stakeholders. The GBRMPA has a clear and formal role in any maritime emergency response in the Great Barrier Reef to provide environmental advice to the Control Agency leading the response.

It should be noted that under the National Plan the 'Control Agency' means the agency or company assigned by legislation, administrative arrangements or within the relevant contingency plan, to control response activities to a maritime environmental emergency.

8. How much research have we got to draw on about the consequences of a big coal spill?

There is a lack of knowledge around the potential chemical and physical effects of a large coal spill in the marine environment. Consequences may vary depending on the location, volume and source (coal properties) of the spill and the habitats and fauna present.

9. What is GBRMPA's understanding of the risks of a large coal spill on the Reef?

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014 rates the risk to the Great Barrier Reef Region ecosystem from a 'grounding large vessel' and 'spill - large chemical' as a 'Medium' risk.