

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice  
**Environment and Energy portfolio**

**Question No:** 103  
**Hearing:** Budget Estimates  
**Outcome:** Outcome 1  
**Program:** Environment Standards Division (ESD)  
**Topic:** Governance arrangements around the Reef Trust- Adani  
**Hansard Page:** 96 and 97  
**Question Date:** 22 May 2017  
**Question Type:** Spoken

**Senator Waters asked:**

Senator WATERS: Yes, but that is my very point. You can still use the Reef Trust mechanism but have the legally binding requirement in the permit. Why, in this case, has it been taken out of the permit and just given to the Reef Trust with much less scrutiny, accountability and structure around it? In all of those other instances, this has never happened, to my knowledge—but correct me if I am wrong. Why is it different for Adani?

Ms Collins: The difference in this case was that the approval for the original Adani project happened around the same time as the Reef Trust was established. It has been part of conversations with Adani over a couple of years that this was a possibility for Adani. It is only recently that the variation has been made, but it has been in conversations with Adani ever since the Reef Trust was set up.

Mr Cahill: You are looking for confidence in how robust the governance arrangements are around the Reef Trust.

Senator WATERS: Well, I will not get that, but I am looking for details.

Mr Cahill: What we will do is take that on notice. It is important to realise that the Reef Trust is not only informed by an Independent Expert Panel that is chaired by Professor Ian Chubb but is also overseen by the Reef Trust Joint Steering Committee, which has senior officials from both the Commonwealth and the Queensland government. That is the headline. As an Australian government, our advice is to make sure that you would not put something into something that was not robust. As a delegate under the EPBC Act, you have to be confident that the offset is being delivered and the mechanism is enabled to do that. As a delegate you turn your mind to two things—that what you are trying to offset is being offset and that the vehicle you are choosing to do that has the appropriate governance around it to give you confidence that it will be delivered. We will give you advice on our confidence around the Reef Trust as a vehicle to be able to deliver that offset.

Senator WATERS: What I would like you to advise me specifically is whether or not the minister's involvement is diminished by no longer having this as a marine offset strategy under the permit conditions but instead using the Reef Trust pathway, whether the community has the opportunity to even see what was the strategy and is now just some amorphous blob in the Reef Trust and the level of diminution of community involvement. I expect to be disappointed on both fronts, but I would await your response.

Mr Cahill: I am hopeful you will not be disappointed. We will take that on notice.

**Answer:**

The Government established the Reef Trust to improve water quality and coastal habitat along the Great Barrier Reef, control the current outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish and protect threatened and migratory species, particularly dugong and turtles.

The Government made the policy decision to enable the Reef Trust to deliver offsets on behalf of *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) approval holders, so as to improve strategic offset delivery wherever possible and to ensure that the design of offset-funded projects is guided by the best available science and resources.

Arrangements for the Reef Trust require that proposed offset-funded projects must be reviewed by the Reef 2050 Plan Independent Expert Panel and approved by the Environment Minister.