

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

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

**Question No:** 72  
**Hearing:** Budget Estimates  
**Outcome:** Outcome 1  
**Program:** Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)  
**Topic:** UNESCO Findings  
**Hansard Page:**  
**Question Date:** 07 June 2017  
**Question Type:** Written

**Senator Urquhart asked:**

What is the Department's view on the above UNESCO report findings that:

- a. "progress towards achieving water quality targets has been slow, and the most immediate water quality targets set out in the 2050 LTSP are not expected to be achieved within the foreseen timeframe"
- b. "that the implementation of the Plan will need to accelerate to ensure that the intermediate and long-term targets of 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan ( LTSP) are being met, in particular regarding water quality.. [ and ]...that important legislation regulating land clearing has not been passed yet, and that increased efforts are needed to ensure that all important legislation necessary to deliver the 2050 LTSP outcomes is put in place."
- c. "Climate change remains the most significant overall threat to the future of the property. It is recommended that the Committee express its serious concern at the coral bleaching and mortality that occurred in 2016 and at the second event underway in early 2017. While the long-term effects of these events cannot be fully evaluated yet, their scale serves to underline the severity of the threat to the property from climate change. At the site level, there is a need to consider how these mass bleaching events influence the effectiveness of the 2050 LTSP in its current form, notably in relation to the most urgently needed measures and improvements that contribute to the property's resilience."

**Answer:**

***Water quality***

- Meeting water quality targets is essential to protect the Reef because good water quality builds the reef's resilience in the face of climate impacts
- The Investment Framework has identified that over \$573 million has been allocated to Reef 2050 Plan water quality actions over the next five years and the most recent Great Barrier Reef Report Card shows we are making progress.
- We are confident our significant investment in water quality through the Reef Trust, as well as actions by the Queensland Government, are improving our progress towards the targets – and that this will be reflected in future Reef water quality report cards.

***Land clearing***

- The Queensland Government's commitment to strengthen vegetation management legislation, an action in the Reef 2050 Plan, is one of 151 actions across the seven themes of the Reef 2050 Plan.

- While new land clearing laws were not approved by the Queensland Parliament, the Queensland Government has indicated it is committed to delivering on this action.
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is protected as a matter of national environmental significance under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999. Where land clearing potentially has a significant impact on the Reef, it is subject to the EPBC Act.

### ***Climate Change***

- The Reef 2050 Plan recognises climate change is the greatest threat facing the Reef. The purpose of the Reef 2050 Plan is to improve the health and resilience of the Reef so it is better able to deal with the effects of climate change.
- The Reef 2050 Plan embeds a science-based adaptive management approach that enables strategies and actions to be adjusted based on what the evidence says.
- The Australian and Queensland governments are actively considering what further action should be taken to respond to pressures affecting the Reef, including widespread coral bleaching.
- Ministers have asked the Reef 2050 Independent Expert Panel and the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee to provide advice on how to best respond to the unprecedented bleaching.
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has recently convened a group of international and domestic experts to look at what can be done about the bleaching.