

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

Question No: 399
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Topic: EYE ON THE REEF DATA
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 29 October 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

I understand that water quality and turbidity monitoring data under the Eye on the Reef program has not been released for the inshore areas near the Whitsunday Islands. Please provide a representative summary of the Secchi Disk monitoring data for that area.

- a. Is it accurate that this data shows a deterioration even compared to the mid shelf data?

Answer:

The inshore waters of the Whitsundays are naturally prone to very large fluctuations in turbidity due to nearby island or mainland runoff and an abundance of warm shallow water easily affected by particle re-suspension due to wind and tidal flows as well as phytoplankton growth.

Detecting turbidity trends within such a variable and dynamic area requires a large number of permanent sample site replications and a very regular, consistent collection of observations.

- a. A lack of consistent survey samples has resulted in the turbidity data for the inshore reefs around Whitsundays to be far too sporadic for any discernible trend and therefore draw any real conclusions. An Eye on the Reef monitoring site offshore Whitsundays (mid-shelf) has consistent data but atypical tidal influence and has yet to be factored into a detailed analysis of turbidity trend at this single location, which is not representative of the Whitsunday Islands reefs.