

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

Question No: 98
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Biodiversity Conservation Division
Topic: DRAFT REEF 2050 PLAN - WATER QUALITY
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 29 October 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

“Priority areas” aren’t defined anywhere in the 2013 Plan, or the Reef 2050 Plan. Can you please explain what exactly they are?

- a. Do they refer to a 2012 publication by Jon Brodie and Jane Waterhouse et al.?
- b. It is my understanding that that publication simply ranked areas in order of priority rather than identifying a specific set of areas and excluding others. Is that correct?
- c. Please provide a list of priority areas as defined.
- d. Has their exact geographical extent been identified?

Answer:

Priority areas and pollutants for management are defined at Appendix 1 (page 32) of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013. Priority areas are those that were identified as posing the highest threat to the coral and seagrass ecosystems of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) in the 2013 Scientific Consensus Statement – Land Use Impacts on GBR Water Quality and Ecosystem Condition.

- a. Yes, this was also reviewed in 2013 as part of the Reef Plan Scientific Consensus Statement 2013 which incorporated the Waterhouse et al. 2013 publication.
- b. The publication synthesised the best available science through a well-documented process outlined in the report. It provides a summary of the management priorities for reducing the relative risk of degraded water quality to the Great Barrier Reef and does not exclude other lower priority regions, just as Reef Plan 2013 does not. Reef Plan Appendix 1 specifies that water quality improvement is critical across all natural resource management regions, not just the priority ones. While reporting against the targets occurs for all of the GBR regions, increased focus will be on the priority areas.
- c. From Appendix 1 – Identifying priority areas for management, Page 32 Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013:

Region	Overall relative risk	Priority pollutants for management		
		Nitrogen	Pesticides	Sediment
Cape York	Low			
Wet tropics	Very High	Very High	High	
Burdekin	High	Very High*	Very High	Very High
Mackay Whitsunday	Moderate	High	Very High	
Fitzroy	High		High	Very High
Burnett Mary	Uncertain**			High

*Lower Burdekin and Haughton focus

** Most reefs and seagrass meadows in this region were not included formally in the analysis and therefore the validity of the result has high uncertainty.

d. Priority areas are defined as natural resource management regions.