

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

Question No: 77

Hearing: Supplementary Estimates

Outcome: Agency

Programme: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Topic: Study on Coral Bleaching

Hansard Page:

Question Date: 21 October 2015

Question Type: Written

Senator Urquhart asked:

1. I understand a study has been recently been undertaken by the US National Ocean Atmospheric Administration and the University of Queensland which forecasts the world's third mass coral bleaching event in early 2016. How is that event expected to impact the Reef? What percentage of the Reef might suffer bleaching in a worst case scenario? What is the Government doing to mitigate those impacts?

Answer:

1. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the University of Queensland (UQ) have forecast the world's third mass coral bleaching event, due to climate change coupled with a strong El Niño, based on recent mass bleaching in Hawaii, Florida and the Caribbean. NOAA released a prediction that mass bleaching may affect more than 38 per cent of the world's reefs, and kill over 12,000 sq km of reefs. Scientists agree it is too early to predict what the impacts will be on the Great Barrier Reef this coming Summer, because this will be determined by local weather patterns.

If a mass bleaching event occurs, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, working with other government agencies, will assess the extent and impacts of the event, and consider implementing measures to reduce other stressors on corals (for example, targeted crown-of-thorns starfish control to protect remaining adult coral colonies). Any specific protection measures would be considered in the context of the severity of the event, and would aim to support coral condition and recovery. The actions the government is currently implementing as part of the Great Barrier Reef Long-term Sustainability Plan, such as supporting delivery of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, will increase overall Reef health and may mitigate the impacts of future events.