

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

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 121
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Environment Standards Division (ESD)
Topic: Gippsland Lakes Dredging Application
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters, Larissa asked:

Senator WATERS: In relation to the multiple uses of the area, you mentioned ports. I do not have the details in my head or before me, unfortunately, but, hopefully, you will understand my drift. I understand there was a dredging application made that went through the usual approval pathway.

Mr Papps: That is correct.

Senator WATERS: My understanding is that the assessment footprint was quite constrained and effectively only looked at the very localised impacts rather than considering the broader impacts on the lake. That seems very odd to me and very wrong. Have I got the wrong end of the stick? If not, is there some intention to revisit that approval decision and to factor in the broader impacts on the lake?

Mr Papps: I can only help you in a limited way here because I do not administer the EPBC Act. My recollection is that the dredging, which is a routine process, was subject to a decision under that piece of legislation. I understand it was approved with conditions. I cannot provide you with any commentary on the extent of the area looked at. I do know that the decision was challenged by a local group and reviewed and confirmed. But if you want more detail, I will have to refer you to somewhere else for that.

Mr Knudson: I think we should take this on notice.

Senator WATERS: I am happy with that.

Mr Knudson: It is not uncommon that we will get a referral for a certain area of impact, which is the direct impact of whatever is being proposed, and the assessment then looks at the direct impacts in that space but also—

Senator WATERS: All adverse impacts, yes.

Mr Knudson: the surrounding areas. I would like to come back and confirm what that scope was.

Senator WATERS: Yes, if you could. Thank you. ...

Answer:

The proposed action by Gippsland Ports was to conduct maintenance dredging of oceanic sand in the inner channels and bar at Lakes Entrance, and to provide ocean access between the Gippsland Lakes and Bass Strait. The proposal was assessed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and on 8 September 2011 was determined not to be a controlled action provided the action was undertaken in a particular manner.

The assessment considered potential significant impacts on the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site, including an assessment against the criteria for wetlands of international importance. This included consideration of potential impacts due to turbidity, invasive species and increased salinity. On the basis of the information available it was concluded that the proposed action

was unlikely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site.

The assessment also concluded that significant impacts on listed threatened and migratory species were unlikely as long as the action was undertaken in the particular manner set out in the approval, including monitoring measures and limits on dredging activities.