

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

Question No: 337
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Program: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review
Hansard Page: n/a
Question Date: 01 November 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

In suspending Australia's 40 new Commonwealth marine reserves in December 2013 and instituting a review, the former Abbott Government committed that the review would be science based. However, the Review's Bioregional Advisory Panel recommends the downgrading of zoning across many reserves in order to accommodate fishing practices that the Review's own Expert Science Panel finds are incompatible with the values of the marine reserves concerned.

- Are you aware of this contradiction?

- Is the Director of National Parks aware that the Expert Science Panel finds that pelagic longlining poses an unacceptable risk to the values in the Coral Sea marine reserve (page X), and yet the Bioregional Advisory Panel recommends a near doubling of the area over which pelagic longlining can occur in the reserve, including in the Queensland trough, the location of a globally significant black marlin spawning aggregation?

- And that the Bioregional Advisory Panel recommends allowing demersal longlining to be allowed to operate on a number of seamounts in the same reserve, despite the Expert Science Panel advising that gear type should not be allowed to operate over seamounts (page X)?

- And that the Bioregional Advisory Panel advises that the area open to demersal trawling in the Coral Sea marine reserve be increased by 700%, despite the Expert Science Panel recommending that demersal trawling be banned entirely from the Coral Sea marine reserve (page X)?

- Or that the Bioregional Panel recommends weakening protection at one of the longest standing highly protected reef systems in Australia -Middleton Reef - to allow pelagic longlining, contrary to the assessment of the Expert Science Panel (page X)?

- Or that demersal setlining be allowed in an aggregation area of critically endangered Grey Nurse Shark, in the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve at Pimpernel Rock (page X)?

- What is the Director of National Park's view of the recommendations by the Bioregional Advisory Panel given these and other similar deviations from the science findings of the ESP?

Answer:

The Director of National Parks is aware of the findings and recommendations from the Expert Scientific Panel and the Bioregional Advisory Panel and will consider these, together with public feedback received through the two statutory consultation processes, in preparing management plans for the marine reserves.

The Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review Expert Scientific Panel and Bioregional Advisory Panel coordinated their work, but reported separately.

The Expert Scientific Panel investigated the available science underpinning the proposed reserves and produced an extensive report on the subject, which concluded that the marine bioregional planning program provided a sound basis and drew upon the best available information for designating the Commonwealth marine reserve networks.

In formulating its recommendations, the Bioregional Advisory Panels considered relevant findings of the Expert Scientific Panel alongside their consultations with individuals, organisations and peak bodies; the public submissions received; and other inputs, such as submissions to previous consultation processes. The Bioregional Advisory Panels took account of socio-economic considerations, such as estimated potential economic impacts of zoning options and potential impacts on local communities.