

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

Question No: 340
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Program: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review – Bioregional Advisory Panels
Hansard Page: n/a
Question Date: 01 November 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

Did any of the members of the Bioregional Advisory Panels have financial interests in activities in the reserves being reviewed? If so, who did and what was the nature of their interests? For instance, noting that (contrary to the advice of the Expert Science Panel) the Bioregional Advisory Panel recommended significant reduction on spatial restrictions on pelagic and demersal longlining in the Coral Sea marine reserve - did any member of the Coral Sea Bioregional Advisory Panel have financial interests that may benefit from rezoning in the Coral Sea which would allow a larger area for longlining to operate than that allowed in the 2013 management plan?

Answer:

Committees and panels appointed by the Australian Government are required to establish and maintain an Interest Register and appropriately manage conflicts of interest.

Probity of Bioregional Advisory Panel members through the review was addressed through a robust interest declaration process, including standard methods for managing any potential conflicts of interest. All panel members provided private interest declarations that were considered by the Government prior to being appointed to the panels. As part of the formal appointment process, each panel member was required to complete a declaration of interest. Panel members were required to review and, if necessary, update their declared interests considering any changes to their circumstances and the scope of the panel's work at the first meeting and at the beginning of each subsequent meeting. Panel chairs were responsible for managing any conflicts of interest throughout the review. Management of conflicts of interest may have included restriction or exclusion for the meeting at the discretion of the Chair when considered to be necessary and appropriate. The final report was prepared by the co-Chairs of the Bioregional Advisory Panels and was not reviewed by regional panel members prior to its public release.

One member of the Bioregional Advisory Panels had an indirect business connection in the Coral Sea. As a result, the action taken by the chairs was that this member did not participate in the Coral Sea regional consultation meeting.