

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

Question No: 350
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Program: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
Topic: Coral Bleaching – Fishing Impacts
Hansard Page: 37
Question Date: 17 October 2016
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters, Larissa asked:

Senator WATERS: ... What impacts on the fishing industry as a result of the bleaching are we likely to see?

Dr Reichelt: I have not seen an assessment of that yet. In those regions there is a lobster fishery. I think the other fisheries are less dependent on coral. I do not have any reports specifically on fisheries' impacts.

Mr Elliot: We do work closely with Fisheries Queensland, which monitors fishing effort. At this stage, we have not had any major issues identified. If fish disappear from an area, the fishing fleets tend to move to where the fish are. We are cognisant that that can increase fishing pressure in other areas. At this point in time, we have not had any major moves of fishing fleets that I am aware of; therefore, it is probably more things like the harvest fisheries, which tend to be more dependent on coral reefs, and they have agreed to not go to the areas most severely bleached. Because they are quite small fisheries, they can move more easily.

Senator WATERS: I see. So the industry has reached an agreement to voluntarily not fish for a time.

Mr Elliot: In certain areas, yes. The harvest fisheries have done that, and we have been working with scientists so that the only scientists who are collecting coral up in those most damaged areas are those who are doing research around bleaching.

Senator WATERS: Could you provide on notice for me the financial impacts of that cessation of those industries, albeit voluntary? For the folk here who only think in money terms it would be good to quantify the impacts on the fishing industry.

Mr Elliot: I can, Senator—but just to reinforce this, it is probably not a cessation; it is generally just moving their effort from one area to the other. But they are very small fisheries and therefore the impact is not great in terms of the areas they move to. But I will get those figures for you.

Senator WATERS: Thank you. I will await those figures

Answer:

There has been no formal assessment of financial impacts, largely because there are currently no reports from industry members or Fisheries Queensland of the commercial fishing industry being affected by the coral bleaching event.