

**Economics Legislation Committee**  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Industry Portfolio  
Budget Estimates Hearing 2014-15  
2-3 June 2014

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**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** Geoscience Australia

**TOPIC:** Maritime Boundaries Review

**REFERENCE:** Question on Notice (Hansard, 3 June 2014, page 36)

**QUESTION No.:** BI-62

**Senator GALLACHER:** Geoscience Australia is currently reviewing the maritime boundaries, is that correct?

**Mr Hoffman:** Yes, Senator. There is ongoing activity and a program of that type.

**Senator GALLACHER:** How long is that process expected to take until completion?

**Mr Hoffman:** Geoscience as an agency was on yesterday, so I will attempt to answer your question to be helpful to the committee—

**Senator GALLACHER:** If you could just supply on notice the process and when it is going to be formally completed.

**ANSWER**

Australia's maritime limits are defined by proclamations made under the *Seas and Submerged Lands Act 1973* (Cth) ('SSLA'). In the context of this question, the most relevant is the *Seas and Submerged Lands (Territorial Sea Baseline) Proclamation 2006*. This proclamation defines the territorial sea baseline (TSB). The TSB is the line from which the limits of Australia's territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone and parts of the continental shelf are established. In addition to limits defined under the SSLA, the TSB is also used to determine the limits of the Coastal Waters of each of the States and the Northern Territory pursuant to the *Coastal Waters (State Powers) Act 1980* (Cth) and the *Coastal Waters (Northern Territory Powers) Act 1980* (Cth). The limit of the Coastal Waters is, amongst other things, the boundary between Commonwealth and State petroleum jurisdictions.

Pursuant to the 2006 TSB Proclamation, the baseline for the territorial sea is generally drawn at the low water mark of the coastline. It is the role of Geoscience Australia to determine the location of the coastline, and from this generate the TSB and its dependent zones and limits, on the advice of the Attorney-General's Department which administers the SSLA. Geoscience Australia undertakes this work using the best available data at the time that the coastline is being assessed. This includes high resolution aerial photography collected by State Agencies; high resolution commercial satellite imagery; hydrographic charts and survey data obtained by the Australian Hydrographic Service; State topographic data; site visits and, where reliable, crowd sourced information obtained from the internet.

An important element of this program is that Geoscience Australia works with State land management agencies in the mapping of the coastline. The general practice is that the first pass interpretation is undertaken by State agencies, and Geoscience Australia then reviews the interpretation. This collaboration avoids duplication of effort between the two levels of

Government. More importantly, it is a trust building measure; the two levels of Government have a shared investment in the data that is used to determine the limit of the State's petroleum jurisdiction.

Where necessary, consultation is also undertaken with other portfolios, for instance, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, where a treaty with an adjacent State may be relevant to the determination of Australia's maritime limits. It is only once this process of technical and legal review has been completed, and a proclamation made under the SSLA if required in the circumstances, that the new limit takes effect and new data is published.

The size and complexity of the Australian coastline is such that completing this task for Australia and its territories takes a number of years. Previous determinations have taken from five to six years to complete. The present redetermination commenced approximately four years ago and is expected to take another four to complete for the whole jurisdiction.

Occasionally it is necessary, as in the case with North Scott and Seringapatam Reefs that a change in the baseline cannot wait to be actioned until the full national epoch is released. Due to the disruption caused by changes in the baseline, out of cycle changes such as this are kept to a minimum. In these circumstances the only substantive difference is that the changes are made over a limited geographic extent.

The formal review of the baselines in the vicinity of Scott and Seringapatam Reefs was completed when Landgate, the Western Australian State government agency that Geoscience Australia collaborates with, agreed on the baseline determination that Geoscience Australia had made of the Reefs. This occurred on 20 May 2014.