

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry and Science Portfolio
2015-16 Budget Estimates
3-4 June 2015

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: NOPSEMA

TOPIC: Protecting matters of national environmental significance

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Wright

QUESTION No.: BI-62

Protecting matters of national environmental significance:

Under a one-stop-shop agreement, approval powers for offshore oil and gas were handed over to NOPSEMA. In that agreement, NOPSEMA committed to protect matters of national environmental significance, including commonwealth marine areas. The commitment includes not approving activities inconsistent with the IUCN reserve management principles. These principles do not allow oil and gas activities in IUCN category II reserves such as Marine National Park Zones in commonwealth marine reserves. Can NOPSEMA explain the decision to approve a seismic survey by Spectrum Geo within marine national park zones?

ANSWER

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reserve management principles are implemented in Australia by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000 (EPBC Regulations), Schedule 8 (<https://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2014C01116>). The IUCN reserve principles set out the broad principles for the management of reserves in a range of categories (IUCN categories I-VI, see EPBC Regulations, Schedule 8, Part 2). These principles do not expressly exclude seismic activity.

Specific direction on the management of reserves, including permitted uses, is contained in the plan of management put in place for each reserve (or group of reserves). There is not currently in place, nor has there ever been in place, a statutory plan of management for the Commonwealth Marine Reserves (CMR) covered by the Spectrum Geo seismic survey (namely the Carnarvon Canyon CMR, Gascoyne CMR, Shark Bay CMR and Abrolhos CMR). The draft management plans developed for the north-west marine reserves network and south-west marine reserves network have not come into effect and have been set aside pending the outcomes of the Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review (<http://www.marinereservesreview.gov.au/about>).

In addition, the Director of National Parks issued a General Approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* on 14 December 2013 which allowed mining activities (including seismic surveys) to be undertaken in the CMRs covered by the Spectrum Geo seismic survey (<http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/171ac95a-8256-4f9d-9575-47672bd5fb19/files/approvalnorthwestgeneral.pdf>). This is under the Government's current policy of 'no changes on the water' for users of new areas added to the Commonwealth marine reserves estate in 2012.

NOPSEMA's assessment of the specific activities proposed by the Spectrum Rocket survey concluded that they were not inconsistent with the IUCN reserve management principles.

NOPSEMA will continue to ensure that titleholder's activities comply with any future arrangements or restrictions imposed by statutory plans of management for CMRs when those arrangements or restrictions are in place.