

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2014-15
23 October 2014

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation

TOPIC: Report – Understanding the effects of marine debris on wildlife

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 23 October 2014, page 48)

QUESTION No.: SI-27

Senator WHISH-WILSON: My last question is on a report that is very important to me personally. That is the report that you released about a month ago called Understanding the effects of marine debris on wildlife. It is the first study of its kind—a multiyear approach to sampling marine debris. Have you briefed the environment department on the findings of that report?

Dr Clark: I am not aware of whether we have briefed on that work done by one of our researchers, Denise Hardesty. It has been well received nationally and internationally. It has been part of a very long-term understanding of marine debris. In terms of your specific question around whether we had a specific brief, I would need to ask some questions and come back to you on that.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I asked the environment department the other night, because they are obviously going through a process of looking at areas on recycling initiatives around plastic, and given that it is the only study of its kind that I know of. Apart from the departments, would you brief the government on that as well? You would pass that information on to relevant ministers? What I am trying to get an idea of is how you prioritise a report like that. I do not know how significant it is; you do so much good work across so many different areas. To me, the ocean is turning into a plastic soup; it is a really serious pollution issue and nobody seems to take it seriously. You have a fantastic report.

Dr Clark: It is a really good question. I do commend the work of, as I said, the lead researcher, Denise Hardesty. That report has been widely distributed. It has also been widely picked up in the media. We have had numerous requests for additional information on that, and we stand ready. CSIRO releases a number of reports. It is one of the bases of why we are such a trusted adviser. In this particular area we are becoming recognised for that expertise. You asked me for who has been briefed and who has not. I will provide as much information as I can on whether there have been specific briefings.

ANSWER

CSIRO's researchers involved in this project have met with a number of groups within the Department of Environment in relation to this project. At the Department of Environment's request CSIRO has provided input to the threat abatement plan for marine debris impacts on wildlife under the EPBC; and the Australian delegation to the International Whaling Commission working group on marine debris.

There have been no specific briefings to Parliamentarians regarding this report, but CSIRO would be happy to provide briefings on request.