

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

Question No: 207
Hearing: Additional Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Topic: 2011 Breach (Water Quality revised permit conditions)
Hansard Page: 99
Question Date: 24 February 2014
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters asked:

Senator WATERS: With regard to that active investigation that you mentioned that the Queensland government has undertaken, I am just trying to find my relevant piece of paper but I understand that the Queensland government then revised the permit conditions and in fact lessened the protection for the reef. Is the authority now going to reconsider its earlier decision to not prosecute given that I think I recall reading that you said you reserved your right to take action against them in future?

Dr Reichelt: We did reserve that right. The advice I have had on that is that it is not true that the protections were lessened.

Senator WATERS: I cannot find my bit of paper.

Dr Reichelt: I would have to check if I am wrong.

Senator WATERS: Are you able to provide the checking to me? My understanding was that the environmental authority was significantly weakened as regards water quality, but I would be thrilled to be disabused of that.

Dr Reichelt: The briefing I had suggested that the standards were significantly raised. It became much harder—virtually impossible—to make use of the pipe under the conditions. But I am happy to explain....

Answer:

Information provided to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) by the Queensland Government indicates that the new Queensland Environmental Authority (permit number EPPR00940913) strengthens environmental protections in a number of ways, including the discharge through the pipeline. The previous Queensland development approval did not specify contaminant limits for discharge through the ocean pipeline. The previous Queensland development approval allowed discharge of any level of contaminants provided that the company submitted a Corrective Action Plan demonstrating that ocean discharge was the best means of managing dam levels. In contrast, the new Queensland Environmental Authority sets enforceable contaminant limits for ocean discharge. Regardless of the contaminant levels set by the Queensland Environmental Authority, Queensland Nickel Pty Ltd must still gain permission from the GBRMPA for any discharge through the ocean pipeline, as the outfall is within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.