

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

Question No: 214
Hearing: Additional Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Topic: Abbot Point dumping approval
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 24 February 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

1. As part of the approval of the capital dredging, Minister Hunt required assessment of alternative offshore disposal sites. This followed recognition by North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation (NQBP) last year that dumping near the wreck of the Catalina was an 'absolute constraint', and resulted in their identification of more appropriate dump sites
 - a) When NQBP seeks to change the approved dump site, will GBRMPA require variation applications to the Sea Dumping Act and GBRMP Act dumping permits, or will it require new applications?
 - b) What is the required process should a variation in a dumping permit be sought?
 - c) What criteria does GBRMPA use to determine whether new, or variation, applications will be required?
2. In light of Australia's obligations under the London Protocol to reduce the necessity for sea dumping, what planning, procedures and/or other measures, if any, has GBRMPA implemented to identify and facilitate viable, land-based dredge spoil disposal sites or beneficial uses for dredge spoil?
3. All dredging under this approval is to be overseen by an independent dredge technical panel. Under condition 23, the proponent must establish and fund the panel. What does independent mean in this context?
4. Will GBRMPA exercise any measure of oversight regarding the selection of the panel?

Answer:

1.
 - a. If the proponent identifies an alternative disposal site for the dredge material that results in equivalent or lesser environmental impacts for matters of National Environmental Significance (NES) and the Minister approves in writing an alternative disposal site (consistent with condition 5 of the EPBC 2011/6213 approval) then the proponent will need either a variation or a new Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act permission and Sea Dumping permission. It has not yet been established whether a variation would be sufficient or whether the proponent needs to put in new applications. In both cases, there will be a robust assessment of environmental, social, cultural and heritage impacts conducted by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).
 - b. It is not yet clear whether a variation or a new application will be necessary. GBRMPA is currently seeking advice on this.

- c. There are no clear criteria on whether a proponent needs a new or varied permission. As such the GBRMPA is seeking further advice.
- 2. The GBRMPA is aware of Australia's international obligations under the London Protocol. In particular Annex 2- the Revised Specific guidelines for Assessment of Dredged Material states that the "reducing detrimental effects on the marine environment and the need for dredged material disposal at sea can be accomplished by... minimising the volumes of sediment that must be dredged by using improved engineering practices." GBRMPA is leading the development of a dredge synthesis scientific consensus statement.
- 3. Refer to answer provided to question 208.
- 4. Condition 17 of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park permission states that "the membership of the TAP must be approved in writing by the Managing Agency prior to the commencement of activities permitted under this permit".