

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

Question No: 31
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 5
Programme: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division
Topic: Cape York Peninsula World Heritage listing
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 07 March 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

Traditional Owners have received that correspondence, and when that correspondence was dispatched? Please provide examples of that correspondence.

1. Since September 2013, what consultation has occurred between the Department and Traditional Owner groups on Cape York, particularly those involved in the Country Based Planning process?
2. What is the status of the assessment of natural values against the World Heritage criteria?
3. What is the status of the assessment of cultural values and cultural landscapes against the World Heritage criteria?

Answer:

Examples of Ministerial correspondence sent to Cape York Traditional Owners:

(the following text is from a letter dispatched 6 November 2013)

“The Australian Government recognises that Cape York contains a range of unique and important environmental, economic, social and cultural values. Areas such as the Quinkan rock art galleries are likely to have values of outstanding universal significance.

The Government considers that it is important that further consideration of a potential world heritage nomination for Cape York only occur with the support of all relevant parties. I consider that it is likely to take some time before agreement and support across all relevant groups can be reached.

In the meantime, I am aware that a number of Traditional Owner groups are continuing to consider, under current funding arrangements, areas that they consider appropriate for inclusion in a potential world heritage nomination for Cape York Peninsula.

Thank you for your kind invitation to visit the Laura area to meet with Elders and Traditional Owners. I would be appreciative if you could pass on my gratitude to Laura area Elders and Traditional Owners for all their hard work in identifying and progressing natural and cultural heritage protection issues.”

(text from letter dispatched 15 October 2013)

“I refer to your letter of 20 September 2013 concerning support to secure long term legal or other recognised protection of Aboriginal Homelands within the Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire of Western Cape York Peninsula. Thank you for your kind invitation to visit Pormpuraaw to meet with the Elders and Senior Traditional Owners.

As the newly appointed Minister for the Environment, I am working through the issues administered by my portfolio, including the long-term protection of Cape York's stunning natural assets and cultural landscapes. I understand that Pormpuraaw and other Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal communities have been working with the Department of the Environment to progress a potential world heritage nomination for appropriate parts of Cape York Peninsula.

I also understand that consultations on the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) are continuing and that an IPA management plan is currently being developed. I would be appreciative if you could pass on my gratitude to the Pormpuraaw Elders and Senior Traditional Owners for all their hard work in identifying and progressing Pormpuraaw land and sea management matters."

(text from letter dispatched on 25 October 2013)

"The Coalition Government recognises that Australia's unique environment must be cared for and protected for future generations, and that includes Cape York's stunning natural assets and rich cultural landscapes. I am currently working with Cape York Peninsula's Traditional Owners on ways to protect their important cultural and natural heritage values.

I would be appreciative if you could pass on my gratitude to the Senior Traditional Owners and custodians for all their hard work in managing and protecting their important land and sea country."

Examples of Departmental correspondence sent to Cape York Traditional Owners:

(text from letter dispatched on 7 January 2014)

"Thank you for providing your final report, for consideration by the department, in accordance with your Funding Agreement. I am pleased to advise that the report is satisfactory and accepted as meeting the requirements of the Agreement.

All activities have now been successfully completed for this project and project funds have been fully acquitted.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Program and acknowledge your contribution towards achieving the Australian Government's outcomes."

(text from letter dispatched on 6 March 2014)

"The Department of the Environment has reviewed your Final Report...the content of the report meets the Commonwealth's requirements...Your organisation is also required to submit an audited financial statement of receipts and expenditure for the amount of ...to ensure the Commonwealth's funds have been spent in accordance with the terms and conditions of your Funding Agreement..."

1. World heritage consultation with Traditional Owners is being facilitated by a combination of Department administered funding agreements and Country Based Planning. Under the funding agreements, Traditional Owners have engaged anthropologists and consultants with world heritage expertise to assist them with their consultation projects. The Country Based Planning Program has been led by the Queensland Government and is in the process of being finalised. Some reports have been received by the Department. The

Minister has written to his Queensland counterpart seeking an update on Country Based Planning and has requested that all the final reports be forwarded to the Department.

2. The natural heritage values of Cape York Peninsula are internationally recognised and well documented. In April 2013, the Department funded the publication of an independent scientific report on Cape York's potential outstanding natural heritage values: *The natural attributes for World Heritage nomination of Cape York Peninsula, Australia*. A copy of the report can be found at <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/5ab50983-6bb4-4d87-8298-f1bcf1ab652a/files/sciencepanelreport.pdf>. The nomination dossier, including the natural heritage values, can only be completed when the Traditional Owners have provided consent for areas which will help inform any proposed nomination boundary. Once the boundary is determined, the Government will be in a position to assess the next steps, including consultation with other interest groups.
3. Ongoing engagement with the Traditional Owners is critical to finalising the cultural aspects of the draft nomination, including the incorporation of the first person voice of Traditional Owners into the document to help describe the cultural values and to demonstrate their authenticity and integrity. Further work is required to complete the description and comparative analysis of the cultural values and other aspects of the nomination dossier that relate to the cultural values.