

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2011-12
15 February 2012

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

TOPIC: Rising Sea Levels

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 15 February 2012, Page 23)

QUESTION No.: AI-16

Senator COLBECK: Are you satisfied that the arrangements for media monitoring are working well in your office? If so, has your attention has been drawn to two reports: one in the *Spectator* magazine in December titled 'Rising Credulity', on sea levels, by the Swedish scientist Nils-Axel Morner, and the other in the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2012, from 16 eminent scientists, titled 'No Need to Panic about Global Warming'? Do you have a reaction to each of those articles?

Prof. Chubb: I am aware of them and I have a response, which you did not refer to, also published in the *Wall Street Journal* shortly afterwards, which says, in response to that letter: do you consult your dentist about your heart condition? I think that is a fair comment. Scientists can comment on science. That is true. But experts comment at some depth and with some extra knowledge. That is truer. And the 32 or so scientists that signed the second letter all claim to be experts, whereas they claim that, of the 16, two were. So I think we have got to get some—

Senator COLBECK: So it is a claim and counterclaim situation in that circumstance.

Prof. Chubb: Isn't that what we are talking about?

Senator COLBECK: Yes. And can you tell me from your knowledge which state of Australia faces the highest risk of projected sea level rise and flooding along our coastlines during this century because of climate change?

Prof. Chubb: No, I cannot tell you that. Do you want to know? I could find out.

Senator COLBECK: I would be interested if you would put that on the record for us, if you could take that on notice.

Prof. Chubb: Yes.

ANSWER

Two reports from the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency were released in 2009 and 2011 providing comprehensive assessments of the risks of sea-level rise and other climate change impacts to Australia's coasts and coastal infrastructure¹. The reports do not single out any one state as facing the highest risk from projected sea-level rise and flooding. Each coastal state and territory faces spatially heterogeneous risk that depends on local combinations of (a) hazard (e.g. sea level rise, king tides, storm surge and increased storminess), (b) vulnerability (viz. steep rock cliffs are typically less vulnerable than sandy beaches) and (c) exposure (e.g. population and infrastructure).

¹ DCCEE (2009), *Climate Change Risks to Australia's Coasts: A First Pass National Assessment*, 168 pp, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Canberra.
DCCEE (2011), *Climate Change Risks to Coastal Settlements and Industry: A Supplement to the First Pass National Assessment*, 16 pp, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Canberra.