

Question on Notice

No. 839

Asked on 15 June 2023

MR S KNUTH ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the announcement last week by the State and Federal governments to ban commercial gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area by mid-2027 and this announcement taking commercial fishers and industry working groups by complete surprise—

Will the Minister provide details on (a) which commercial fishers or working groups did the Minister or the department consult with prior to the announcement, (b) during the 10-day mission from IUCN and UNESCO representatives in March 2022, which commercial fishers or working groups were consulted and (c) how many days of this 10 day Mission were spent in government offices and how many days were spent on the Great Barrier Reef?

ANSWER:

There has been extensive engagement with commercial fishers throughout the implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017–2027, including on fisheries management within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The risk to protected species in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area has been a key focus of discussion, and an area of escalating concern by the Queensland and Australian Governments over many years. The East Coast Inshore Fishery Working Group has met 12 times between 2017 to 2022, and these issues were discussed at all meetings. There was also a dedicated species of conservation interest (SOCI) workshop held with industry and scientists that developed the Protected Species Management Strategy. Further, in November 2022, industry was made aware of the IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission report recommendations and was advised that the government was considering its response.

Following the recent joint Australian and Queensland Government media statement, a taskforce is being established to provide advice and recommendations to government on the implementation of the structural adjustment package. Targeted engagement with affected stakeholders will be undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Department of Environment and Science.

The Australian Government invited a reactive monitoring mission to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area in August 2021 in response to the decision of the World Heritage Committee (44COM 7B.90, paragraph 8), “centred around ensuring that the revised Reef 2050 Plan addresses the threat posed to the property by climate change and determines a pathway for accelerated actions in other areas affecting the conservation of the property.” The purpose of the mission was to seek expert advice on additional corrective measures that Australia should take to protect and conserve the Reef, including stakeholder priorities rather than industry consultation.

Stakeholders involved in the mission included:

- the Reef 2050 Plan Independent Expert Panel (IEP) – the IEP provides scientific and expert advice related to the Great Barrier Reef, including support for the implementation and review of the Reef 2050 Plan, Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan, and other matters, as requested. The Panel also advises the Australian Government Minister for the Environment on funding priorities for the Reef Trust;
- the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee (RAC) – the RAC meets regularly to provide strategic advice on the implementation of Reef 2050 actions, stakeholder priorities, and to highlight any emerging cross sectoral issues that need to be addressed, and includes commercial and recreational fishing members;
- the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee who provides advice to the Marine Park Authority Board through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The committee's purpose is to provide objective advice, insights and recommendations on matters to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples keep their heritage strong, safe and healthy, and contribute towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations for sea country and heritage management into the future;
- the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC) – the TRAC provides advice to the Marine Park Authority Board through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Committee's purpose is to provide objective advice, insights and recommendations on legislative, policy, and guideline review and development, strategic plans and programs, actions that can be taken to address risks identified in the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report;
- Fisheries management was discussed with members of the delegation, the Queensland Deputy-Director General of Fisheries & Forestry, the Executive Director of Fisheries Queensland, and the Director of Strategic Policy of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

I am advised that the then Executive Officer of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) was invited to brief the mission but declined the meeting due to other commitments.

The purpose of the mission was to seek expert advice on additional corrective measures that Australia should take to protect and conserve the Reef, including stakeholder priorities. The mission duration occurred over 10 days, including travel, where two days were spent in Brisbane and eight days were spent in Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and catchments adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef (Lady Elliot Island, Goondicum, Townsville, Burdekin and Cairns). Further queries regarding the days spent in offices or on ground should be directed to the Department of Environment and Science.