

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question On Notice



Tuesday, 10 March 2020



2835. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Environment

I refer to the article "Dramatic and rapid reef loss in north-west will continue without climate action: scientist", published by the Sydney Morning Herald on 8 December 2019 (<https://www.smh.com.au/national/dramatic-and-rapid-reef-loss-in-north-west-will-continue-without-climate-action-scientist-20191206-p53hmu.html>), and also to the report *Exmouth Gulf, north Western Australia: A review of environmental and economic values and baseline scientific survey of the south western region*, by Fitzpatrick, B., Davenport, A., Penrose, H. et alia (2019), and I ask :

- (a) is the Minister aware of the findings of this report;
- (b) to what extent does the Minister agree that climate change presents a tangible threat to our coral ecosystems;
- (c) does the Minister agree that the frequency and severity of current coral bleaching events, along with the risk of such events, are generally greater than previous decades;
- (d) does the Minister agree that Western Australia's coral systems are ecologically and aesthetically invaluable, and of vital importance to tourism and recreation in the area;
- (e) can the Minister advise whether any action is currently being undertaken by Government in relation to coral bleaching in the State:
 - (i) if yes to (e), would the Minister further explain the action;
- (f) considering that the world heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef sits within the area, does the Government intend to intensively monitor the situation:
 - (i) if yes to (f), what form will this take; and
 - (ii) if no to (f), why not; and
- (g) does the Minister agree that anthropogenic factors are contributing to coral bleaching globally:
 - (i) if no to (g), would the Minister provide evidence to the contrary?

Answer

- (a) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has provided me with an overview of the report findings.
- (b) The McGowan Government acknowledges the challenge that climate change poses for the State and is developing a new State Climate Policy. The Policy will provide a roadmap that will help guide the State's transition to a low carbon future. To inform the development of the policy a Climate Change Issues Paper was released for public consultation from September to November 2019. The Paper specifically acknowledges that warming trends and extreme events will affect our natural assets, such as the Ningaloo reef.
- (c) I am advised that the available scientific evidence indicates that the frequency and severity of coral bleaching has increased in recent decades and the risk of such events is increasing.
- (d) Western Australia's coral reefs are a vital aspect of our marine biodiversity and are recognised as key ecological values in marine parks and reserves in WA's north. Coral reefs are culturally significant to traditional owners and are important tourist attractions in places

like Ningaloo Marine Park. Coral reefs support many other species, including commercially and recreationally important fishes, and protect other important coastal areas like beaches and mangroves from ocean swells.

(e) DBCA's Marine Monitoring Program monitors coral communities in WA's marine parks and reserves, including the impacts of coral bleaching.

(e)(i) Numerous coral monitoring sites are established in every marine park where coral reefs are identified as a key ecological value from Shark Bay Marine Park, northwards to the Kimberley marine reserves.

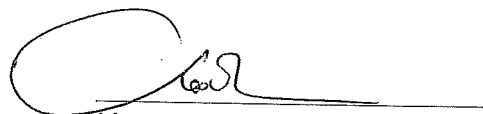
(f) Coral communities at the Ningaloo marine reserves are monitored as part of DBCA's Marine Monitoring Program.

(f)(i) Coral monitoring is undertaken at over 20 sites along the entire length of Ningaloo Marine Park and Muiron Islands Marine Management Area.

(f)(ii) Not applicable

(g) I am advised that scientific evidence demonstrates that climate change is the main cause of marine heat waves and coral bleaching, that is primarily caused by increased emissions of greenhouse gases from global anthropogenic sources.

(g)(i) Not applicable



Hon Stephen Dawson MLC
**MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT;
DISABILITY SERVICES; ELECTORAL AFFAIRS**