

JOHN NEWBY — WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FISHING INDUSTRY COUNCIL

978. Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM to the Minister for Fisheries:

- (1) Did the minister authorise his chief of staff, Mr Trevor Whittington, to contact the Chairman of Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, Mr John Newby, approximately two weeks ago asking him to resign as chairman?
- (2) Subsequent to that phone call from your chief of staff, did the minister instruct the Department of Fisheries chief executive officer, Mr Stuart Smith, to ask Mr Newby to rescind his resignation?
- (3) Why has the minister not contacted Mr John Newby personally in the past two weeks to talk to him about this issue?
- (4) Is it the minister's normal practice to ask people to resign from independent organisations by phone message?

Hon NORMAN MOORE replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1) No.
- (2) Yes.
- (3) I have sought to contact Mr Newby. I thought that he was going to attend a meeting I had with the WAFIC board to talk about the future of WAFIC. As he is the chairman, I anticipated that he would arrive at that meeting. For reasons that I now understand but did not at the time, he did not participate in that meeting.

I have forgotten what question (4) was but the member may be able to help me in a minute.

I will explain the situation that has arisen with respect to this matter. The government has made a decision that we need to restructure the way in which we consult with the industry and the way in which industry provides advice to government. At the moment, as the member might know and as Hon Jon Ford would certainly know, a multitude of organisations provide advice to the minister. Some are set up under statute and some represent industries. It is my view that WAFIC should be the peak body representing the fishing industry. The state collects the fees for membership of WAFIC from fishermen and gives them to WAFIC by way of a cheque every year. I have said to WAFIC that if it wants to be the peak body representing the fishing industry into the future, that particular funding arrangement will continue. However, if it does not want to be and it wants to fight amongst itself, I will have to reconsider the way in which the funding applies.

Hon Sue Ellery: Have you said that in person or just on the phone message?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I did not make any phone call to Mr Newby. I have already said that I had no knowledge of that. If the Leader of the Opposition had listened to the question, she would know what the answer meant. Indeed, when I found out some time later that Mr Newby was thinking about resigning as the chairman of WAFIC, I asked Mr Smith, the chief executive officer of the department, to give him a call and ask him not to do that because there is an annual general meeting coming up this month and it would leave a hiatus for about three weeks. I thought that was undesirable in view of the fact that we are trying to give some support to WAFIC in its desire to become the peak body representing the fishing industry.

Members might have noticed that today I gave notice that tomorrow I intend to introduce a bill to amend the Fish Resources Management Act to change the way in which we go about consulting with the industry to make it far more streamlined and to give WAFIC a far more important role with respect to what it does, representing fishing right across the board instead of having countless industry groups seeking to represent their own interests without a coordinated approach. There is a reason why it is important right now. That is because the federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts has plans for the oceans off Western Australia. Those plans may well see very large areas of the ocean turned into marine parks and no-go areas for fishing and petroleum exploration, and it needs an industry response. I make no apologies for the fact that we have asked WAFIC to get its act together to become a serious peak body on behalf of the industry. I categorically deny that I made any suggestion that Mr Newby should resign. Indeed, my chief of staff advised me that there was a misunderstanding with respect to what he said and he did not at any time suggest to Mr Newby that he should resign.