

SHARKS — DETERRENT DEVICES

796. Mr D.J. KELLY to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to comments made by the Minister for Fisheries on Sunday when he rejected Labor's proposal for a subsidised scheme to promote the use of individual shark-deterrent devices for divers and surfers.

- (1) Why did the Premier's minister call this proposal shallow when the government's own research shows that these devices —

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Treasurer, I call you to order for the first time. Let the member ask his question so that we know where we are going.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I will start again. My question without notice is to the Premier.

Mr P.T. Miles interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo!

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer the Premier to comments made by the Minister for Fisheries on Sunday when he rejected Labor's proposal for a subsidised scheme to promote the use of individual shark-deterrent devices for divers and surfers.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Joondalup, I call you to order for the first time. Carry on.

Mr D.J. KELLY: My question continues —

- (1) Why did the Premier's minister call this proposal shallow when the government's own research shows that these devices can be effective on 90 per cent of occasions?

Mr M.H. Taylor interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bateman, I call you to order for the first time. I am getting really tired of this. You think it is hilarious.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Again —

- (1) Why did the Premier's minister call this proposal shallow when the government's own research shows that these devices can be effective on 90 per cent of occasions?
- (2) Why did the Premier's minister call this proposal shallow when of the 14 fatal shark attacks since 2000, 12 involved surfers and divers?
- (3) Why did the Premier's minister call this proposal shallow when it is supported by Rick Gerring, the brother of Ben Gerring who was the last surfer to die in a fatal shark attack?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

- (1)–(3) This government has done an enormous amount to try to make water users—whether they are swimmers, surfers or divers—as safe as possible. I will not go through it, but the most extensive measure has been the aerial patrols by helicopters along metropolitan beaches and the south west. I also think that the building of swimming enclosures gives a lot of comfort to many people, particularly parents of young children. A lot of different proposals are being promoted out there. A lot of research has been done. Indeed, the state government has sponsored, primarily through the University of Western Australia, a great deal of research and it will continue to do that. We will continue to trial new technologies. Over the weekend, the minister announced the use of drones. Obviously, that will have a local application if a shark is considered to be in the area. The government will retain its imminent threat policy and its preparedness to catch a shark if it is considered to be an imminent threat. There are a whole range of things.

With respect to the policy of members opposite, that is up to them to promote. I will note a couple of things though. The member said it was proven to be effective nine times out of 10, but what will happen on the tenth time?

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, the point is —

The SPEAKER: That is enough!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Do not get so excited.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call you to order for the second time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There is not a 90 per cent improvement in safety if a device is used that is considered to be effective nine times out of 10. They are different statistics—quite different in their meaning.

The point I make is simply that Shark Shield, a commercial product, is not foolproof; it is not. The member's own question admits that.

Mr D.J. Kelly: And drones are?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Did I say that drones were 100 per cent effective? I do not think so.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Somebody is going to have a rest!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This shows the opposition's lack of depth in understanding research and policy issues, but I will keep going. I want to make a couple of points, if members opposite are interested in the answer. This is not foolproof. It may have effect but what are the longer term effects in terms of the adaptive behaviour of sharks? That remains unknown. Animals and species adapt—sharks and fish adapt. We do not know the long-term —

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Members opposite may get positive results, but I do not know whether they will get them long-term. No-one knows the answer about the behaviour because there is evidence of shark behaviour changing.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Can I say the second thing? I think it is a poor policy position for a would-be government to endorse a commercial product. That is what members opposite did. They endorsed a commercial product.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is what the opposition has done! It has endorsed a commercial product.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the first time. We need to bring this to a conclusion. A quick answer, thank you.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am trying to, Mr Speaker.

The opposition might explain to us how it got to the position of endorsing a commercial product that has been promoted —

Mr R.H. Cook: It was your research!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Was it? Okay. The opposition might explain to us how it came to endorse one particular commercial product and decided to subsidise the sales of that product. It might also say what that means for the price; that is another matter. I do not think that is a proper thing for a government to do, for a number of reasons, including that it may well give a surfer or a diver a false sense of security. If Labor were in government, this product would be government-endorsed, which would imply a high level of safety. What would the opposition do if—hopefully it does not happen—someone had one of these Shark Shields on their ankle and they were attacked? What would be its legal position if it is out there, as a government, endorsing a commercial product? Has the opposition even thought that through? I do not think it has.