

SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION — SWAN RIVER

128. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Fisheries:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's comprehensive shark management strategies to improve safety in our waters.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government's shark hazard mitigation strategy is being expanded to develop a better understanding of shark movements in the Swan River?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how swimming enclosures are being used to mitigate risks at popular river swimming locations, including Bicton Baths?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

I thank the member for Bicton for not only the question, but also her unwavering commitment to the safety of ocean users and people within the river systems, and for the many discussions we have had about how to improve safety and the provision of information to ocean users in particular.

- (1)–(2) Today, I very pleased to announce joint work between the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to expand the process of shark tagging within the Swan and Canning River estuaries. This will involve an expansion of the existing research program into juvenile bull shark populations in the river to include adult bull sharks. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development will commence tagging programs tonight to target adult bull sharks and place tags within those bull sharks that will interface with three new acoustic receivers that will be placed in the river.

This is a very new process. We recognise that the river system is a very strong interactive zone. There is a lot of movement of boats up and down the river. The ability of our tags and receivers to interface through that traffic will be an important part of assessing how we can use acoustic receivers in the river system into the future. This is a very important piece of work. The acoustic receivers will have the ability to interact with our shark alert network and expand real-time opportunities to advise people of the presence of bull sharks within the river system. Importantly, it will provide research information about the seasonality of bull shark populations, where they are swimming, the aggregations and potential populations within the river system. This is part of our ongoing approach to shark mitigation by building up a solid evidence base and understanding of the patterns of behaviour of sharks that might present a risk. The expanded network of combining this new system with the VR2 receivers that already exist within the river for the juvenile tagging program will help to improve knowledge about seasonal movements and the abundance of bull sharks. It will also provide a better understanding of the connectivity of bull shark populations and how they interact with each other. The new system will also assess the efficiency of detection approaches, including real-time detection in the river system. This is a very important step forward in how we can manage risk issues within the rivers, which we know are very popular and mean an awful lot to our communities along the river system.

I am very pleased to also announce that following the announcement that I made in February with the member for Bicton that we are progressing down the track of putting in place the first swimming enclosure on the river, which will be at Bicton Baths. That will provide the first opportunity, in partnership with the City of Melville, for an enclosed area of the river that will prevent access by sharks. The river system is very different from ocean environments. I have written to other local governments to assess their interest in looking at all forms of shark mitigation, but particularly enclosure options, recognising that enclosure options will not be suitable for every location in the river as a consequence of river stream currents and boating interactions et cetera.

That is part of our program and we will be looking very closely at any additional opportunities that might come out of both the shark tagging program and the beach enclosure program to improve safety. This is part of our evidence-based shark mitigation program. We will continue to build our knowledge base and to do our very, very best to understand shark behaviour and the risk of interaction with our communities and with individuals who have taken to using our oceans and river system. We are committed to looking at how we can inform the public and can make our waterways as safe as possible.