

SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION

**894. Hon RICK MAZZA to the minister representing the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to the death of surfer Nick Slater on Greenmount Beach on 8 September 2020, the sixth shark fatality in Australian waters this year. Now that Western Australians are being forced to holiday in the state due to COVID-19 border restrictions and the summer season is approaching, many people will be seeking to enjoy our beach culture.

- (1) Will the government review the SMART drum lines on the south coast for the coming summer, particularly with likely increases in local tourists?
- (2) What other management programs will be in place to help ensure the safety of beachgoers?
- (3) What research is being conducted to assess the relative abundance of shark numbers in the marine ecosystem?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question. I do note that I think most Western Australians are really enjoying the opportunity to experience their state.

The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Fisheries.

- (1) The SMART drum line trial was reviewed by the Chief Scientist of Western Australia, Peter Klinken, in April this year, with a recommendation to continue the trial in its current format until May 2021. The McGowan government committed to continue the trial, recognising that more data is needed to determine its effectiveness as a public safety tool for shark mitigation. Shark warning systems that include both visual and audible alarms will continue to alert the public to the presence of sharks, both tagged and caught on the SMART drum lines within the waters of the SMART drum line trial.
- (2) Western Australia has one of the strongest evidence-based shark mitigation programs in the world to assist locals to enjoy the beach and ocean with confidence. The McGowan government is committed to a range of measures and initiatives to improve the safety of our ocean users. This investment includes the SMART drum line trial off Gracetown, the electronic shark deterrent rebate, beach emergency number signage, beach enclosures, an extensive targeted shark tagging program, the satellite-based shark monitoring network and, of course, the SharkSmart WA app, which integrates so much of this technology.

Since March 2017, the government has successfully implemented a targeted tagging program of white sharks, doubling the number of tagged sharks along the Western Australian coastline. Recently, the McGowan government announced its commitment to deploy an additional two VR4 receivers and an alert tower in Bunker Bay following the latest shark incident involving a local surfer. The government also works in partnership with Surf Life Saving WA and other external stakeholders to deliver various shark mitigation strategies, including aerial and beach safety surveillance to gather intelligence information along the Western Australian coast in the Perth metropolitan and south west regions for the benefit of public safety when using the beach. The millions of dollars of investment in these measures demonstrate the McGowan government's commitment to improving ocean safety in Western Australia.

- (3) To access trends in the relative abundance of sharks, the department undertakes stock assessments of more than 30 commercial species and annual abundance surveys in the north west of eight species. These assessments and the information are used to assess the sustainability risk on Western Australian sharks. The department also undertakes surveys of shark diversity and relative abundance within inshore and nearshore ecosystems—shallow reefs, creeks and rivers—in the Kimberley marine ecosystem; baseline surveys of threatened, endangered and protected sawfish and river sharks and the identification of critical habitats; long-term monitoring of the relative abundance of sharks within the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park; and baseline surveys of shark diversity relative abundance and tagging of coastal shark species at 30 to 300 metres depth in the North-west Marine Parks Network.