

SWIMMING WITH HUMPBACK WHALES PROGRAM — NINGALOO

18. Hon DIANE EVERS to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the swimming with humpback whales trial program.

- (1) What monitoring has occurred during the trial since 2016?
- (2) How often did monitoring occur and what were the results?
- (3) Has an evaluation of the impacts of whale interactions been undertaken?
- (4) If yes to (3), who completed the evaluation?
- (5) If yes to (3), will the minister please table the report; and, if not, why not?
- (6) What research is being undertaken on the impacts of swimming with whales?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) Monitoring of in-water interactions with humpback whales occurred throughout the duration of the trial since 2016. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions engaged independent scientists to undertake a number of research projects over the past four years. DBCA also undertook assessments of visitor satisfaction and interviewed operators to obtain their feedback. In addition, all of the commercial operators involved in the trial provided data on their activities throughout the trial through the electronic monitoring system installed on their vessels.
- (3)–(5) Annual reviews were conducted by DBCA, which included consideration of monitoring data, findings from research conducted under the trial, and operator and community feedback. Representatives of science, conservation and tourism sectors assisted with these reviews. Multiple reports and other documents comprised the review; there is no single final report of the evaluation of the trial to table.
- (6) In addition to the research already conducted, key research topics that will be progressed in the future include the status and health of the humpback whale population that uses Western Australian state waters, including the proportion of whales using Ningaloo Marine Park and adjacent areas; and short-term impacts of in-water interactions on individual whales, including larger calves.