

SHARK DETERRENT DEVICES — SUBSIDY

632. Ms S.E. WINTON to the Minister for Fisheries:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to reducing the risk of shark attacks on Western Australians.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the world-first rebate scheme for personal shark deterrents that was rolled out earlier this year?
- (2) How is this government helping Western Australians to protect themselves in the water?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for Wanneroo for her question. I note that she is a long-term member of the Yanchep Surf Lifesaving Club and I understand she is also the manager of the nippers program up there. I thank her for her active interest in this issue.

- (1)–(2) I rise today to give an update on where we are in relation to this matter. I saw the reported comments by Leon and Julie Brouwer, who tragically lost their daughter Laetitia earlier this year after an incident in Esperance. It is hard to imagine how a parent would go through that experience, but I thank them for the comments that have been reported in the press and I thank them in particular for the scholarship that they have announced. They are supporting a scholarship that will encourage safety in the water for youngsters. I share their hope that that program will assist in saving lives in Western Australia.

They also made some comments about the importance of personal shark deterrents. I am pleased to advise the house that the world-first program introduced by the McGowan government whereby we are subsidising independently verified shark deterrents is continuing to go well. We initially funded 1 000 deterrents that attract a \$200 subsidy. Over 800 Western Australians have now taken up that subsidy. Clearly, Western Australians see that program as being of value. Given the tragedy of those incidents, certainly as a government, we want to do things that actually work. It is a failing if a government tries to do things that will simply get a headline. We want to concentrate our efforts on things that actually work. We picked up the research that was done by the previous government that showed that, in the marketplace, there is at least one device that is university tested to be effective nine out of 10 times. We think that getting those devices out there amongst the people who are most at risk—that is, surfers and divers—is the best thing we can do at this time.

Of course, it is not the only thing we are doing. I visited Esperance a couple of weeks ago and met with members of the local community. Although they were grateful that the government had extended the shark-monitoring network to Esperance by placing two satellite receivers at beaches down there chosen by the community, they raised with me the issue that if those receivers pick up a tagged shark and a person is already in the water, they would be unlikely to be checking their Facebook feed, and they asked whether it was possible that there be some sort of visual or audio signal to tell people that a tagged shark has been detected. That issue is now being considered by the Department of Fisheries. I have undertaken with the community down there that if that is technically possible, we will look at implementing that as an additional part of the shark-monitoring network.

It is worth pointing out that we also allocated an extra \$6 million to fund Surf Life Saving WA for its services over the next couple of summers, including its helicopter. It is interesting that when we came to government, we found that the helicopter service and other services of Surf Life Saving WA were funded only to June 2017. There is a bit of a pattern here. We heard earlier about the south west rescue helicopter. We made that commitment. Amongst the many things that people in Western Australia appreciate, the shark surveillance that is provided by Surf Life Saving is seen as important, so we have given Surf Life Saving the funding it needs—an additional \$6 million—to continue those programs.

We are serious about doing it. We want to do things that work. My only comment to members opposite is to get on board with these initiatives, in particular the shark deterrent. I heard the interview with the member for Vasse, who described those shark deterrents as being like waving a toothpick. Given that those deterrents have been university tested to work nine times out of 10, it is very irresponsible of members opposite to discourage people from taking them up. Clarity in the marketplace about which products work and which do not is important to enable people to make a safe choice when they go into the water. I urge members opposite to encourage people to take up those deterrents and not try to muddy the water.