

SHARK DRUM LINE PROGRAM — ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY REPORT —
PREMIER'S COMMENTS

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

I ask a supplementary question. Are the comments of the Premier just a case of fearmongering, the same as we heard today from the acting Minister for Tourism when he said that he would swim only close to the beach in the south west?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

When seven people die from shark attacks, yes, there is room for fear, and people in this state are fearful. That is why surf clubs throughout Western Australia back the government on this policy—to provide greater protection and confidence for people. That is why the surfing association came out and supported it.

As I have said in this house and publicly on a number of occasions, no-one likes the concept of drum lines or killing sharks, but when seven people lose their lives over a three-year period, it falls upon the government and the Premier of the day to make a decision. I am disappointed by the decision of the EPA.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the second time. Let the Premier finish.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In my view, there is a responsibility to act.

Mr M. McGowan: What about the tourism business?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will come back to that.

Mr M. McGowan: It's an important point.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am answering the question. When sightings of very large sharks occur on a fairly consistent basis, as they have in the south west, staying for several days in the case of Albany and at least a month in areas where people swim, surf and recreate, that is a risk to public safety. The EPA's decision relates to the marine environment and the species of great white sharks, which are not endangered; they are listed as vulnerable. That is the only scope of its report. The issue of the safety of the public is not a matter that the EPA considers; that is a matter for government to deal with. I accept the criticism of the drum line policy but, in my view—it is my view—the EPA made it clear that there was a lack of evidence one way or the other and that it decided on the side of caution. I and this government have a responsibility for the safety of beach users. We are heading to summer and the school holidays —

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, you asked a question and a supplementary, I have called you to order twice. If I call you to order for a third time, you are on a slippery slope.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Of the measures that this government has put in place I think without doubt the most effective, and I have to say the most expensive by a long way, has been the switch from fixed-wing aircraft to helicopter patrols patrolling more hours in the day over a longer duration of the summer period and introduced for the first time in the south west; that is the most significant change. It is for that reason that I made the comment that I think the metropolitan beaches, which are relatively easy to cover from the air and have surf clubs all the way along, are as safe as they can reasonably be. I praise the surf clubs for the work that they have done in conjunction with government. I think the south west is a different situation; it is more difficult. At the moment we are looking at some measures there. One measure that has proved successful is the trial of a swimming enclosure at Dunsborough; it has been a great success. We are looking at extending that, but it can only apply in areas of comparatively still water. Yes, it could happen at Busselton, Rockingham and maybe at Leighton, but not across all metropolitan beaches and certainly not across the surf beaches in the south west. That is the issue that we are dealing with and all the opposition can come up with is a semantic point about the term “rogue shark”, which is a common usage term.