

SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION

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

I refer to the Cook Labor government's world-leading shark hazard mitigation strategy backed by a \$17 million investment in safety measures.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the Bicton Baths swimming enclosure will keep local swimmers safe this summer?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on other strategies being implemented to keep the Western Australian community safe when enjoying the Swan River and Western Australia's coastal waters?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

- (1)–(2) I certainly can, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to inform the house of ongoing improvements to strengthen the Cook government's comprehensive shark hazard mitigation strategy. I thank the member for Bicton, who is a strong advocate for her community and a committed supporter of the enclosure at Bicton Baths to help keep her community and other members of the Perth community safe, and also add to the amenity of the area. I also acknowledge Cameron Wrathall for his tireless advocacy as well.

The City of Melville is leading the project to install a shark barrier at the Bicton Baths and has been working closely with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions—an excellent partnership leading to an excellent outcome. I am pleased to say that the project is on track and the barrier will be ready to be enjoyed this summer. It will be the first shark barrier to be installed in the river. I commend the City of Melville for taking up the Cook government's offer to assist with the purchase and installation of a barrier that has been offered to all councils along the river. It will cost up to \$320 000 to build and install, and I am very pleased that a local company Global Marine Enclosures, which has previously supplied these enclosures, has been awarded the contract. The design of the barrier that has been supported by our government is different from the shark nets used on the east coast; it is very important to remember that. Our barriers are designed to minimise harm to marine life and prevent larger animals from getting into the enclosed swimming area.

We are also going to extend the highly successful shark tagging program to include bull sharks in the Swan and Canning Rivers. DPIRD has been undertaking tagging operations in the warmer summer months when bull sharks use the river for their breeding cycle. This complements existing work carried out by DBCA to tag juvenile bull sharks as part of its research program. Any shark caught and tagged will be reported to Water Police and published by the shark notification system.

We are also installing three new shark monitoring receivers in the river later this year to be connected to the shark monitoring network consisting of 37 receivers from Perth all the way to Esperance. That provides near real-time notification of tagged sharks. To make sure that the technology that supports these automated systems keeps people safe, our government has invested \$4.5 million to upgrade the state's shark notification and response system to a more reliable cloud-based system.

These measures are based on science and are part of a comprehensive strategy, including ongoing white shark tagging with 178 sharks tagged; the \$200 personal shark deterrent rebate, a work-first scheme set up by our Labor government that has been claimed over 8 800 times; helicopters, drone, beach and jetski patrols have been provided through our partnership with Surf Life Saving WA; beach emergency number signs have been used more than 2 000 times when requests for assistance have been made to Western Australia police; and we have had over 134 000 downloads of the SharkSmart app as part of our "Switch on Your Sea Sense" campaign.

I have looked to see what our opposition's policy is in these respects, and I did not find a lot of sense there. In fact, the only thing I could find from the shadow Minister for Fisheries was a transcript of a media discussion held very early on the morning of 29 July 2021. There was not a lot of anything in it to be honest, members. When he was asked whether there was a role for government to protect fishermen, spearfishermen, divers or anyone in the water for that matter, his response was —

... I think there is a role for government in this space that's for sure and I think earlier ... or last year and the year before the Government trialled drum lines —

Of course, that was the year we took drum lines out because we found they were totally ineffective. The opposition's policy framework seemed to be calling for drum lines to be spread right along the coast from the south to the north. There was no evidence behind it; it was just an idea on the run. In fact, in this interview, the most common phrases were, "I guess", "I think", "I guess" —

I guess the other thing to of course is ... whether we use the shark deterrent devices, now I'm not sure how effective they are —

Well, 8 800 people certainly do think they are effective —

I would suggest though that it's not a bad idea to be using something that may help, anything you can do to try and stay safe.

That is the difference between our government and the members opposite. Our government is about evidence, science, structure, strategy and continuous learning and the members opposite are about "I guess".