

WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE

**735. Ms E.L. HAMILTON to the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to rebuilding the state's stocks of demersal fish for generations to come.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government is creating new high-quality fishing opportunities for charter operators and recreational fishers whilst ensuring the sustainability of the resource?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of any alternative policies to preserve demersal fish stocks for future generations whilst also maintaining a balanced fishing allocation between sectors?

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

- (1)–(2) Some 18 months ago, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, Recfishwest, the Marine Tourism Association of WA and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development came to me with a serious problem—our prized demersal species were under significant threat and we had to halve the benchmark recovery target for the species to 375 tonnes. That is a serious issue because it is about the sustainability and future of a species that is highly prized by fishers on the west coast of Western Australia. It meant that some hard decisions had to be made, and we made them; we did not resile from them. They were tough decisions and they were not popular. They were decisions that were very hard to explain in terms of the science, but the issue is there and the science is there. In making those decisions, we recognised the need to support rec fishing, commercial fishing and the charter boat sector into the future. We put together a \$10 million package—a package that is unprecedented in Australia. We were able to do that thanks to our careful budget management.

I was very pleased to be on the water down in Fremantle today with Dr Andrew Rowland from Recfishwest to confirm that our \$1.5 million package for fish aggregating devices, or FADs, is underway. That initiative will provide new recreational opportunities, targeting surface-dwelling fish like tuna, mahi mahi and marlin. These are really interesting and exciting fish to fish for, and they provide a good feed as well. We are providing alternatives and encouraging people, as part of our campaign, to switch their fish. I am really grateful to Recfishwest, which has undertaken the pilot to prove this technology up. We have had it in place in the north west, and we have had some really feedback from there. I recognise the great work that Recfishwest has done in proving the value of FADs to recreational fishing.

We are putting in place 28 FADs to be deployed along our coastline from Albany to Geraldton. In winter, they will be deployed in the northern waters to provide an alternative fishing location in the north. We are providing funding to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to support that program on an ongoing basis. These are not a passing “fad”; these are fish aggregating devices that are there for the future. We intend to increase the number of them up to 40 to make sure that we have great opportunities for boat-based recreational fishing and charter operators into the future. We are really encouraging fishers to switch their fish.

Throughout this period, I have looked to see whether the opposition would show a single shred of leadership on an issue that is important to the future of Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I had faith that the opposition would show some leadership and join us in protecting these species —  
Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, members! The Minister for Fisheries has the call.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I expected members opposite to show some leadership and recognise the hard work that has been done, with difficult decisions, to support these fishers into the future. What did the Leader of the Opposition say? He said on 31 August—my birthday, actually!—that the changes were unwarranted. He has no respect for the science, for the people in DPIRD who put this work together, or for the opinions of the peak bodies. He said that they were unwarranted; that is his view.

Then the member for Vasse stood on the steps of Parliament just a few weeks ago and said that 80 per cent of charter operators were looking at pulling up stumps. If she had requested a briefing on this, she would have known that 50 per cent of charter boat licences have been inactive for years. This is just more of the misinformation that the member for Vasse comes in here with and repeats, on any issue. It does not matter whether the issue is health or fishing; regardless of the issue, she comes in here and spreads misinformation.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This tells us that not a single member of the opposition has requested a briefing on the science. They do that deliberately, because they do not want to know the science and they do not want to know the facts. They just want to go out there with plausible deniability and spread misinformation. The opposition has engaged in spreading commentary that has no basis in science or fact and only serves to discredit the extraordinary work of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, its internationally recognised scientists, and the peak bodies. All opposition members want to do is serve political interests by appealing to grab a few votes. That is what they did in 2010 when they totally undermined the sustainability of the fishery then, and they are doing it again today. That is absolutely true.

If members opposite think they are showing leadership by representing a populist view, ignoring science and placing the future of this fishery at risk, they are not fit for government and they should be ashamed. The last thing I want to see is a situation like we had in South Australia, where the fishery is closed. No-one has an industry in South Australia, with a closed fishery, so I am calling on the opposition to show some leadership, look at the science, and start coming in here and commenting based on fact.