

BEACH EMERGENCY NUMBER SIGNS

Statement by Minister for Fisheries

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries) [12.15 pm]: I am delighted to inform the house that the McGowan Labor government is working hard to improve beach safety along the Western Australian coast. Since 2017, the McGowan government has provided funding for the installation of beach emergency number, or BEN, signs on the coast between the WA and South Australian border and Geraldton. So far, almost 1 300 signs have been installed along Western Australia's coastline, and the southern rollout of BEN signs is likely to be completed by the end of the year.

The BEN signs project was initiated by Mr Rick Gerring after the tragic death of his brother Ben, who was fatally injured by a shark while surfing off Falcon Beach in Mandurah. The first BEN signs were launched in Kwinana in 2018 by Rick; my predecessor in the Fisheries portfolio, Hon David Kelly; and Deputy Premier and Kwinana MLA, Hon Roger Cook. BEN signs are prominently located at WA beaches, each with a unique identifying number to help emergency services pinpoint an exact location to attend to and improve response times for serious incidents.

Beach emergency number signs provide vital support to first responders to emergencies and form part of the state government's comprehensive shark mitigation strategy. The continuation of the program for the northern coastline was announced in December 2020, with nine local government authorities having submitted an expression of interest for the signs. I am pleased to advise that the Shire of Chapman Valley is the first local government authority between Geraldton and Kununurra to share in \$600 000 of available grant funding for the northern rollout of BEN signs. Up to \$50 000 is available to each of the 12 eligible local government authorities to improve beach safety for their communities. The BEN sign initiative is making a difference. By the end of August 2021, St John Ambulance had received 457 requests for ambulance attendance referencing BEN signs and the WA Police Force had 329 requests for police assistance. I congratulate the Shire of Chapman Valley for leading the northern rollout and thank other shires working with the McGowan government to help bring BEN signs to their beaches.