

CLOSED WATERS MOTORISED VESSELS AREA — SOUTH BEACH, FREMANTLE

Grievance

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [9.45 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Transport. This grievance is made on behalf of my constituents and those further afield who believe very strongly that South Beach and South Fremantle should be left exclusively to swimmers and, in the case of the beach just south of Fremantle Sailing Club, their dogs.

Users of South Beach have seen successive efforts to have vessels, motorised and sailing, including jet skis, encroach on a very popular and much treasured public asset. The most recent campaign to stop vessels encroaching on public safety and enjoyment at South Beach was in response to the Department of Transport's "South Metropolitan Aquatic Use Review". This proposal, left unchecked, would have allowed a significant area of South Beach, 120 metres from the groyne that separates South Beach and the Fremantle Sailing Club and 125 metres in from shore, to be open to motorised vessels—that is, boats and jet skis. That proposal also included a beach landing area. Beach users were aghast at this proposal, which they rightly believed would have an extremely detrimental effect on public safety and enjoyment of the beach. Beach users enjoy the usual amenity that the public utilise at the beach—walking, swimming, children playing and getting their confidence in the water and exercising their dogs. These uses are enjoyed by thousands of people every week at South Beach. As a user of this beach, I can say categorically that another element of this coast has motivated people to come out and fight for this stretch of beach. South Beach is not just a beach; it is a jewel at the heart of the community. It is a place where people go, sometimes 365 days a year, to meet friends, make friends and greet acquaintances, or sometimes just alone to get fresh air, have a swim or a walk or to take their dogs. This beach is a free and accessible community asset and it should be kept that way.

One of the reasons people have been so motivated to keep boats and further development away from this beach is that so little public beach is available in Fremantle. With the port, fishing harbour, and commercial areas, including a marina, as well as a sailing club, the only places for the public to swim in that area are Bathers Beach and South Beach. Beach users are frustrated at successive efforts to encroach on safe public access and swimming at this beach. They are frustrated and they are angry, so much so that when the Department of Transport released its survey in early December last year, the defenders of the beach swiftly swung into action. They set up information stalls and commenced collecting petition signatures so that with the addition of the 600 signatures in the petition I tabled this morning, over 11 100 signatures have been collected in support of a groyne to groyne swimmers-only zone at South Beach. That is an extraordinary achievement by South Beach users. They collected signatures daily, including on Christmas Day. That is the sort of passion and commitment the Fremantle beach users group have to this public space and to their natural environment. Only half of those signatures came from people living locally. Many more came from within the wider metropolitan area. Nearly 10 per cent came from interstate and overseas. This is a widely recognised asset on Fremantle's popular tourist trail.

I know the minister is checking his phone and it might be interesting, but I think for the people in my electorate this is an interesting issue to which I would ask the minister to pay attention.

Mr D.C. Nalder: You will find it interesting what I was checking.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Another reason that this beach should be swimmers only, groyne to groyne, and free from all boats is that it is a particularly accessible beach for the elderly, the very young and those with limited mobility. The area between the grass and the water is narrow and the water is protected and mostly calm. As I said in my inaugural speech to this Parliament, South Beach has a calm and a lack of pretence that is fiercely protected by the local community. Prior to the aquatic use review, the proposal in 2012–13 by the Fremantle Sailing Club to construct a parallel groyne on the north end of South Beach so that junior sailors could have a launching ramp closer to shore also drew the ire of the local community and was rigorously opposed. Members of the Fremantle beach users group reference a history of the Fremantle Sailing Club published in 2000 titled *Sailing to Success: Fremantle's Yachting Heritage and the History of Fremantle Sailing Club*. The author of that book, Trevor Sutcliffe, confirms the beach users' frustration over the years at the loss of public beach space and outlines what he believes to be the understanding that negotiations to extend the sailing club to its current boundaries would be the end of the matter. This view has been confirmed by senior Fremantle council staff, including the then CEO Ken Posney.

In short, the users of South Beach are sick and tired of efforts to encroach on full safe public access to their beach, either by motorised boats or by yachts or support vessels from the Fremantle Sailing Club. There may be issues allowing an easy launch ramp for junior sailors, but it is the firm view of the community that the sailing club has enough coastal real estate to manage that issue within its existing footprint. The community saw off that proposal because it felt that sailing clubs' motorised tenders or rigid inflatable boats coming on to the beach presented real safety issues for the hundreds of swimmers and their families with young children who use this

section as the main entrance to the beach. In summary, minister, beach users said, “Enough; the sailing club has enough of our coast. We treasure our free public space—this community meeting place; our beach—and we’ll fight for it.” In 2007-08, the state government proposed the three harbours policy, which was another effort to extend the marinas in Fremantle. That was also fiercely and successfully opposed. Many of the people who have put their heart and soul into fighting for South Beach to be boat-free are with us this morning, and I acknowledge their commitment. They welcome the recommendation that arose from the aquatic use review that motorised boats should be kept from the shoreline, but the beach users believe they have won this battle but not the war. They would like to see South Beach free of all vessels, including from the sailing club, and for it to become a vessel-free zone groyne to groyne. They would like to hear the minister commit to that this morning.

MR D.C. NALDER (Alfred Cove — Minister for Transport) [9.51 pm]: I thank the member for Fremantle for her grievance.

The Department of Transport is committed to working with the community and stakeholders to continually monitor and improve localised aquatic use arrangements. These arrangements include waterskiing areas, the setting of speed limits, and in some instances the creation of sections of water that are closed to motorised vessels. It is not uncommon for the department to receive passionate and conflicting submissions. I am very familiar with South Beach. I played for South Fremantle Football Club for seven years, and we often used South Beach for training. We would run down, do some swimming and then run back to the oval. I am fully conversant with the amenity and what it provides to the local community.

The department recently conducted a review of the coastline from Fremantle port’s South Mole to Port Kennedy south in Warnbro Sound. This area included the area of coastline known as South Beach, immediately south of Fremantle Sailing Club. The review involved extensive consultation with key stakeholders, with one of the issues identified being the use of motorised vessels at South Beach. Previous representations had been made to the department that asked for total closure to motorised vessels along the beach; others requested that the status quo remain, with motorised vessels able to access the entire beach. To balance these conflicting views, the proposal put forward for public comment was to establish a 30-metre wide channel directly south of the existing groyne to allow motorised vessels to access the beach and utilise facilities ashore. This method has been successfully implemented in other popular beaches, including Meelup Beach in Geographe Bay.

Ms S.F. McGurk: But not Cottesloe.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I think the member for Fremantle needs to wait until the end.

To further enhance the safety of swimmers along the dog beach, the department also proposed to restrict the speed of motorised vessels to eight knots within the proposed beach access channel and within 200 metres of the shoreline, and close the waters to all motorised vessels south of the proposed access channel to the second groyne out to 100 metres offshore.

The public comment period closed on 31 January 2016. It attracted strong public interest, with over 2 500 responses received through the online survey. After careful consideration of the community feedback, the department modified three of the 10 proposals. Those included the proposals related to South Beach. On 22 March 2016, the department announced, and placed on its website, that the proposal to establish a vessel access channel onto South Beach had been discarded and that the entire beach area south of Fremantle Sailing Club to the second groyne would be closed to motorised vessels. I am not sure whether the member is aware —

Ms S.F. McGurk: Yes, we are. We are saying that we want all vessels to be banned, minister; not just motorised.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am advised that the final outcome has the support of the City of Fremantle and Fremantle Sailing Club, which will continue to have limited access to the area for training activities via an exemption that will be closely monitored by the department. The department is now preparing a new boating guide, new and updated signage, and a six-month education program to inform all waterway users of the changes that will come into effect from 31 May 2016. The review process has ensured safe, equitable and sustainable use of the coastline as the population of the area grows and demand increases for a variety of aquatic activities.

Ms S.F. McGurk: Minister, will you take an interjection?

Mr D.C. NALDER: Just a moment.

I wanted to check that this was a widely held review, and that others were involved in the consultation process and were aware of the changes, I have with me—I am happy to table it—the notice to members of Fremantle Sailing Club, which reads —

An amended proposal impacting the boating public includes a new closed waters zone banning motorised vessels which will now extend the entire length of South Beach, from the Fremantle Sailing Club groyne to the second groyne to the south and extending 125 meters from shore.

...

Fremantle Sailing Club Commodore Terry Baker stated, *“Fremantle Sailing Club is aligned with the Fremantle City Council in supporting the Department of Transport to ensure a safer environment for both the boating public and beach goers.*

The notice also included a quote from a Fremantle city councillor, who stated —

“This is a great outcome for the whole community. The Department of Transport is to be commended for supporting the community and the Council’s wishes to make South Beach a safe swimming zone.

[See paper 4034.]

Mr D.C. NALDER: I repeat that the government’s responsibility is to find the right balance for the whole community when there are conflicting and various opinions about usage. Careful consideration has been given, including assessment of the 2 500 responses received through the community consultation process, and I believe, from what I have received, the City of Fremantle is fully supportive, in which case we have done the right thing. We are committing to the continued monitoring of activities to ensure a safe environment for all beach users.

Ms S.F. McGurk: Minister, do you understand that people are saying that Fremantle Sailing Club has enough real estate, and they actually want all vessels to be stopped from having access along that beach, not just motorised?

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am happy to take the interjection, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr I.C. Blayney), if that is okay. I am aware, but, as I said, we received 2 500 submissions and the department went through them. The department has banned the use and access of motorised vessels anywhere near the beach —

Ms S.F. McGurk: And that’s welcomed; that’s good.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Before now, motorised vessels had unlimited access to anywhere on the beach; that has now been removed. But we will not make any changes to dinghies being able to be rowed up to the beach or other small, light craft coming up to that beach.

Ms S.F. McGurk: But there are other metropolitan beaches where that exclusion applies.

Mr D.C. NALDER: We believe we have taken a balanced approach. We know there will always be elements that will not necessarily be happy with the final outcome. I believe it is a much improved circumstance than we had before, and the department is committed to ensuring it continues to monitor activities on South Beach.