

## **SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION**

### *Grievance*

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [9.15 am]: I thank the Minister for Fisheries for taking my grievance. My grievance relates to the recent horrific attack on Mr Paul Millachip, a father of two, who was fatally bitten by a shark 50 to 75 metres from shore on the southern end of Port Beach on 6 November this year. Following the attack, I met with members of the Fremantle Surf Life Saving Club who were on hand to assist with the search efforts on the fatal day. The members are all very conscious that there is a lack of safe swimming areas along Western Australia's coastline. It has become very clear to me, after meeting with members of the club and talking with other beachgoers, that this tragic case has galvanised support within the community for proactive steps to be taken to ensure safer access to our beaches. As an active member of the Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club, I can personally attest that once an area is made safe for swimming—for example, once a shark barrier is installed, as is the case for Cottesloe Beach during the summer months—it significantly increases the number of beachgoers who feel safe enough to swim at our beaches.

Although the government's recent investments in shark mitigation systems and infrastructure are welcomed, this tragic attack has brought attention to the deficiencies in our shark protection system. The installation of shark barriers is clearly one of the most effective ways of ensuring the safety of our beachgoers. However, I appreciate that shark barriers need to be installed in relatively calm waters, because if conditions are fairly rough, the shark nets become unstable and will be torn up and displaced. Nevertheless, there are still clearly a number of locations along our coastline at which shark nets could be installed, which would give our beachgoers more options on where they can safely swim.

Following the meeting with the members of the Fremantle Surf Life Saving Club, I was also made aware of major concerns over the significant gaps in our shark mitigation network. As the minister would be aware, the 25 satellite-linked VR4G receivers that comprise the shark mitigation network allow near real-time monitoring of tagged sharks on our state's beaches, allowing the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to issue public warnings that minimise the risk of human–shark encounters. I also recognise that the minister is trialling alarms. However, in the case of the attack on Mr Millachip, due to the limited range of these receivers sadly Port Beach was uncovered by the shark mitigation network at the time of the attack. The 400 to 500 metre range of the VR4G receiver would mean that the Leighton receiver's location—an estimated one kilometre from Port Beach, 1.5 kilometres from Sandrax, the southernmost section of Port Beach, and 3.5 kilometres from the closest receiver in Cottesloe—creates a significant gap in our capacity to provide effective early warnings. There are obviously many similar gaps across popular swimming beaches in the metropolitan area and major regional beaches.

When aerial surveillance and beach surveillance are not present or are hindered by adverse conditions, tagged sharks may approach these stretches of coast undetected, posing a risk to beachgoers. Although it is reported that the shark that caused Mr Millachip's tragic death was untagged, this incident has brought attention to the gaps in our shark mitigation system that must be quickly remedied to reduce the risk of future shark attacks. This includes an expansion of the shark monitoring network to ensure that tagged sharks can be detected along those major swimming beaches. If anything, we know that these proactive steps can save lives.

Consequently, I request the minister to act rapidly and decisively in expanding Western Australia's VR4G receiver network to ensure that our coastline is more reasonably covered by the shark mitigation network. I further request the minister to expedite progress towards installing further shark barriers across Western Australia's most popular beaches as a matter of the highest priority.

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries)** [9.18 am]: I thank the member for Cottesloe for his grievance. I have previously expressed in this house the sense of loss and tragedy around Mr Millachip's attack. Although the risk of shark attack is low along the Western Australian coastline, whatever the nature of a shark attack, it affects everybody. We all share a sense of horror and the sense of loss that occurs with it. It always promotes the profound debate about what we should be doing or what we could be doing and lots of opinions about the best way of reducing risk into the future. That debate has been around for quite a while.

This government has focused on identifying a comprehensive way of reducing risk that is based on evidence and science. My predecessor, who sits next to me, Hon Dave Kelly, set the foundations for the management framework to reduce risk in Western Australia, and we have continued to build on and refine that process ever since. One of the foundations of that is ensuring that people have adequate knowledge of what is around, which the member raised in his grievance, and working out the best way of giving people that information to help them assess risk, because people go into waters right along the Western Australian coastline for a variety of purposes. For some it is to swim along the beach, and for others it is spearfishing or diving. There are a variety of ways that people enjoy our oceans and we want to ensure that they can continue to do that.

The partnerships that we have developed have been the foundation of how we manage risk. The partnership with Surf Life Saving Western Australia has been profound not only for getting feedback from people who are out there daily supporting people to engage safely with the ocean, but also regarding the aerial and beach patrols that have added significantly to being able to cover a large tract of popular beaches as efficiently as possible. We certainly take a lot of advice from the Surf Life Saving Association. I understand that at the recent meeting of the members for Cottesloe and Bicton and members of Surf Life Saving WA, it was agreed that this issue should not be dealt with in a political way; it should be an arrangement whereby the community identifies what is important for that area. There is an open invitation to convey those views to me to see how we can continue to improve our relationship with Surf Life Saving WA et cetera. It is very unfortunate that the agreement that the member for Cottesloe and the member for Bicton shared on a commonly signed letter of support to Surf Life Saving and to raise these issues has been overlaid by this grievance, but I accept that the member has an opportunity to present a grievance.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Minister, I'm not attacking the government or criticising it. I understand your good intentions; it's purely on behalf of my electorate. I am not seeking to confound anything we are doing with the member for Bicton.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Member for Cottesloe, I understand, but there is an agreement with the community, Surf Life Saving WA and the member for Bicton, and I think that if that agreement failed in some respect—if the government did not respond in an adequate way—there would perhaps be a better basis for a grievance.

I want to go through the rest of our mitigation program, because at the core of this is gaining the public's confidence in the systems that are in place. Too often in this house of late, work has been done to undermine public confidence in the very genuine attempt of people and governments to address this risk. Earlier this year, following the cessation of the shark drum line trial, we announced a significant expansion of the shark mitigation program. That includes the continuation over the next four years of the aerial patrols that are operating along popular beaches in the south west, through the Mandurah area and up into the northern beaches. Surf Life Saving WA has been doing a terrific job with those aerial patrols. The other areas include jet skis and drums for Surfing WA events, so that extra resources are put in to help safeguard the public during a major event. The SharkSmart WA app has around 60 000 users. I am very pleased that people are using that app to check out what is available. The shark monitoring and enhanced tagging that the member referred to has \$2.8 million allocated to it over the next four years to improve the range of and upgrade the existing 34 receivers, and to look at an enhanced tagging program. We know from the science that opportunistic tagging of white sharks, which are typically responsible for these attacks, is the best way to get that tagging program out. We have significantly enhanced that.

The member mentioned beach enclosures, and that is an ongoing program of support, working in partnership with local government. I am sure that this incident, unfortunate as it is, will raise that issue in the minds of local governments and they will work with their communities to see whether beach enclosures are the most suitable option for particular beaches within their local government areas. I always have an open door to local governments and am willing to engage in any conversations around those requirements.

The shark response unit mobilised very quickly in response to that attack. We do not want attacks to happen, but when they do, the most significant thing is to recover the person and make sure that they get access to first aid in an appropriate and timely manner. That links to the beach numbering system, which enables people to identify exactly which beach they are at so that emergency services can get there very quickly.

The community awareness campaign that my predecessor raised has done an enormous amount to sensitise people to assessing risk. We know that if there are whale carcasses or seal pups in an area, that significantly attracts sharks. If people are aware of that, they can make a decision about entering the water. We have a comprehensive system. I certainly take on board the member's points, but I continue to support community efforts in this respect.