

## **WELLINGTON DAM — RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY**

### *Grievance*

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston)** [9.11 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Transport and relates to licensing boats to allow people to ski on Wellington Dam. My reason for raising this issue today is that I am concerned about the health and safety of people who will be using that dam this long weekend. A couple of thousand people will probably be around Wellington Dam for various reasons, including skiing, which is now allowed on the dam. I am not asking for people to be stopped from skiing straightaway; I am asking for a review at the end of the year to look at the impact of V8 ski-boats on that dam. I have already raised in this house the irony of these boats using that dam. The small electric motors that local people have bought to comply with environmental issues are not allowed on most parts of the dam. For many years people have fished and recreated on the backwaters of the dam from these small dinghies with electric motors, which are now banned. Yet in the middle of the dam, people are allowed to use a 354 Chevy, which rips up and down the dam, to ski right up close to the wall. People are also allowed to use jet skis as long as they are towing. That would be fine if they stayed within the required area but they do not. It was reported to me after the Christmas weekend that threats of violence were made against people who never stayed in the ski area with their V8 boats but, instead, travelled to the backwaters where people camp for some peace and quiet and because it is cheaper. Family groups come together and really enjoy the national park, which is probably how it should be enjoyed. We should remember that this is part of a national park, with V8 boats in the middle of it. People are not allowed to take their dogs there, but they can take a V8 boat there. I find that quite amusing, to say the least. Some people who go to these backwaters put their boats in the water and never go skiing. Today, many of these boats have great big sound systems called boom boxes. They drive up the backwaters at three o'clock in the morning shining their spotlights into the camps. I am a bit concerned that someone might get shot because of the agitation between groups of people. This happens when someone shines a spotlight from a boat—they have boom boxes that blow most people out of the water—into these nice, quiet camping areas at three o'clock in the morning, which is very intrusive.

One of the first photos I saw from the first weekend the dam was opened to skiing was a jet ski parked alongside the wall. That is highly illegal but no-one policed it. All these problems are associated with licensing Wellington Dam after it was de-proclaimed a couple of years ago. At that time, the Minister for Water said that the community would have a big say on what happened on that dam. That never happened. I presented a petition to this house from 3 700 people saying, “Please do not license that area for skiing.” It is a place that people use to recreate in peace and quiet and enjoy nature and the lovely surrounding jarrah forest. There is also the side issue of motorbikes. We have “water” bikes—jet skis—and motorbikes in the bush that cause problems.

All of a sudden there was a blitz. Officers from the department went up there and grabbed these people who were using their little 10 and 12-foot boats with electric motors. What a change that made to the whole place. What made the department say that a boat with an electric motor is not allowed on the dam, yet a boat with a Chevy motor roaring its guts out is allowed to stay there? I do not understand the logic of that. I am asking that there be a review, in which the community is involved, after this summer. I acknowledge that there is a shortage of ski areas, but we have one of the best ski areas in Australia awaiting this government's action—that is, Lake Kepwari. It is a mine void—two kilometres long and one kilometre wide. It has been sitting there for a long time. The former Leader of the National Party even challenged me to a swim when he was going to open it about five years ago. It has not happened. The irony of that is that there was a blow through; we had a storm and water flowed from the south branch of the Collie River into that mine void and improved the water. We had to do a study to work out why the water improved. It was quite ironic. Under this government, there is no way forward.

Money is available to move that ski area to Lake Kepwari. The South West Development Commission has around \$4 million that could be used. It has been identified. It has been there for some years. I ask the minister to do a review to see how we can phase one area out and phase the other in at the same time. There is plenty of room for ski-boats out there, and it would be a great boom for tourism in Collie. We can go forward. Chalets can be built around Lake Kepwari and we can have low-impact camping around Wellington Dam. I ask the minister whether he will review Wellington Dam's usage after summer.

**MR D.C. NALDER (Alfred Cove — Minister for Transport)** [9.18 am]: I thank the member for the grievance. I will give a bit of background on this issue first, because the member raised some points that I was not aware of. Motorised vessels were officially permitted to operate on Wellington Dam from 28 February 2014 in line with the state government's election commitment to increase recreational opportunities for all Western Australians. A comprehensive assessment to determine the dam's suitability to safely accommodate waterskiing was conducted by the Department of Transport. The assessment identified an area of water approximately 1.2 kilometres long and 500 metres wide in Potters Gorge that has sufficient depth to safely accommodate waterskiing. Following discussions with both the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the

Department of Water, a number of measures were introduced to promote the safe use of Wellington Dam, including prohibiting motorised vessels from operating in the majority of Wellington Dam and imposing a five-knot speed restriction in all those areas outside the waterski area. Additionally, a section of beach adjacent to the camping ground has been established where motorised vessels are prohibited from operating.

In conjunction with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Department of Transport installed signage at key sites on the shoreline and marker buoys out on the water to clearly articulate the aquatic use arrangements and delineate the waterski area. The department has also published a Wellington Dam boating guide with safety information pertaining to waterskiing. Department of Transport compliance officers conduct regular patrols of Wellington Dam to encourage voluntary compliance with the local arrangements and other safety requirements. Overall, they have reported that the overwhelming majority of vessel users are adhering to the new arrangements and doing the right thing. The officers also report noncompliance rates, and the advice that they have provided to me is that noncompliance rates are in line with what they see at other waterways around the state. It is not always possible for compliance officers to be present, but they have a program to ensure that they check all the waterski areas to ensure compliance with the guidelines.

It is my understanding that the Department of Transport received seven reports from the same person on 16 February 2015 that related to alleged noncompliance by a number of motorised vessels on Wellington Dam on the Australia Day long weekend. These reports are currently being investigated by the Department of Transport. It is my understanding that the Department of Transport has not received any other marine safety compliant forms related to Wellington Dam since February this year.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** Do you want them to load them up after this weekend?

**Mr D.C. NALDER:** No. I will come back to the member's queries. If the motor is removed from a motorised vessel, it is no longer deemed to be a motorised vessel, and that is all pretty standard. I am confident that the safety measures introduced retain the majority of the dam for passive recreation, while delivering upon our commitment to accommodate a wider range of recreational activities.

The question that the member asked was whether we can review it at the end of the year. I have not heard about the other waterway that the member mentioned. I am more than happy for us to review that at the end of the year to see whether it is the best use and whether there is a more acceptable arrangement to the broader community there. I am happy that we undertake that. I will not promise the outcome of it at this point, but I am more than happy for us to look at it. We are trying to accommodate a wide range of activities for a number of Western Australians, and we want to provide waterskiing facilities for those who enjoy that water sport. I am happy for us to look at it and see whether we can find a better outcome.