

SOUTH COAST MARINE PARK — CONSULTATION

671. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to comments from the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council that the state government's handling of plans for the proposed south coast marine park are 100 times worse than the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act process, and I note the minister's answer in the Legislative Council yesterday that he will receive submissions from entities outside of WA.

- (1) Is the minister now taking submissions, funding and direction from entities such as Pew Charitable Trusts?
- (2) Will he admit that he has not properly consulted with the local community and industry and, indeed, even the department of fisheries?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

- (1)–(2) The member for Roe said to me a couple of weeks ago outside this place that he was going to ask this question. I have been waiting. Unfortunately, he did not impress me with that lot of malarky, quite frankly.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: What an old bunch of malarky he came up with just then. Seriously! There has been more consultation on this proposed marine park than is statutorily required of government. We are going over and above and will continue to do so. Is it 100 times worse? Why did he not say “one gazillion”? Seriously! He is taking his cues from, I think, one person in the community, not the bulk of people, who are reasonable and who want the government to take action with a marine park. What the member for Roe as the local member does not do in this place is advocate for the incredible environment in his own backyard. He ignores it all the time. He tries to promote anxiety and fearmongering in the community, which does him no service whatsoever.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am more than happy to go through the exhaustive process.

Another thing I will say is that we are not at a conclusion here. We are in the middle of a process. It is interesting that there is so much commentary coming from the member when he should be saying to the community, “Let's engage in consultation”, because that is the process we have gone through and that is the process we will continue to go through.

We established the community reference committee, which engaged recreational fishers; commercial fishers; diving, tourism and local environment representatives; and other key groups in the community. We met more than six times over 18 months. In addition, 10 different sectoral advisory groups, or SAGs, comprising businesses, not-for-profits, independent experts and scientists all had input into the process. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions also separately consulted 31 individuals involved in commercial fishing and seven involved in recreational fishing. We went to every licensed commercial fisher and offered a face-to-face meeting. They were held in places like Albany, Hopetoun, Esperance and Perth.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, they were often one-on-one meetings. When that was accepted, those meetings were held. I do not know what more we could do, but we are doing more—much more.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: This is important! Do you want to hear the answer or not?

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members! Minister, I might just interrupt. When I first came into Parliament, we did not have supplementary questions; we had a lot of interjections. The concept of the supplementary question was to give someone the opportunity to ask a supplementary question and perhaps not continuously interject. If I am going to get continuous interjections from more than one person in the opposition, I will then have to reconsider whether to offer a supplementary question.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, Speaker.

The truth is that there are strong views on both sides. I will concede that. There are strong views from some, not all, of the commercial fishers, and there are very strong views from environmentalists in the conservation movement. It is the government's job to work through this to get the right balance and a sensible outcome. The value of the marine environment on the south coast is extraordinary. There are species there that do not exist anywhere else on the planet. Less than one per cent of state waters are devoted to their preservation and protection. That is not good enough.

The Western Australian community is demanding that we protect these areas. It is my job to work with the Minister for Fisheries to ensure that we strike a sensible and reasonable balance that will allow commercial fishers, recreational fishers, the community, conservationists and traditional owners to all be satisfied with an outcome. Not everyone will get 100 per cent of what they are after. My job is to land in the sensible centre, which is what this government always tries to achieve, and create an outcome that makes sense, protects the environment and allows for commercial and recreational opportunities into the future.