

DOLPHINS, JAMES POINT IN COCKBURN SOUND

365. Hon JIM SCOTT to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage:

I would have asked this question of the Minister for Housing and Works, but he is not here.

Hon Norman Moore: Is there some reason that the Minister for Housing and Works is not here?

Hon Kim Chance: He is very sick actually.

Hon JIM SCOTT: I ask -

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage will be aware of the dolphin population near James Point in Cockburn Sound.

- (1) Have any studies been conducted to ascertain the importance of the area inclusive of James Point as a dolphin habitat?
- (2) Can the Minister for the Environment and Heritage inform the House what impact the current coastal land and marine activity at Jervoise Bay has had on the dolphin population, including any reports of dolphin deaths since the Jervoise Bay project began?
- (3) As any work to -
 - (a) give safer access to Cockburn Sound for United States' naval vessels; or
 - (b) to build the James Point sheep loading facilitywill impact on the marine environment, can the minister tell the House what new impact studies has been undertaken for each of these projects?
- (4) Will the minister table these studies?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Yes. Two separate studies have been conducted. The first was between 1993 and 1997 as part of a PhD study by Ms Rebecca Donaldson on the presence and behavioural characteristics of dolphins in Cockburn Sound and on the importance of habitats for the dolphins in Cockburn Sound, including the James Point area. The PhD study is nearing completion. The second study was between 2000 and 2002 and was a PhD study by Mr Hugh Finn on the importance of habitats to the dolphins of Cockburn Sound and the Swan River. The PhD study is nearing completion.
- (2) To date no direct observations have been reported of impacts and there is no evidence of dolphin mortality due to the current coastal land and marine activity at Jervoise Bay. The recent PhD studies indicate that habitat health and water quality are key environmental conditions of relevance to the health of dolphins in Cockburn Sound.
- (3)
 - (a) There has been insufficient time in which to formulate a response to this part of the question, although it is likely that the environmental office of HMAS *Stirling* would be the best source of information on this issue.
 - (b) An environmental impact statement was prepared for this proposal in the form of a public environmental review. Mr Hugh Finn was engaged to investigate the potential population impacts of this proposal and concluded generally that direct population impacts were unlikely to occur, but that further investigation into the potential for disturbance or loss of habitat needed to be undertaken in recognition of the intrinsic value of benthic habitats - for example, seagrasses - to dolphin viability. To this end, Mr Finn recommended that more accurate habitat mapping of the Cockburn Sound region in and around the proposed development area be undertaken. It is understood that the proponent has committed to this action.
- (4) The various documents and reports etc that relate to these matters reside in a variety of institutions and, as with all publicly available literature, are accessible via the normal channels.