

MARINE SAFETY

769. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Minister assisting the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to keeping the community safe. Can the minister advise the house how proposed laws introduced to Parliament today will improve the safety of our waterways and those who use them?

Mr D.R. MICHAEL replied:

I thank the member for the question and acknowledge her particular interest in the important area of water safety. As she mentioned, earlier today the government introduced amendments to the Western Australian Marine Act to enable drug and alcohol testing on Western Australian waterways, which brings WA into line with most other jurisdictions across Australia and delivers a consistent safety message to skippers and drivers. I thank the Ministers for Transport and Police for their work on this bill to date. Under these new laws, skippers navigating a vessel will be subject to the same drug and alcohol limits and penalties as those in place for drivers on Western Australian roads. The first stage of the new laws includes offences to target the unsafe operation of vessels and significantly increases penalties for skippers under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Skippers who operate a vessel under the influence face a fine of up to \$3 750 for a first offence and more than \$7 500 and up to 18 months' imprisonment for a third or subsequent offence. Those responsible for causing death while under the influence can face up to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine that reflects the severity of that offence.

Although the majority of skippers are responsible on the water, this approach allows officers to test a skipper for drugs or alcohol to ensure that all skippers adhere to these new regulations and act to improve safety. The Department of Transport officers supported by the Western Australia Police Force will have the ability to test skippers if required and remove any threat to on-water safety. An education campaign will also raise awareness of the reforms. In the coming months I look forward to debating that with the opposition and hopefully getting its support.

The latest safety reforms designed for our waterways follow the introduction of more stringent safety equipment requirements for vessels that were announced recently. The changes to safety equipment will maximise technological improvements, particularly with regard to marine rescues, and will ensure that life jackets are always carried, and worn when risk is elevated on the water. On-water incidents in WA have claimed 57 lives in the past seven years, the same number of lives claimed over the former 12 years. As we move to warmer weather, I encourage all boat owners to take the time to ensure that they have the appropriate safety equipment and to also skipper the vessel safely.