

MARTUWARRA FITZROY RIVER

225. Hon NEIL THOMSON to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:

My question without notice of which some notice is given is to the Minister for Transport and I refer to —

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, member. I cannot quite hear you and I am sure Hansard is having the same problem.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I refer to the recent tragic deaths of two Kimberley men who died swimming in the Martuwarra Fitzroy River.

- (1) Has the minister considered building a temporary footbridge or other pedestrian-capable structure?
- (2) If not, why not?
- (3) If yes to (1), why has the minister not proceeded with the project?
- (4) If yes to (1), what were the cost estimates of any options considered?
- (5) Given the tragic deaths so far, and the two years to go before the new road bridge will be constructed, will the minister reconsider the decision not to build some form of pedestrian crossing that could be utilised by pedestrians after hours?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. I answer on behalf of the Leader of the House. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Transport.

- (1)–(5) Main Roads considered the installation of a temporary bridging structure—Bailey bridge—across the Martuwarra–Fitzroy River, which currently spans 200 metres. However, this was not considered a viable option due to the damage sustained to the existing bridge and piers; the additional extensive piling work required to make it safe and secure for use as a superstructure; and the requirement for a complete rebuild of the eastern bridge abutment and bridge approach roads.

Further investment on making the old bridge “safe” was not deemed appropriate, given that demolition of the structure is due to commence in May. As an alternative, a ferry service was progressed to provide pedestrian access across the river in the first instance. This commenced yesterday. Subject to water levels, the ferry service will be scaled up to take essential vehicles.

In the meantime, Main Roads is also working on establishing low-level river crossings for vehicles. Development work for the construction of two temporary crossings is underway. Timing of construction is dependent on future rainfall events and river conditions, but it is expected that the first of these crossings, which will be accessible to four-wheel drives only initially, may be available in late March. A second crossing is planned near the existing bridge and should be available in May for use during the dry season when river levels are low.

If I can say as Minister for Emergency Services, it is terribly, terribly sad that people have died in the river. Prior to the ferry service, a helicopter was in operation to take people from side to side, but obviously some people have swum in the river and it has ended badly. I urge everyone to keep out of the river because it is still not safe.