

FISHERIES — WHITEBAIT STOCKS

**679. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to the *Status reports of the fisheries and aquatic resources of Western Australia 2020/21: State of the fisheries*, which indicates that whitebait stocks from within the west coast bioregion are “unsustainable–inadequate”.

- (1) In view of the stock assessment in 2018 already indicating a risk rating of “severe” for whitebait and the subsequent findings of the 2020–21 status report, what studies have been undertaken to determine the impact of such significantly low stocks of whitebait on —
  - (a) fish stocks that feed on whitebait and fish stocks overall; and
  - (b) the overall sustainability of the west coast bioregion?
- (2) What management activities have been undertaken to rebuild whitebait stocks to sustainable levels since 2018?
- (3) In the event that no studies have been undertaken or management activities set in place, why have they not?

**Hon KYLE MCGINN replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of the question. The following answer has been provided to me by the Minister for Fisheries.

- (1)
  - (a) The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development monitors the stocks of key indicator species, including Australian herring, which predate on whitebait. The latest herring stock assessment indicates this species has fully recovered following management actions taken in 2015.
  - (b) The latest *Status reports of the fisheries and aquatic resources of Western Australia 2020/21* reported that 98 per cent of the state’s fish stocks were not at risk from fishing. Within the west coast region, both whitebait and garfish are classified as being environmentally limited.
- (2) Based on the 2018 assessment, in July 2019, following extensive consultation with industry, DPIRD implemented a closed season to reduce the catch of whitebait by 50 per cent.
- (3) The current management settings for whitebait will be reviewed following the next whitebait stock assessment scheduled for 2023.