

MARGARET RIVER PRO — SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION

271. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Tourism:

I note that having seen today's rally, the minister is aware of the surfing community's concerns about sharks. I refer to the cancellation of the Margaret River Pro and his endorsement of the World Surf League's decision to cancel this event in light of issues raised by a few professional surfers regarding shark safety.

- (1) What representations did he make to the Minister for Fisheries to do more to protect ocean users from sharks?
- (2) Why did he not fight harder to see this event continue in Margaret River this year given Surfing WA's management of the event zone and Margaret River's reputation as a tourist destination?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

- (1)–(2) Why does the Western Australian Liberal Party hate the Margaret River Pro? Let me remind the house that I think in the very first week after taking office and being sworn in as the Minister for Tourism, I was notified by Mark Lane of Surfing WA, an excellent servant of the sport, that, unfortunately, the previous government had lost the Margaret River Pro. The Margaret River Pro was going to be removed as a world championship tour event. Mr Lane approached me in the hope that we as a government might support a second-tier event. I said to Mark Lane at the time that I absolutely supported this event as did the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the government. The McGowan government will fight and do everything it can to retain the only world championship event hosted annually in Western Australia. We did that. We authorised Mr Lane to go back to America and approach the World Surf League organisers, the owner of the tour, and convey the message that he had the full support of the state government. What happened as a consequence? They signed a contract for two years—an extension of the World Surf League's top tier event at the Margaret River Pro. That happened as a direct consequence of advocacy by Mr Lane and the government of Western Australia—the McGowan government—not by the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party, however, spent the entire summer writing opinion pieces in the hope there would be shark attacks so they would be able to condemn the government in the hope the Margaret River Pro might be impacted. It was not a good thing; it was a very sad outcome. When we say we supported the decision by the World Surf League, we did because it is the league's decision to make. On the morning of the decision being announced, I spoke to the CEO of the World Surf League. She assured me that she was satisfied with, and very thankful for, all the measures offered by both the organiser of the Margaret River Pro and the state government. In fact, in that discussion she confirmed to me that had it gone ahead, that event would have been the safest one the league had ever conducted on the planet. She said that, unfortunately, the league was swayed by the presence of dead whales on the beach. With the recent death of 40 whales in the near vicinity of the same area, the league was concerned more about the impact of dead whales and the continued presence of the oil from the dead whales —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will get to that—and its ability to attract sharks over a long time. That swayed the league.

Let me make this point about the claims made by Brazilian surfers. Brazilian surfers do not like surfing at Margaret River.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, I call you to order for the first time.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! I know it is your electorate, member for —

Mr P. PAPALIA: By her actions, the member for Vasse is empowering the Brazilians' argument that they should not have to surf a break they do not like.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The point I made —

The SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The point I made about the decision by the World Surf League was that it put its business model in jeopardy. The league's business model is selling to certain locations around the world. Where there are sharks at a World Surf League event, the league puts at risk its business model, not ours, because it has rolled over —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister! I cannot hear the minister. I was talking to this side of the house, but now I am talking to both sides. I want to hear the answer. Member for Vasse, you asked a question; listen to the answer.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Look, member, we are doing everything we can. I did everything we could to try to retain the Margaret River Pro. The member for Vasse appears to be doing everything she can to drive it away. That is disappointing. I say to anyone who values the Margaret River Pro to get on board with our efforts to retain it and encourage the World Surf League to come back. Do not empower the Brazilians because they do not like the break.