

SHARK FISHERY — SEA LIONS

**826. Dr G.G. JACOBS to the Minister for Fisheries:**

Can the minister update the house on the likely impact of the proposed commonwealth sea lion closure zones and the effect they will have on the state's fishing industry?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

I thank the member for Eyre for his question. This is an important issue for fishermen in his electorate because obviously the temperate shark fishery goes all the way around to the South Australian border. At a time when so many of the world's fisheries are classed as either over-exploited or depleted, it is great that we can assure the people of Western Australia that 95 per cent of our fisheries in WA are assessed as sustainable, and the remaining five per cent, predominantly beyond the impact of mankind through to natural events, are being managed obviously because of the downturn in the fish stocks. Overwhelmingly, there is no other place in Australia or indeed the world that takes ecologically sustainable fishing practice as seriously as we do here in Western Australia, and I think that is something we should all be proud of. However, some of our fisheries are still losing productive fishing grounds for, shall we say, uncertain ecological gains, and obviously the temperate shark fishery is one that is currently under threat. Regarding the status of the Australian sea lion, it is an important species; no-one doubts that. It is a protected species, with population pressures. It is an important issue. There are somewhere around 10 000 to 14 000 sea lions between Western Australia and South Australia, with obviously different numbers at different times.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** What are their names?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** This is a serious issue and the member makes jokes about their names—really?

The problem is that if the commonwealth had its way and imposed 25-kilometre restrictions around the breeding habitats of the sea lions, it would effectively shut down 25 000 square kilometres—one-third of that fishery. That fishery is vitally important. None of that produce gets exported. It is all for the domestic market, so when people go to buy fish and chips in their electorates, they are predominantly buying fish that has come out of that fishery. We can only imagine the cost pressure on domestic fish produce and seafood if one-third of that fishery were to be shut down.

To put Australian sea lions into another context, from 2007–08 to 2014–15—over those seven years—the total accidental kill of sea lions by fishermen in those fisheries was six. If we also take into consideration the likely impact of sharks taking sea lions through the removal of one-third of the shark fishery—because sharks eat sea lions—it would have a negative impact on the population of sea lions. That is why I have taken up the fight with the commonwealth. That is why I have written to the federal minister to point out the significant environmental and economic issues with the proposal. Interestingly also, the commonwealth does not have a plan to compensate fishermen if it were to take away the livelihood of fishermen through the combined effect of environmental policies. If we did that here in Western Australia, at least we would buy back whatever licence or permit was issued. This is an important issue for not just fishermen in the temperate shark fishery, but also consumers of fish product in Western Australia, which is why the state government is not prepared to stand by and allow the commonwealth to impose these restrictions on our fishery. That is why I have asked the commonwealth to reconsider its approach on this very important matter.