

SHARKS — DATA-RECORDING ACOUSTIC RECEIVERS

564. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Fisheries:

Can the minister please update the house on the state government's shark monitoring program?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for her question. I acknowledge the work that the member does and the interest she takes in shark activity in her electorate. From the outset, I note that the member for Bassendean is not in the chamber so I will not direct my comments or reflect on his comments. I will make it general.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Willagee!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This is a very important issue of public safety. I want to highlight the fact that when politicians try to score cheap political points, they can sometimes exacerbate a problem and create a greater risk to the public by exposing them to risks that they should not be exposed to in order to gain, as I said, some kind of cheap, political point.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That happened on the weekend when the opposition claimed that the government was putting people's lives at risk because we had not fixed two active transponder buoys that are part of the VR4G satellite system. Over the last few years in Western Australia, the government has spent over \$40 million in shark mitigation and hazard management. Part of that management includes the tagging program and the sonar buoys that transfer data into the satellite system in real life—people's phones, laptops, whatever it might be—so they can monitor the tagged sharks. Over 800 sharks have been tagged and 200 of them are white sharks. Mr Speaker, I promise you that I do not know how many white sharks there are in the ocean —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: — but there are far more than 200. In fact, the member for Bateman just pointed out that a tagged shark was tracked doing 7 000 kilometres in 99 days from the coast of Africa to the coast of Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We do not know how many sharks are out there but we know there are a lot more than 200. My point is that there are 25 VR4G receiver buoys in the ocean. In the last couple of weeks, two of them went offline, which was the subject of a criticism by the Labor Party on the weekend.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: That is enough.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Two of them went offline. The reason two of them went offline—surprise, surprise—had something to do with the weather conditions and the sea state off the coast in the last few weeks. One buoy went offline off Busselton and another off Floreat. They were fixed this week. We were criticised for putting people's lives in danger because those buoys had not been fixed.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: When?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It was on Saturday night. The reason they were not fixed was —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: — that we did not want to put the lives of Department of Fisheries workers in danger in rough sea states to go and fix the buoys. We just cannot win with the Labor Party. The bottom line here is the more people were told that their lives were in danger because two buoys were offline, the more the falsehood was reinforced that, if the buoys were working, their lives would be any safer. Members opposite are telling people it is okay to swim in the ocean because those two transponder buoys are working now.

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am happy to give the opposition a lecture on bathymetrics, sonar technology and the speed of sound through water any day of the week. The bottom line is —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn. Member for Warnbro, you might have missed the story, but I have not missed you shouting out—just relax. Through the Chair.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Members opposite obviously do not listen to the member for Bassendean either. That is okay; it means that nobody does, so maybe I am reading too much into this. However, the bottom line is that it is ridiculous to reinforce the myth that people would somehow be safer going into the ocean were those two buoys working, had they been repaired and had we endangered the lives of people from the Department of Fisheries and contractors to go and fix them in a rough sea state. Members need to be guarded, when they try to score cheap political points, that they are not doing more to put people's lives at risk, like the Labor Party has just done.