

SHARKS — HAZARD MITIGATION ACTIVITIES

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

Can the minister please update the house on the Liberal–National government’s shark mitigation activities, in particular the recently announced trial of drones at metropolitan and regional beaches?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

Excellent. I thank the member for Vasse for the question.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: All I hear is a lot of drone from the other side, Mr Speaker. I thank the member for Vasse —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, relax. You are stressing me out!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I thank the member for Vasse for her question. This is an important issue. Since 2008 the Liberal–National government has spent around \$33 million on a range of different strategies to try to address the ongoing and ever present risk of shark attack in Western Australia. We are doing a lot of different things. It is not just about drones, which I will get to shortly, it is also about increasing aerial surveillance. Under the Labor government back in 2007, there was one fixed-wing aircraft that had a volunteer observer trying to look down out the window to see whether there was a shark in the water. Now we have helicopters that patrol our beaches better and, as of December, we will start a three-month trial of drone technology, which I announced on Sunday at the beautiful City Beach in the member for Churchlands’ electorate.

Mr S.K. L’Estrange: Thanks for coming down.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It was a pleasure to be there.

It is important that we try every kind of technology that will help make our beaches and communities along the coast safer from the risk of shark attack. We all know the best way to see a shark is obviously looking down from above. That is why helicopters work. The drones will transmit back, in real time, high-definition images to operators—all licensed under the Civil Aviation Safety Authority—of small drones to see whether sharks are in the water and to try to alert potential beach users of the risk. Of course it is not just about that. The Government Chief Information Officer is currently negotiating with shark mitigation systems to try to determine whether the Clever Buoy system is suitable for trialling in Western Australia as well. Hopefully, we will also be doing something with that coming into this summer.

Compare that with the opposition’s shark mitigation policy. Opposition members announced it the other day. It comprises two things. One is subsidies; that is, for 1 000 out of 300 000 surfers to be eligible for a subsidy for a personal safety device that may or may not always work. Note: do not use it around pregnant women, do not use it around the elderly, do not use it around young kids and do not use it around people with heart issues, and it may or may not always work! I know this because our government invested money in the University of Western Australia to test the successfulness of that technology. But all that aside, its other policy—the sum of all its policies—was subsidies for Shark Shield and also to get rid of the serious threat policy. If a shark is harassing kids at a beach or if a shark actually takes someone’s life, it will be left to swim around the ocean. If a shark takes two lives, it will be left there. We are committed to finding serious ways to respond to the shark threat. The Labor Party is obviously committed to stunts. It can never be trusted with putting the lives of Western Australians before those of sharks.