

SORRENTO BEACH — SHARK MITIGATION

Grievance

MR P. LILBURNE (Carine) [10.05 am]: Today I grieve to the Minister for Fisheries, Hon Don Punch, MLA, regarding a matter within the Carine electorate that I represent in the Legislative Assembly.

One of the great things about living in Western Australia is the great beaches. My electorate of Carine has a unique coastline for the Perth metropolitan area that attracts a range of water users to this area. The rocky reef platform along much of this stretch of coast creates a great opportunity for snorkelling, diving, surfing and fishing, as well as creating a series of interesting small beaches for people to enjoy and explore. Sorrento Beach and Waterman's Bay are pristine recreational waters that provide a focus point for my community.

I am a local Carine resident who grew up in the Carine district. I distinctly remember looking at property available for housing construction as a five-year-old boy with my parents in 1978. I cherish the photos of my swimming and fishing adventures that occurred every weekend when I was growing up. I held a recreational rock lobster and abalone fishing licence and remember diving for these delicacies during my twenties and thirties. I have watched the Carine district grow and blossom. I am greatly humbled to represent these wonderful communities.

My election commitment in October 2020, prior to the last election, was to fund \$8.1 million for the redevelopment of the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club. The dilapidated building was over 64 years old and was truly past its designated use-by date. I am extremely proud to see the design features and planning moving through the local council.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Attorney General! Keep it down please.

Mr P. LILBURNE: As the patron of the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club, it is my responsibility to promote safe water usage by citizens and encourage wise decision making. The President of the SSLSC, Mr Ron Morris, and I advocate for safe community usage of the Sorrento Beach and its surrounds. I note that Minister Punch also holds the disability services portfolio. Several beaches in my electorate have disability access. Sorrento Beach has a beach wheelchair funded by the McGowan government in 2022, which I sponsor the ongoing maintenance for. It also has a changing facility to allow people to change clothes in a safe and clean environment. These facilities make it an accessible beach for those living with a disability.

I think it is great that my electorate has beaches accessible to everyone. Last week, I attended an event hosted by the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club, which featured the Mighty Dolphins Lifesaving Team. This group of individuals, with various disabilities, form a collegiate team of enthusiastic swimmers, enjoying the Aussie sun and surf at Sorrento Beach. Activities such as snorkelling, surfing and swimming all come with some inherent risks, and the risk of sharks is something that plays on the mind of a lot of people when in the ocean. And this is the issue that I would like to focus on today. The state's shark mitigation strategy is an important part of addressing the risk from sharks and helping beach users stay safe and make informed decisions about their beach use.

<008> F/2

Most Western Australians who visit the beach will be familiar with the Surf Life Saving WA helicopters that patrol the beaches through summer. These patrols provide great peace of mind to beach users.

In 2022 the state government funded a shark warning tower at Sorrento Beach, which uses lights, sirens and audio broadcasts to notify beach users of a shark in the vicinity. I remember attending the opening with you, minister. It was wonderful to see such a great initiative taking place in my electorate and being facilitated and promoted by yourself, sir! The shark monitoring network and the SharkSmart WA app and website, funded by the Cook Labor government, shows shark sightings at a monitoring centre and alerts groups such as the Surf Life Saving WA Helicopters, jet ski response teams and the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club service. I have also met several people who use personal shark deterrents when surfing and diving to help reduce the risk of sharks.

These measures are so important to help people enjoy the beach. However, I get a sense of growing angst about the risk of sharks from our community. I am concerned about the implications if there were to be a reduction in these shark mitigation services. This is not just an issue for my electorate, so I raise this as a concern on behalf of the broader WA beach-loving community.

There is finite funding to keep key strategies like helicopter patrols and personal deterrent rebates. The shark monitoring network is dependent on ongoing shark tagging and on making sure that the technology does not fall into disrepair. Minister Punch, what assurances are there that ocean users will be able to continue to enjoy the beach with their current level of confidence? The City of Joondalup decided in 2022 to remove the Sorrento Beach shark enclosure. The effect of that local government's decision has made this a sensitive issue for the area, and highlights the importance of other mitigation measures.

The Surf Life Saving WA beach and aerial patrols, integrated communication systems and jet ski response teams are funded through 2024–25, and I know that the people of Carine would like to see this funding continue well into the foreseeable future. I would like to bring this issue to the minister’s attention today, and I wish to thank the Minister for Fisheries for taking my grievance. Thank you.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries) [10.12 am]: I take this opportunity to acknowledge our young visitors in the gallery: welcome to the Parliament.

I thank the member for Carine for his grievance, for raising this issue and for his advocacy on behalf of beachgoers in his electorate and right around Western Australia. We know that a lot of people love to enjoy the beach by getting down there and really taking advantage of what our coastline and beaches have to offer. I was also really pleased to hear that the shark hazard mitigation strategy is well supported and valued by the member and his electorate. I am happy to say that we also value it.

The Cook Labor government has been and will be committed to the shark hazard mitigation strategy. It is one of the strongest evidence-based shark mitigation strategies in the world, so Western Australians can have confidence in enjoying our beaches and oceans. Our shark mitigation strategy is based on scientific evaluation and is geared to informing the community and making sure that they have access to the best information possible in relation to risk issues, and access to the sorts of equipment that might help mitigate risks into the future. I acknowledge that it can be a very difficult topic for people who have been injured or who have lost loved ones as a consequence of shark interactions. It is something that causes a great deal of fear and anxiety in our community, and we as a government will always do our best to ensure that people can make the safest decisions possible.

With regard to our shark mitigation strategy, in the 2023–24 financial year \$6.4 million was allocated to support the strategy as a whole. That included \$4 million to the Surf Life Saving WA beach and helicopter patrols in Perth and the south west, as well as vital frontline safety services like the jet ski response the member mentioned. I would like to acknowledge Surf Life Saving WA for the very collaborative way in which it has worked with us to help ensure the safety of our community. The strategy includes the world-first \$200 personal shark deterrent rebate scheme, which has been taken up by more than 9 300 people across the state. This helps people who like to dive for the delicacies the member mentioned, as well as snorkelers, swimmers and surfers. These are the people who are most at risk and who need to access scientifically proven shark deterrent devices as another tool for minimising risk.

The shark monitoring network consists of 40 acoustic receivers from Perth to Esperance, providing near real-time alerts of tagged shark activity, as well continuation of our shark tagging operations. We now have more than 180 white sharks tagged, and our bull shark tagging program is underway. Of course, white sharks have presented the most serious risk in our history of shark interaction. There has been funding support for local councils to install safe swimming enclosures; the most recent example of that was Bicton Baths in the Swan River. Other initiatives include beach emergency number signs and whale carcass management, because we know that whale carcasses attract sharks; the SharkSmart website and app, which is very popular; the integrated notification and response systems; and our Sea Sense campaign with tips to encourage water users to make informed decisions by checking the latest shark information.

More than 163 000 people have downloaded the SharkSmart app; that is a significant number. As I have mentioned, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has since 2009 tagged 184 white sharks in WA waters, with 123 having been tagged since 2017. More than 9 000 rebates have been claimed by WA surfers, divers and other water users for shark deterrent devices, and more than 1 600 BEN signs are now in the ground at WA’s metropolitan and regional beaches to help boost emergency response times should a person be injured, whether it is a shark attack or any other form of incident on the beach, to make sure first responders can get there as quickly as possible. Those are very, very significant outcomes and something that the government is very proud of.

The Cook government has seen the benefits of investing in that strategy, and we will continue to make it as effective as possible, based on science. We have adopted a science-based approach to inform all of our decision-making on a range of studies and applied research, including a trial and evaluation of the effectiveness of SMART drum lines that was independently reviewed by the WA Chief Scientist. That was something that opposition members advocated for, but we found that it was completely ineffectual in ensuring accurate information for people who use our beaches. In fact, it created a false sense of confidence in relation to the presence or otherwise of sharks.

With regard to improvements to the strategy, we were the first government to provide a multiyear funding commitment for ongoing aerial patrols. That has worked well for both Surf Life Saving WA, giving it certainty, and for the government, in terms of ensuring that that service is provided. Last year the government also approved funding of \$4.5 million to upgrade the shark notification and response system. That was in recognition of the

significant changes in technology. I have also announced that the shark tagging program will be expanded to include bull sharks, and that the monitoring network will be extended, with three new receivers installed in the Swan River. This expanded program will help build our understanding of the prevalence and movements of these species.

As a last comment, we have also introduced wire trace restrictions. We, as a government, do not regard fishing for sharks on our popular beaches and bringing sharks into popular swimming areas as being compatible with trying to alert and warn people about the presence of sharks in the beach environment. We will continue to work with the fishing community to modify that behaviour to make sure that our popular swimming beaches do not conflict with people fishing for sharks. I thank the member for his advocacy. We are very proud of our shark mitigation strategy. It is a world first and was recognised at the Margaret River Pro as recently as last week, when I was down there with the member for Warren–Blackwood. Thank you.

<009> M/5