

FISHERIES — SECONDMENTS — CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

1816. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt to the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Fisheries:

I refer to concerns raised by the Auditor-General in their “Regulation of Commercial Fishing” report dated 7 December 2022 regarding possible conflicts of interest between the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and the commercial fishing industry, and I ask:

- (a) was the Minister aware that a Senior Fisheries Officer at DPIRD recently completed a 12-month secondment at the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council Inc (WAFIC) and if not, why not;
- (b) if yes to (a), was the Minister made aware of the secondment prior to its commencement in May 2022 and if not, why not;
- (c) in light of the concerns raised by the Auditor-General, does the government continue to support secondments between WAFIC and DPIRD;
- (d) if yes to (c), what is the rationale for this given the Auditor-General’s documented concerns around conflicts of interest between DPIRD and the commercial fishing industry;
- (e) is the Minister aware of the concerns relating to conflicts of interest (actual or perceived) between DPIRD and WAFIC as the peak commercial fishing lobby group, and if so, has the Minister taken any actions in response (for example, attended any relevant briefings or meetings, sought updates from DPIRD on relevant actions, etc.);
- (f) have any DPIRD Fisheries Officers undertaken (or currently undertaking) secondments in other peak fishing body organisations, such as RecFish West, and if yes, will the Minister identify the names of those organisations;
- (g) if no to (f), why not, given Fisheries Officers are seconded to WAFIC; and
- (h) will the Minister table the following:
 - (i) the process(es) for identifying, assessing the suitability, and approving the secondments of DPIRD’s Fisheries Officers; and
 - (ii) a list (which may be anonymised) of secondments undertaken in the last 5 years by Fisheries Officers to non-government agencies, including (where possible) the Officers substantive position title at DPIRD at the time of the secondment, the organisation and role to which they were seconded, and the secondment duration?

Hon Kyle McGinn replied:

- (a)–(g) The Director General of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is responsible for all staffing matters and there is no requirement for the Minister to be advised of or consulted on staff movements. It is not unusual for staff to be seconded where the secondment is of mutual benefit to the respective organisations. These practices are consistent with Public Sector Commission guidelines and *Public Sector Management Act 1994*.

Although not identifying examples, the Auditor General made specific recommendations on the potential risk of conflicts arising between fisheries compliance officers and made recommendations to strengthen the integrity framework to mitigate those risks. DPIRD has accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General, is actively working to implement them, and in some cases has gone beyond recommendations from the Auditor General.

DPIRD has briefed the Minister regarding the finding of the Auditor General and actions to address the Auditor General’s recommendations.

- (h)
 - (i) Approaches can be made by peak sector bodies seeking secondment opportunity for staff with specific skill sets. Should suitable staff be identified, the secondment is formalised in writing.
 - (ii) Three secondments have been undertaken in the last five years to fishery peak sector bodies. One communications officer to Recfishwest and two Fisheries Management Officers to WAFIC. No fisheries compliance officers have been seconded to fishery peak sector bodies.