

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 76
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: White shark populations
Hansard Page: 72
Question Date: 22 May 2017
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Senator WHISH-WILSON: So unless we get something versus 2014, we do not know whether the population levels are increasing per se. We know there is a recovery plan in place because, going back over decades, there were concerns about numbers of great white sharks. That is part of an international treaty on protection. Mr Frydenberg, our environment minister, said not long ago, on 20 April 2017 that 'Blind Freddy' could see that there were more 'great white sharks in the water and people's lives would be put in danger if we don't take action'. Where would the minister have got that idea that blind Freddy could see that white shark populations were going through the roof?

CHAIR: I think you just have to talk to any cray fishermen, fishermen or anyone else who is off the coast of Western Australia and they will tell you the same. That is why this survey is so important.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Thank you, Senator Reynolds. I would prefer to hear from the department whether they believe it is—

CHAIR: My apologies, Senator Whish-Wilson.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: That is okay. Actually, Senator Reynolds makes a good point. Perhaps, Senator Birmingham, I could ask you. Is it anecdotal evidence from cray fishermen off the coast of Western Australia that the minister is using to make that comment?

CHAIR: They are in the water all day every day.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: It sounds very scientific to me. I was just interested if that might be what is informing the federal environment minister.

Senator Birmingham: Senator Whish-Wilson, I am happy to seek some information from Mr Frydenberg's office as to the evidence base used by the minister.

Answer:

The marked increase in the number of recent shark attacks in Western Australia supports the Minister's characterisation that the white shark population has increased in recent years. There has been a doubling in the ten year average number of unprovoked shark attacks off the Western Australian coast since 2010.

The Minister is aware of the research being undertaken by the CSIRO and partners through the National Environment Science Program on shark numbers in Western Australia. The Minister has asked the Department to expedite the finalisation of the research, in order to help inform the debate.

In 2014, CSIRO and partners through the National Environment Science Program reported the first empirical estimate of adult white shark abundance – provisionally 750 to 1,200 adult white sharks for the eastern Australia population. This estimate is being refined and by the end of 2017 there will be a total population size for the east coast white shark population.

By the end of 2017 there will also be an initial estimate of the adult population on the west coast of Australia.