




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 14 November 2018

MOTION

Shark Control Program, Inquiry

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (5.38 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the private member's motion moved by the shadow minister for agriculture and fisheries. It is a considered and constructive motion which would provide for the establishment of an inquiry so that we can discover the facts needed to make an informed decision about protecting the safety of Queenslanders and tourists. Both sides of politics regularly talk about the importance of Queensland's tourism industry, but it is clear that this Palaszczuk Labor government is not willing to make the decisions required to protect that industry and the jobs that rely on the regular flow of tourists through places like the Whitsundays.

It is clear that something is wrong at Cid Harbour, given the three tragic attacks that have occurred in the past two months, and it is clear that tourists are concerned about these events. The government recognised these concerns when drum lines were deployed after the first two attacks in late September, but when called on to again provide protection to Whitsunday residents and tourists after the most recent fatal attack the government decided to ignore the genuine safety concerns. They instead embarked on a talkfest with a preordained outcome which was designed to pay lip-service to the genuine safety concerns that have been expressed by tourists, residents, fisheries experts, the local member and tourism operators.

When pressed, the Minister for Tourism cited scientific reasons for not providing the same protection to the Whitsundays that is already in use at 85 other beaches across Queensland. Given the minister has stated that no scientific basis exists for the use of drum lines in the Whitsundays, I would ask the Minister for Tourism to explain why drum lines were installed at Cid Harbour following the first two non-fatal attacks in September. Was the government's decision at that time a kneejerk reaction not made on the basis of scientific advice, or is the government's failure to act after the most recent fatal attack at Cid Harbour the result of pressure from environmental lobby groups and vested interests? Is the government putting the safety of Queenslanders second to its own political interests?

Queensland's tourism industry generates \$13 billion for the Queensland economy and supports 220,000 local Queensland jobs. It is an industry that diversifies the economies of regional communities and is the mainstay of places like Cairns, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and, importantly, the Whitsundays. It is an industry that has been supported by the Shark Control Program, implemented in 1962, which has provided reassurance to an industry that leverages our natural assets in the form of our beaches and marine environment. Since the Shark Control Program has been protecting Queenslanders, there have been around 20 fatal shark attacks across the state. In the same time frame only one fatality has been recorded at a controlled beach. The evidence speaks for itself.

It is understandable that there have been numerous calls to implement the Shark Control Program in the one major coastal tourism market that is still not protected: the Whitsundays. It is the same place that has seen three attacks in the past two months. There are hundreds of drum lines up

and down the coast, but there is not a single one in the Whitsundays. Tourism operators are understandably concerned. Resort manager Ms Sharon Dewsbury reflected the concerns of tourism operators across the Whitsundays when she said—

Airlie's had a rough time for a long time and it's very sad. I booked a tour for some overseas tourists and they didn't even want to go snorkelling and these were divers who have dived in numerous places around the world.

Another business owner, Mr Ivan Pratt, said he 'absolutely' believed the attacks would impact the local economy. Labor needs to stop treating the people of Whitsundays as second-class citizens and needs to act now to ensure tourist safety across all of Queensland. The failure of this Palaszczuk Labor government to listen to the genuine community concern in relation to recent shark attacks in the Whitsundays is just another example of Labor being completely out of touch. Labor's priorities are all wrong. This government needs to step up and take action rather than just commission another talkfest.

As an aside, when I told my three-year-old daughter at lunchtime that I would be speaking about the Shark Control Program, she broke into 'Baby shark, do-do-do-do' in the Stranger's Dining Room. I apologise to all those members who were having important meetings with stakeholders. I commend the motion to the House.