

## **QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**No. 104**

**Asked on 16 February 2017**

**MR A CRIPPS** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development (HON W BYRNE)—

### **QUESTION:**

With reference to the missing commercial trawler that departed Urangan on 11 November 2016 and for which a co-ordinated search commenced on 25 November 2016—

Will the Minister advise (a) was the vessel monitoring system (VMS) device operational when this trawler departed Urangan on 11 November 2016, (b) was the VMS device on this vessel operational on each day between 11 November 2016 to 25 November 2016 and (c) if not, on what date did the on-board VMS device first fail to provide a location for this vessel at sea?

### **ANSWER:**

I thank the Member for the question.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has been tracking the movement of certain fishing vessels for compliance and monitoring purposes since 1996. Around 340 vessels are currently monitored with the majority of these operating in Queensland's East Coast Trawl Fishery.

Vessels fitted with a VMS unit are not authorised to leave port unless the unit is operating. If a unit malfunctions while at sea manual reporting can be used. This type of reporting is dependent on making contact with vessel operators. The contact is not always possible with operators not answering calls or failing to provide current contact details. A vessel can be directed to return to port if its unit is malfunctioning.

In the case of the missing trawler that departed Urangan on Friday 11 November 2016, I am advised that the VMS unit was operating when it left port and continued to operate as required until it ceased transmitting on the Saturday morning, 12 November 2016. No further positions were received after this date.

The department made several unsuccessful attempts over the weekend of 12 and 13 November 2016 to contact the vessel on the telephone numbers provided including a home phone number. Messages to contact the department were left on these phones.

The department contacted multiple operators in the area to see if the trawler could be sighted.

Contact with the operator's partner was eventually made on Monday 14 November 2016. The department was advised the vessel was expected to be at sea for about 10 days.

On Wednesday 16 November 2016, the department contacted Maritime Safety Queensland, Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) in Gladstone to place a message over VHF channel 16 (Emergency and initial calling) regarding the vessel.

On Thursday 17 November 2016, the operator's partner advised the department she was starting to get worried. The department formally advised Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) and Queensland Police of the situation on Friday 18 November 2016.

Queensland Police requested a full reconstruct of the trawler's positions from the department on 30 November 2016 which was provided.

There is no head of power under the *Fisheries Act 1994* to address the issue of maritime safety. The department's VMS is not a maritime safety system and is not to be relied upon as one. The department does pass on information to MSQ where there are concerns for a vessel.