



State lashes Canberra over fish poachers

**NATALIE O'BRIEN
and TIFFANY LAURIE**

Illegal fishing off WA's North is at crisis point with shark stocks under dire threat because there were not enough patrols, State Fisheries Minister Jon Ford said.

His comments came as the State stepped up pressure on the Federal Government over the decision to move the eight-member fisheries patrol from Broome to Darwin. The group policed the area and gathered intelligence on poachers.

Mr Ford wants his Federal counterpart to instead provide more resources, boats and officers to stop fish stocks being plundered.

"I am so disappointed with the whole approach. I was unaware of how little resourcing was being put in," he said. "It just shows the whole border protection issue is a sham."

Federal Opposition fisheries spokesman Gavan O'Connor said the situation was out of control and getting worse.

But Fisheries Minister Ian Macdonald said more boats were active along the northern coast than ever and patrols were adequate. The same number of boats would patrol the area after the Broome unit was shifted.

Senator Macdonald said WA

needed to stop table thumping and use its own patrol boats to help.

"The WA Government needs to take a dose of reality and if there are problems in WA waters then they should be policing them," he said.

Six Indonesian vessels were caught off WA in the past two weeks and dozens more escaped after being seen.

Liberal backbencher Alan Eggleston also called on Canberra to increase patrols in the north amid fears illegal fishermen could introduce bird flu and other diseases to Australia.

He backed the WA Fishing Industry Council's call to increase patrols after reports of animals on foreign fishing boats.

Senator Eggleston said more surveillance and faster response times were needed.

Senator Macdonald also criticised a decision by a Broome magistrate this week to release 10 Indonesian fishermen on good behaviour bonds despite the Federal Government increasing the maximum fine to \$250,000.

"At a time when the Northern Territory is handing out record fines to illegal fishermen it is disappointing that the WA system is not treating it with the same seriousness as the Commonwealth does," he said.