



# ***STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr CG Whiting MP—Chair  
Mr MJ Hart MP  
Mr RI Katter MP  
Mr JE Madden MP  
Mr JJ McDonald MP  
Mr TJ Smith MP

**Staff present:**

Ms S Galbraith—Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL 2021**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**TUESDAY, 8 MARCH 2022**

**Bundaberg**

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### **The committee met at 1.31 pm.**

**CHAIR:** I declare this public hearing of the committee's inquiry into the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021 open. My name is Chris Whiting. I am the member for Bancroft and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

With me on the committee today are: Mr Jim McDonald, the deputy chair and member for Lockyer; Mr Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; Mr Michael Hart, the member for Burleigh; Mr Tom Smith, the member for Bundaberg; and Mr Robbie Katter, the member for Traeger. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's directions at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Could you please turn your mobile phones off or to silent.

**EHRKE, Mr Barry, OAM, Assistant Manager, Australian Seafood**

**KIRCHNER, Mr Lincoln, Seafood Smokery**

**STEVENS, Mr Peter, Commercial mackerel fisher**

**CHAIR:** I invite to you make an opening statement after which we will have questions for you.

**Mr Ehrke:** First of all, I would like to thank Robbie Katter for bringing this forward. It is something that, as we know, will hopefully amend the act. We think it will go a long way to alleviating the fears of a lot of the general public and people who go out and buy seafood in Queensland. A lot of the people who come into the outlet side of things ask, 'Where does it come from? How is it caught? Is it wild caught or is it aquaculture? Does it come out of a pond in the ground or has it come out of a good, clean area?' We believe it can be achieved reasonably easily by just putting a letter behind a menu item in a restaurant or wherever the outlet is so people have a better understanding of what they are buying and where it comes from.

**Mr Kirchner:** To reiterate what Barry said, I am also from the retail wholesale seafood sector. I am a major advocate for sustainable wild caught fish. I recognise the same thing. My clients are asking for traceability as well as being Australian versus imported. Therefore, when they are asked by the customer they can proudly state exactly what it is and where they got it from. At this point, it is only a small portion of the smaller, more obscure seafood markets—the fish and chip shop that also does dagwood dogs and everything else—that can pass off, for instance, Mekong delta catfish, which is marketed in Australia as basa, whack a bit of batter on that and flog it off as cod and chips. That is a European swing that has come into Australia. I think colloquially hoki is marketed as cod in Australia. It is a Pacific fish that is caught by New Zealand or Australian fishers. You are really ripping the consumer off by having generally Northern Hemisphere fish or Asian fish sold here without any definition of where it has come from. A lot of people just do not know and they do not ask questions. How many times have you asked, 'What's in the Filet-o-Fish at McDonald's?' I have never done that. I never really thought about it until yesterday when I was looking at coming here. But what is in that? What sort of fish is it, where has it come from, what are its origins, who takes care of that fishery?

We now work on a world stage of being environmentally responsible. If we can make the consumer aware of every single place their seafood comes from at the point of sale where they have the option to read it—because this is what it is coming down to. We do not have to read anything, but it is there when they want to read it if they have that interest. Then I imagine it is back to industry to do the marketing campaign behind these things that are put in place so they can get their consumer to follow their brand or follow their ideology. I think most Australians feel strongly about consuming something we produce ourselves. I only know my business model. I would be very close to one of the Bundaberg

smallest wholesale retail outlets on the Queensland coast. I have done traceability as good as probably anybody to the point of where I only buy from people I know. Those people tell me what they catch and where they catch it. We document that right through to the point of batch numbering.

When a client buys my product it is batch numbered. I can go back through at request and even right through. If Fisheries Queensland, who are looking at law enforcement, wanted to, they could follow my batch dating all the way back to the point of capture or point of receipt, which then puts you on to the fisherman and the point of capture. That is all well documented. It does not have to be that stringent; I have just gone to those levels because it is probably more of a pride thing to say that is what I am doing. However, I believe if you go into a restaurant and you order something off the menu, be it prawns or any sort of seafood dish, scallops or fish, you should have the ability to know what sort of fish it is and its origin. That applies to prawns also. We also have the breakdown in this country now of aquaculture versus wild caught. This is a real inter-industry issue.

It appears from our stance in the industry that the ones who profit from the wild caught industry being removed is the aquaculture industry. They are very much the ones who gain financially here. I believe that should also be marked as a differentiation somehow, whether it be later down the track or immediately, because the difference here is the breakdown of the way some aquaculture is produced when it comes to talking Australian versus imported. I believe that on average across the aquaculture business we import 80 per cent of the food that we are fed; therefore, by eating aquacultured fish you are eating imported fish anyhow.

**CHAIR:** Peter, obviously as a mackerel fisherman you may want to talk about other issues outside of the actual bill.

**Mr Stevens:** I am going to talk about that later on. I support labelling because we catch it efficiently and we catch it sustainably. If we let lots of other product in and do not differentiate, we can just be pushed away without anyone noticing, basically. We produce a good product here. It is top quality, world-class. It should be pushed as such. It is a good selling point for it.

**CHAIR:** Barry, the desire to know the place or country of origin is obviously industry-led, but consumers are a big push behind that; is that right?

**Mr Ehrke:** That is correct. It is also by wholesalers. If they have a retail shop attached to their wholesale business they get the question all the time, 'Where was this caught?' 'How was it caught?' A lot of people think if you are selling it here in Queensland or anywhere in Australia that it is Australian caught from a sustainable fishery, and that is not the case. As we know, it can be imported or it can come out of aquaculture ponds. It is surprising how many people come in and ask where and how it was caught. 'Is it wild caught, or did it come out of an aquaculture pond somewhere out of Australia or overseas?' That means a lot to them. All of our product that we supply is Australian wild caught. It is surprising how many people say, 'Thanks for that, because that's what we want.'

**CHAIR:** Lincoln, it seems that this is an issue that is important to smaller businesses. It is important for small scale local producers; am I right?

**Mr Kirchner:** When you look at our commercial fishing fleet, particularly in the fish industry—not so much probably the trawl, but the fish—they are very individual people. So whether they come out of one of the line fisheries, net fishery or potting industry like crab and things like that, they are individual primary producers. Very few of them have ever taken branding, as you well know. I know that Peter sells to me. He does not have a brand; I am his brand. Anybody else I sell for, I advocate for what they do. On the bigger front, larger seafood industry based—which I have had a little bit to do with in the last couple of years, particularly pursuing them to give smaller companies, particularly their local fishermen, a hand on advocacy levels. I have had it said to me by large people that 80 per cent of their profits come from imported. Here we are, a country that is wrapped around with ocean. We are really the only country in the world where we have the ocean all the way around us. There are vast economic values and vast quantities and we use very little of it. The main issue is that we need more help for smaller people to have that type of thing put forward.

**Mr McDONALD:** One of the submissions from those against this bill talks about the cost to the retailers of having to implement the changes. From your experience, is there any real cost to retailers to see this implemented?

**Mr Kirchner:** If you are a butcher, for instance, and you have pork, chicken, lamb and beef, you do not have a problem differentiating between those, do you? You cannot tell me that they cannot tell us individual types of fish and whether it is an Australian product or not. I strongly believe anybody who is putting forward an argument like that is possibly more chain store and would love to hide the fact that they can ask top dollar for an imported product they have paid very little for.

**Mr McDONALD:** The follow-up question to that is: if your business already identifies the source of the product, it would just be a matter of then reflecting where the product came from; is that right?

**Mr Kirchner:** Yes, from somebody like us. The vast majority, which is South-East Queensland, where a good portion of those people who sell seafood are going to—if something like this comes into play—is your corner store, which is doing battered sabs and everything else, making burgers, and they have their battered fish in the hot box. I pretty much know the product they are buying. I know they are getting it from one of the big wholesalers. It is generally a frozen battered product, and it is going to have it written on the box. I just do not believe they want to have the customer see exactly what they are trying to sell them. I service my products up and down Queensland to some of the best restaurants in Queensland. I work with some of the best chefs. One thing I do know is they proudly advocate who supplies their seafood, what it is and where it comes from. They are 100 per cent behind everything we are trying to achieve from our end of the industry.

**Mr Ehrke:** When you are talking about cost to the retailers and that, I believe—and a lot of other people in the industry believe—it is only as simple as putting an ‘i’ at the end of their menu. If you have barramundi and it is imported, it can have an ‘i’ there and down the bottom of the menu you denote what each thing means. If you go into a lot of places now you will see ‘gf’ on things. Years and years ago you would not have known what ‘gf’ is, but now we all know what ‘gf’ stands for. I do not think it would be a great impost on anybody to put that same sort of lettering after a particular item.

**Mr SMITH:** Lincoln, you touched on this already. A lot of the restaurants you provide to openly share that this is an Australian product. Could you maybe give some anecdotal evidence as to why they believe it is so important to share with their customers that this is Australian product?

**Mr Kirchner:** We have had a renewed vision since the COVID epidemic about buying and supporting local. They have captured that market. We all like to feel nice and warm and fuzzy inside to know that we are supporting our fellow person rather than supporting a multinational whose funds or end funds go outside the country. It is that whole traceability thing. I know from my point of view, being so small, I work individually with them fairly much. They can point to me. It is the social media linkup where we share pages. Like I said, I am very small and run a very individual business. This particular bill does not affect me at all. I imagine any of you who are seafood eaters have all witnessed our fine quality seafood. We do produce the best in the world. We have been told that. It is wanted for export all over the world. Thankfully, we consume most of what we produce in Australia. We consume most of our wild caught inside of Australia. When you get people like myself, who have done something a little different and got some credibility for it, also by sidling up alongside those restaurants and saying ‘Look here, I’m using this,’ it is a claim as such. There is a bit of everything involved with that.

**Mr Ehrke:** It is just a better product and you are right to be proud of it, too.

**Mr SMITH:** You alluded to it before, Lincoln, but I will ask Peter: within the industry itself, is there much of an internal conflict between wild caught and aquaculture? How is aquaculture viewed in a more traditional sense?

**Mr Stevens:** Aquaculture does not affect me personally at all because they cannot grow mackerel in ponds yet. They have tried to do a lot of cobia and that sort of thing. The results are nowhere near as good as a wild caught product. The other big problem with the aquaculture product is what they feed them. A lot of it is imported foods. They go and get products from somewhere where the environmental concerns are not as strong, bring it in cheap as chips, grind it up, put it into pellets and feed it to your aquaculture fish. Like I said, it does not affect my product, but that is the big problem with the aquaculture.

**Mr SMITH:** Gentlemen, I have asked this of all of the witnesses we have had before us. At the end of the day if this bill passes, it becomes legislation, a piece of law, and within the bill there are currently two penalties: there is a first infringement fine and a second infringement fine. What do you believe is a fair penalty for a business which decides to intentionally not put an imported symbol on their menu should this become law?

**Mr Stevens:** I think public scorn and derision. I reckon publicise that they are not playing the game, rather than a monetary one of some sort. Let everyone know that they are not doing the right thing. That is just my opinion.

**Mr Kirchner:** On that, Tom, the policing of said product, knowing how this works, to be done effectively, it would need a stage of implementation. As we all know, you would need some sort of warning period. You cannot be running around belting unsuspecting people. Of course, all of this

costs money to advertise, to get this into play. There needs to be a level of campaigning that, 'We are proud that we are now pointing out you have the option to buy Australian from our seafood sector.' The question I have is how we would go about policing it effectively. I have heard Safe Foods. I do not have a whole lot of faith in that system. I know that they already have their work cut out doing what they do.

**Mr Ehrke:** There has to be an education program. If all of this is to be put in place, there has to be an education program which I expect would be done through government because at the end of the day it probably is going to be a government department or somebody who polices this sort of thing. That way, people will know that down the track there could be a monetary fine attached to it if they do not do it the way that has been suggested. It is not until somebody gets caught for not playing by the rules and then is fined that people will know. It will get out there pretty quickly that you have to put the labelling as to what it is on the seafood you are selling. It is like if you drive down the road now and we know the speed limit is 60 kilometres per hour, but some people will go faster than 60 kilometres per hour and then when the policeman grabs them, they get booked. This will be the same sort of thing. I can see it being something the same down the track with an education program. Then people will know and they will know that if they do not do it, they could be in a lot of trouble. There could be something from whatever organisations they may even belong to that could do their own education program as well, explaining to these people that, 'You need to do this' and the reasons why.

**Mr KATTER:** You have already touched on it, but I think it is good to hear examples of where the system is failing at the moment. You said fish and chip shops can sell X, Y, Z. What was that species called—Mekong?

**Mr Kirchner:** Mekong delta catfish. It is the one predominantly imported and sold extraordinarily cheaply. Depending on what side of the argument you are from, there are definite concerns with the way it has been handled. We get to eat very poor quality products that have been produced definitely not within the realms of our own aquaculture production in Australia, up to Safe Food standards. We bring all this other product in from other countries. We know white spot has jumped the fence a bundle of times now. With frozen imported fillets, I hardly believe they get any more than a plate count scrutiny. It is frozen in a box.

**Mr KATTER:** In your view, are we talking more about fish and chip shops rather than high-end restaurants? My assumption is that high-end restaurants usually like showcasing where their product is from, so this is probably not where this legislation is going to bite. It will bite more the fish and chip shops, I would imagine.

**Mr Kirchner:** That is right. If you are throwing \$150 at a meal, you expect it to be Australian, unless it is some imported truffle or something to that effect. It is not to stop it; it is just so that the consumer is aware that the person who they are buying it from is the one selling it to them.

With pork products, you buy bacon which is made in Canada—I have seen it; my wife has brought it home—it is written on it that it contains 10 per cent Australian water, salt and sugar and wood smoked. We have arguments. I think at the base rate like that, that is where it really starts.

**Mr KATTER:** My observation typically with these sorts of things is that if you are forcing something, the counter point will be—it should be a promotional campaign of local seafood or something. What is your view on the effectiveness of a promotional marketing campaign or voluntary labelling versus a policy of forced labelling?

**Mr Kirchner:** We live in a free market and this is the area that we are playing in. Are you talking about the seafood industry doing just a general campaign and saying, 'Look for it'?

**Mr KATTER:** There could be the alternative of just doing a marketing campaign to help—

**Mr Kirchner:** But then you are relying on a 15-year-old at the shopfront knowing what they have put in the hot box. I don't know how many 15-year-olds you have hung around with, but they could not care less if it is not on Facebook—I am getting old—they do not care unless it is on TikTok. There needs to be some level of enforcement by those people who are responsible for their front-of-house staff. I have done it myself, being in the seafood industry; I have asked.

A great story from another one of our seafood outlets in Tasmania—I was talking to the manager yesterday—from the person who owns it, and they were at a cafe and asked the people where the local fish came from and they said, 'Victoria.' He said, 'What sort of fish is it?' The young waitress has gone out the back, had a look and came back and said, 'It is Nile perch.' It had come from Lake Victoria.

**Mr KATTER:** Enough said.

**Mr Kirchner:** This is the sort of thing that has happened everywhere. Vannamei prawns are a thing. I know your father starred on *What's the Catch* at Parliament House when Matthew Evans hosted the program on SBS. It is a fantastic piece of journalism that everybody interested in seafood should watch. He had the left and right argument fairly split down the centre and you could make your own decisions from what he said. It is probably a piece of journalism that is seven or eight years old now, but it still is as relevant now. I believe this particular bill could be centred on much of what he collaborated in that to come up with a response. It was a feel-good show with some good ideas.

**Mr KATTER:** There was a report made to me in Cairns that there was a procedural investigation into imported fish. When they did the testing on batches, it was alleged that there was 100 per cent noncompliance with certain categories—not every category—but there were breaches across many. Can you comment on that? Do you know anything about that? That was an interesting fact to me that had not come out before.

**Mr Kirchner:** I live under the rock of the smokery. I am mainly aware of what is immediately around me in my area. I think as you go further into this investigation, particularly in the south-east corner, if you can get a hold of some other people to ask that question of, they would be in a much better position to answer. I am assuming there is a testing regime done of imported products. Is that what you are aiming at?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes.

**Mr Kirchner:** Whether that comes from Paraguay, Chile, out of Indonesia or whatever, that comes under biosecurity. That is what we put in place, so I imagine the government should somehow be able to check what the government is doing here, and there should be a report on that.

**Mr Ehrke:** I would like to make a comment on that. As somebody who has come out of the catching sector and gone into the processing side of it, and also being part of the research side of things, I can quite honestly say that our regulations in Australia for exporting seafood are far greater than what they are for the import of seafood into Australia.

**Mr HART:** I love seafood and I will always eat local seafood—I am putting that out there—but I want to play devil's advocate for a moment. All of you are retailers. We have heard from quite a lot of retailers. This bill is not going to affect the way you do your work; in fact, it will probably benefit you. Lincoln, I have been looking at your website. You have seven restaurants which you deal with, on your website. Have you spoken to those seven restaurants to see how they feel about this? We are not getting any feedback from restaurants. We are getting feedback from peak industry, but not individual restaurants. I am a bit worried that they do not know that this is coming.

**Mr Kirchner:** It is because you have not let them know. That is why.

**Mr HART:** We haven't let them know?

**Mr Kirchner:** No. How I am sitting here today is only by sheer chance, that I even had the access to be invited to it. I have multiple people who would have loved to have been today who are restauranteurs and chefs. I had 24 hours to round this lot up. Unfortunately it fell over at pretty much the 11th hour of walking in the door. The last one could not come. I am trying to run a business while I am doing all of this and advocating on other levels. I probably would have had a good chance of grabbing a couple out of Hervey Bay who would have bothered to make the drive because they see this as important.

Looking at the list of places that your future meetings are going to be held in—Toowoomba—you could not get much further away from the ocean, but it has seafood consumers—and your big seafood-consuming centres like Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, for instance, places where you have lots of seafood restaurant bases, they are the very people you are after who are going to proudly support the products that they put on their plate. This issue is going to affect those people who are not proud about what they are putting on their plate. I understand exactly what you say. Every person who buys off me, they stand behind me in a big long line and they have told me to say, if ever I was questioned on this, that happily they are right there. I am more than happy to name-drop if you like.

**Mr Ehrke:** I support that. We supply prawns, Moreton Bay Bugs and scallops, when we are allowed to get them, to a lot of these same restaurants that Lincoln is referring to now. They want the wild caught products that we sell to them. That is what they want.

**Mr HART:** At the moment all that is voluntary, though. Do you think they would be happy to have this forced on them?

**Mr Kirchner:** I actually asked two of them yesterday. Like I said, I was trying to get my head around what I was about to come and do and speak on behalf of them. I would have loved them to be able to speak for themselves. I would really press that you take the opportunity to get the right people in front of you to get the detail that you need. It is everybody's bite of the pie here for that matter.

They said it is going to be extra work, but, as I mentioned before, when you walk into the butchery or a supermarket, everything is labelled. It is not that hard. Seasonal products are seasonal. There are many things that you can and cannot buy and are swapped out for other things where you have to label the name of them. You cannot sell a watermelon as a lemon. It is that simple. However, if you whack a bit of batter or crumbs over something, you can call it whatever you want for the unconcerned buyer. These things are not like for like even though they can be sold like for like. This is what the issue has been all along with the seafood industry. When it comes to fish, salmon, which is an orange-flesh species, are pretty much the only thing, apart from tuna, which is separated from the white fishes which is mostly what is consumed. There are really three types of fish flesh which the average person can pick out. I mean, we have all had whiting and chips, if you have had any sort of fish and chips. Not many can tell you where that whiting has come from, or if it was whiting, or anything like that.

I catch fish as a recreational fisherman and I also process fish. I know my fish probably better than the average person, and I know the difference is profound. I think that the average person should have the opportunity to make that judgement for themselves.

**CHAIR:** Peter, we will finish off with giving you the opportunity to talk about other fishery related issues. I know some mackerel fishermen have strong opinions otherwise. I am inviting you to give your feedback or give your opinion about other fisheries' regulations that you might want to talk about.

**Mr Stevens:** I am a member of the mackerel working group. We are doing all that sort of thing at the moment. I have a lot of concerns with the way it is being steered. One of the things we keep getting told is that this is the best science at the moment and we have to accept it. I have written something here. I will read it rather than trying to remember it.

**CHAIR:** You can table that and just talk to it briefly.

**Mr Stevens:** I will table it. I have a written statement here—it has a cover page and then some backup comments after that. The big problem we have at the moment is the basis of the science. We trust the science, but the data that is being fed in appears to be very biased and dubious. That would be my way of describing it. I would like to, if we could, get a review of this system that is being pushed on us. It is supposed to be happening on 1 July. We have four months to push through a very doubtful set-up which will affect a lot of people. It could theoretically just about close down the Spanish mackerel fishery in Queensland. The origin of the product would no longer be a problem because there would not be any Queensland product. I think the best thing to do is to table this document so you can all have a look at it. Then when we are at the smokery if you have any questions I can answer them.

**Mr HART:** We are pretty well across the mackerel.

**Mr Stevens:** You would be. You are all aware of the doubt that is being cast on it. I note that in 1994, after the Tom Burns inquiry, there was a recreational levy put on recreational boat registrations for the purpose of buying commercial fishing effort out. It is now \$28 per boat registration. Last year they raised \$5.5 million from it. The total raised so far is between \$65 million and \$80 million. There has not been too much buying out of commercial fishing effort with this. I have had a discussion with Tom previously. I came up with a solution which may be reasonable. This information may be useful for that. I have details of that here too, so you can have a look at that.

**Mr McDONALD:** That is included in your tabled documents?

**Mr Stevens:** That is in my tabled documents, yes.

**Mr SMITH:** For *Hansard*, that is Tom Smith, not Tom Burns, that he had a chat with.

**Mr Stevens:** There was the Tom Burns inquiry in 1994. You probably were not even born then!

**Mr SMITH:** I was four.

**Mr Stevens:** If you were making decisions like that then, they would be very suspect anyway!

**Mr Ehrke:** I did not know that we would be talking about the management reviews that are going on at the moment.

**CHAIR:** Yes. This is giving you the chance anyway.

**Mr Ehrke:** Peter sits on the mackerel working group and I sit on the trawl working group. The industry has a real problem with the science that is being used, the way it is being used and the things they are trying to implement. Getting the information that they need for the managers and scientists to make proper decisions is very hard. I think there needs to be a complete review of the process at the moment. It should be put on hold until all of these things are sorted out. There are a lot of things being mentioned that nobody can put real science or real figures on the table to the fishermen at all yet. This is impacting them and their lives.

**CHAIR:** That is one of the reasons we wanted to give you the chance—

**Mr Ehrke:** I have a paper here that I will table too about some of the things I was talking about.

**CHAIR:** Sure. If you want to table that, you can. It is good to see. Lincoln, did you want to say something?

**Mr Kirchner:** Yes, I will, seeing as we are off the original topic that I was talking about. It is along the same lines. As you have probably worked out, the three of us sort of roll in the same circles locally. As a supporter for Peter and out of general interest for myself, I have become a contributor to the science for the Spanish mackerel and other fisheries via Queensland fisheries research.

We were invited last week—either last week or the week before—to a meeting outside of the working groups to explain to those people who have been contributing to the research projects. I believe, from my own statistics, that I contribute somewhere in the percentage of 70 per cent of all of the data for my area, and that comes from my shop. That said, Peter supplies 85 per cent of that. If you look at the breakdown of the database for an entire area—which is what we spend all our money on as a state—it comes from this bloke here. There is a lot of weight on his shoulders.

For us to sit there and make an effort to understand any of the science, as soon as I saw the breakdown and talked to the guys, I thought we are not doing enough on the research side. Fisheries management and scientific research in that area definitely lacks passionate people. It definitely lacks people who have a genuine interest in trying to keep these industries alive, viable and growing and in trying to find ways of working with industry to move forward in a positive direction where we are not seen to be saying, 'It's too hard. We'll just stop it.' I do not think that is a viable way out.

We had an online meeting with fisheries research to further that. I tabled quite a lot of questions to them on what we need to do to end up with better science. I was pretty much met with a blank. They did not have answers to my questions. They said, 'Our science really isn't good enough. We can only work with what we have.' However, when I asked them to table the top 10 things that would help them move along, they could not. I believe that this is the area where any level of political force can make us invest more money into our industry and we will end up with a better outcome so we do not have this shambles that is happening with the Spanish mackerel currently.

We have a lot broader outlook. Believe it or not, Spanish mackerel is the most studied fish on the east coast. They have studied 13 per cent of commercial catches, yet it is the most studied species! That just goes to show you how the rest of the fisheries are not studied.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. The time for this session has now expired. We thank you for coming along and for sharing your knowledge and your opinions with us today. That concludes this public hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thank you to Hansard and to our secretariat. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 2.19 pm.**