



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Spanner Crab Fisheries Management Plan

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: I have become aware of concerns expressed by some members of this House and members of the fishing industry about aspects of the spanner crab fisheries management plan. I would like to set a number of matters straight and lay to rest some apparent misunderstandings of what is proposed.

This plan is the culmination of a process which was started three years ago under the previous Government. It was also progressed and managed by the Borbidge Government. It is very significant that in November 1997 the industry voted for a system of individual transferable quotas known as ITQs. At the same time, the industry requested that an independent committee be established to determine the most appropriate way to allocate ITQs. In March last year, 1998, an Independent Assessment Advisory Committee was appointed, comprising a retired Federal judge, an economist and a commercial fisher from New Zealand. The independent committee held public meetings in Bundaberg, Maryborough, Mooloolaba and Southport and also invited written submissions.

In June last year the Independent Assessment Advisory Committee recommended that ITQs be allocated on the basis of catch history in the spanner crab fishery based on the period from 1 January 1990 to 4 October 1996. The reason for choosing this seven-year period was that it gave the fairest picture of catches in the spanner crab industry and therefore provided a sound basis on which to make the allocations.

The second draft management plan on spanner crabs was released on 24 December last year and was accompanied by a regulatory impact statement. This allowed for a further period of consultation. So the consultation process over three years has involved—

- a management options paper;
- two draft management plans;
- a regulatory impact statement;
- numerous public meetings; and
- two major specialist reports.

Not only is the final outcome of this process a fair one but it also ensures there is minimal disruption to fleet operations and to employment opportunities both in the spanner crab fishery and related industries. This plan will ensure the future sustainability of spanner crab resources through a range of measures which include—

- spawning closure;
- a minimum legal size;
- gear restrictions; and
- a prohibition on the taking of egg-bearing female crabs.

As well, through the allocation of individual transferable quotas, everyone in the spanner crab fishery ends up with an asset. It is then up to individual operators to decide whether they want to keep their operation at current levels, build it up or sell it.

For those who currently hold an authority to take spanner crabs, the proposed formula recognises their commitment to the fishery and the holder's current economic position within the fishery. Commitment to the fishery is recognised by providing a base allocation of 500 kilograms to all in the fishery. The old arrangements have created a competitive climate in which product is caught and sold regardless of market price. This has resulted in a reduction in the economic benefits derived from harvesting spanner crabs. This competitiveness has also resulted in periodic fishery closures which have threatened export markets through the inconsistency of supply.

ITQs will eliminate competitive fishing activities. They will provide commercial fishers with a form of financial security that will enhance their financial and strategic planning capacity. Further benefits will lie in improved market prices through more consistent supply of product, along with improved quality of product. This process has not been carried out in haste. There has been very broad, very detailed and very lengthy consultation. The spanner crab fishery is the largest single species fishery in Queensland, with a current annual quota of 2,600 tonnes. Gross value of production at the wholesale level is estimated at \$18m a year.

The outcomes of the spanner crab fisheries management plan are fair and provide the best result for the industry and for the broader community. Importantly, this plan has the support of industry. There could be no better indication of that than a statement by the president of the Queensland Commercial Fishermen's Organisation, Mr Ted Loveday, last Friday in which he said—

"This plan marks a milestone in fisheries management in Queensland that everyone, including industry, the community and all sides of politics can be proud of."

I look forward to the successful implementation of this management plan on 1 June this year.
