



Speech by

**KEN TURNER**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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### **AQUACULTURE**

**Mr TURNER** (Thuringowa—IND) (11.20 p.m.): In Australia, the demand for prawns has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. Australians have included prawns in their regular diet along with pies with peas and fish and chips. Prawns are no longer a once-a-year luxury. Throw another prawn on the barbie has become as much of an Australian icon as vegemite on toast.

The past 20 years have taken us on a journey to look for the bigger, better, cheaper prawn. If the ocean cannot meet the demand, the solution would seem obvious: just raise more seafood down on the fish farm. Therefore, aquaculture was started to help meet the demand for prawns and other seafood and has become a boom industry for Queensland. The industry has increased at such an alarming rate that proper legislation was never put into place to govern and protect it, and, at the same time, govern and protect the environment and wild fish and prawn stocks that can be drastically affected by the mismanagement of aquaculture farms.

Aquaculture is a worldwide phenomenon and has become a giant international business, with almost every country in the world now actively involved in the import and export of farmed seafood. One-quarter of the world's prawns are raised in ponds in 50 countries. One in four salmon that are eaten today never left the pen until the fish was on its way to a dinner table. Some 200 species of fish and shellfish, and maybe more, have gone the way of pigs and chickens.

Theoretically, fish farms are a good thing. They provide much needed food while taking some of the pressure off dwindling fish populations in the wild, but in practice aquaculture is often profoundly wasteful and destructive. Fish farms can devastate the surrounding environment, and the idea that the growth of aquaculture can save wild fish is, to a large extent, wishful thinking. Farm prawns are fed a diet of fish meal and the trade-off is dismal. Three kilos of fish meal produces one kilo of prawns.

Viral disease in aquaculture is a constant worry. Bacterial infection can ravage farm prawns despite the large doses of antibiotics that are given to them. Self-pollution of prawn farms due to poor pond management and the lack of properly separated inlet and outlet systems is of great concern to the prosperity of this industry. It would be fine if growers could use a pond over and over again, but the population density—as many as 500,000 per hectare in artificial ponds—eventually fosters diseases that can knock out a prawn population in a matter of days. Pathogens settle into the muck of prawn waste and unconsumed fodder, poisoning a pond and preventing further use. An artificial pond exhausts its usefulness usually within three to six years. When contamination becomes deeply embedded, the industry simply crashes and never recovers. This happened in Thailand, which was once the world's biggest prawn producer. Mismanagement, overproduction and contamination of prawn farms and the resulting contamination and overfishing of the sea has left the fishing industry in the Gulf of Thailand completely destroyed.

Aquaculture is a very lucrative business, bringing many millions of dollars into the Queensland economy and providing thousands of jobs for Queenslanders. Some Queensland prawn farmers are displaying a total disregard for the prosperity of the aquaculture and prawn trawling industries by flushing diseased prawn stocks and polluted pond water directly into the ocean and waterways. Because there are no laws pertaining to this issue, this practice is being allowed to continue. The discharge of polluted pond water into rivers and creeks changes the entire ecology of the waterways and can result in the death of mangroves and sea life. This practice will almost certainly infect other shellfish such as crabs. Should this occur, and it may be that it already has, it would be extremely

difficult to control, if not impossible. Disease can also be spread from pond to pond and to other water areas by birds. Ponds must be covered to prevent the spread of disease.

It is common practice in Queensland to market infected prawns before they die. These surviving prawns must be cooked before being sold to ensure that viruses are not transferred into the environment. Most aquaculture feed is imported and requires treatment to kill bacteria before being imported into Australia. We are placing a lot of faith in other countries to carry out this treatment. The importation into Australia of untreated feed has the potential to introduce exotic diseases and, considering that the countries that export the aquaculture feed to Australia have already destroyed their own prawn industry by mismanagement and disease, can we rely on those countries to do the right thing by our industry and environment? I think not.

There is no reason why Queensland cannot build its own aquaculture feed industry, creating much needed employment while reducing the risk of importing exotic diseases and ensuring that our already established prawn farm industry continues to flourish. At present, Queensland has very few guidelines and laws that cover aquaculture. We need to introduce such laws and the infrastructure to police them before it is too late. It is time for us to accept total responsibility for the protection of this industry, ensuring that the aquaculture industry continues to prosper——

Time expired.

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