



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 20 August 2002

FISHERIES AMENDMENT REGULATION (No. 2) 2002 Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.04 p.m.): I second the motion. I have to say that I am very disappointed in the minister. In rising to speak about this fishing regulation, which I oppose, I must say that I am amazed by the hypocrisy of the Beattie Labor government which claims, in science week, that science offers opportunities for jobs and then seeks to ban a commercial fishing industry. That is flying in the face of science.

Pilchards, which are also marketed as sardines, have a market. In some sectors the fish has been used for bait, but in this instance I am talking about gourmet food. This processor had the machines and, up to this point, it had people working on stock that was from New Zealand. I understand that that process has finished and already people have been put off. As a result, 25 jobs have been lost.

We know that independent scientific expert opinion shows that Mr Pinzone's application for a developmental application of some 350 tonnes of pilchards compared to a resource of 25,000 tonnes would have negligible impact. This process was employing Queenslanders. In fact, it was employing people who live on the Sunshine Coast—one of the highest unemployment areas of Queensland. In my electorate, the unemployment rate ranges between 12 per cent and 13 per cent. The average unemployment rate for the Sunshine Coast is about 12 per cent. That is a lot of people who would readily grab these jobs that have been lost.

I want to talk also about the environmental impact of this process. It was acknowledged that there had to be a change in the way in which these fish were caught, and there was a change. A new lift net was applied. It passed the environmental test. It was dolphin friendly and it did not have a by-catch concern. In fact, the lift net was a leader in environment terms in that the South Australian industry continues to use the old purse seine nets.

For the information of Labor members—who probably have already settled for voting along party lines rather than listening to the fact that jobs will be lost—I point out that South Australia has a pilchard industry. In that state, the industry provides a lot of jobs. Yet in Queensland the resource has not even been tapped. We are talking about a developmental licence of only 350 tonnes.

The man who made the application has been dealt a blow due to the politics of the minister who has taken allegedly 260 or so submissions against this proposition. But that has all been done behind closed doors. When the opposition tried to get hold of that information under freedom of information, we found that we had to pay over \$1,200 to get access to copies of those so-called submissions—whether they were individual letters or photocopied letters all in the same format. We have not seen the quality of those submissions.

The freedom of information process is too expensive for the average person, or for the opposition. I say shame on this government that claims to be promoting science and jobs but blatantly goes against scientific advice and new environmental measures that are leading Australia and are far ahead of methods used by other existing industries such as that in South Australia. It hides behind an

expensive freedom of information system that is anything but free. When we have to pay over \$1,200 just to get some 260 so-called objections to the minister, it is not a freedom of information system. This issue is not about science and good policy making but about behind-the-scenes, cloistered, secret decisions made with people whom we do not know. It has all been done in a way that makes it beyond the realms of public accountability.

I note also that the minister refused to meet Mr Pinzone. I remind members that this issue has been going on for longer than a year. Mr Pinzone was just seeking to have this issue dealt with in an appropriate and due manner but the minister was not making a decision. Finally, Mr Pinzone asked to see the minister. He also indicated that there had been an undue delay. The minister feigned a legal problem as to why he could not see Mr Pinzone. He was allegedly being threatened with legal proceedings.

Mr Pinzone was seeking to have the matter resolved after such an extraordinary period of time, in which they were actually putting people off from their jobs. As has been confirmed by the solicitor for Mr Pinzone, it would have been the logical, practical, cost-effective and reasonable method to endeavour to resolve issues at a 'without prejudice' conference between Mr Pinzone and the minister, and certainly myself as a local member whose harbour this would be coming through. That would have been sensible, but the minister refused to meet with Mr Pinzone.

We know that there have been these so-called submissions—which one has to pay a fortune to access—which the minister claims he has based his decision on. I am disappointed with the minister because this is a small application for a developmental licence and it is good science. A decision to use a new method of by-catch reduction is all about a smart way of providing jobs with good science. Yet we have seen a decision based on politics and the abuse of someone who has tried to do the right thing and invest in jobs in the local community. It seems that good science and good policy has been ignored and jobs have been lost.

The way in which this issue has been handled is a worrying trend for the rest of the fishing industry. We need good policy and good science. There will always be controversial issues. There are those who try to polarise the issues between recreational and commercial fishing, but this was a situation where the science clearly showed that it would have had a negligible impact upon the recreational industry and, in fact, upon the other commercial fishing people.

In gross terms, the fishing industry in the Mooloolaba port—the seafood and fish taken through that port—is worth \$87 million. That is extraordinary. Yet this is another industry which is not currently being accessed and which could be accessed in a reasonable way that would not have impacted upon the recreational industry. Also, it would not have impacted on existing industries due to the small amount—just 350 tonnes—being taken from a resource of over 25,000 tonnes. The facts are there. This is a bad way for the minister to make decisions. It does not bode well for the government's approach to other fishing industry matters in the future when we see the template which has been set during this case.
