



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 14 May 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fishing Industry

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (11.30 a.m.), by leave: Following on from the comments by the Premier, I would like to outline further proposed changes to fisheries management being released for public comment. In particular, I would like to refer to the proposed amendments to blue swimmer crabs, or sand crabs, and Spanish mackerel.

These amendments seek to crack down on the practice of tipping crabs. Tipping involves deliberately breaking the tips of undersized crabs so that the current alternative underbody measure, which is regarded to be more generous, is used. Tipping is unscrupulous and the practice has become widespread, particularly in Moreton Bay. It is estimated that almost 20 per cent of blue swimmers caught in Moreton Bay, equivalent to 54 tonnes, are tipped. This abuse of the law cannot be tolerated. Fishers should not be able to bend the rules by breaking a crab.

We intend to crack down on this abuse of the law by introducing a new notch-to-notch measurement to replace the current tip-to-tip measurement. Instead of the current measure from these tips, which fishers knock off or damage, the proposed new measure will be from this notch across the carapace to the other notch. In addition to introducing a new measurement, it is proposed that the minimum size limit will be reduced. The proposed minimum size limit would be reduced from 15 centimetres to 14 centimetres in terms of the tip-to-tip measurement. As a notch-to-notch measurement, it will be an 11.5 centimetres minimum size limit. Research shows that by the time blue swimmers have reached the proposed notch-to-notch measurement they are sexually mature and have also most likely mated.

Another popular species being dealt with under these proposals is Spanish mackerel. These proposed changes will protect this popular species from a potential increase in fishing effort following the introduction of the coral reef fin fishery management plan. The proposals for Spanish mackerel include a limit on the number of commercial licences, a ceiling of approximately 620 tonnes per year on the commercial catch, requiring commercial operators to report their catch before landing, and the introduction of systems of landing dockets, logbook returns and buyer returns, reviewing the quota, based on stock assessments, every two years, and reducing the recreational possession limit from 10 to 3. The government is also seeking comment on a proposal to set a maximum size limit for Spanish mackerel to reduce the risk of ciguatera poisoning and ways of protecting the species from localised depletion during spawning.

These reforms are proposals in respect of which we are seeking public comment. However, I believe industry and the wider community understands the importance of these proposals. We must protect our fish stocks and fish habitats for future generations. We must face up to the reality that there is too much conflict between fishers on our waters and on our beaches. As a government we have introduced important fisheries reform to ensure our state continues to produce arguably the world's best seafood, remains an angler's paradise and that our valuable fish habitats are protected.