



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Wednesday, 29 September 2004

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.10 p.m.): In rising to speak to this legislation, there are just two or three issues I want to raise. With regard to changes to the fishing industry, I have to concur with the comments of the member for Toowoomba South in that many fishing families have expressed concern to me not so much about the fact that changes have occurred but that a lot of changes have occurred over a short period of time. Many of the changes had placed costs on the fishermen themselves with the installation of the newly required equipment—that is, if we take the matters in isolation, turtle excluders, the VMS system and those things. The fishing industry has not opposed in any great measure many of those issues. It has happily put on the TEDs and happily installed the VMS, albeit believing there were assurances that the VMS would achieve certain safety elements. Those were certainly not achieved. In fact, the information given to the fishermen at briefings appears to have been flawed.

However, there have been additional closures of six weeks and closures of areas permanently. As I said, I have to concur with the comments of the member for Toowoomba South. Overwhelmingly, a view that has been repeated to me and one that I also hold is this: can we just stop for a while and let all of the changes—the closures, the withholding periods and all of that—settle in in order to determine their effect on the ecology to see whether what was projected to be achieved with some of those closures four and five years ago in terms of fish stocks and so on has been achieved and whether sustainability has been achieved in those areas that have been of concern not just to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the conservation groups but to the fishing industry itself, because it is its future in terms of sustainability.

The repeated call that I would pass on to the minister is to ask if we can just stop with the changes for a little while and let them roll through and see how the fisheries improve—that is, how the fish stocks improve, stabilise or change. Let the people in the industry itself—the men and women who work hard to be able to supply us with good quality seafood—take time out to do their job and also time out from having to constantly respond to reviews, investigations and changes to their livelihoods so that they can get on and enjoy their livelihoods. That is a point of view that I would hope the minister would have regard to.

The recognition of powers for police officers involved in animal welfare directions—obviously that includes seizures—is also welcomed. It is one of the sad indictments of humanity that there are certain individuals who find absolutely no problem in acting towards animals—pets as well as stock—in a way that is cruel beyond belief. Some of the actions that the RSPCA and police officers get involved in are situations of a lack of understanding or situations of error or omission where people have inadvertently perhaps allowed animals outside in the heat without water. The real problem is those individuals who have no qualms about dealing harshly and inhumanely with animals that usually rely on them for food, drink and comfort.

After contact with them, most police officers in my electorate are sensitive to a balance with the needs of the home owner, and authorities like the police and the RSPCA, and have a practical appreciation of how various families can afford to keep animals in terms of the quality and the cost of housing. But

nearly every one of us here and nearly every individual can understand the difference between animals that are mistreated and abused versus animals that are perhaps kept in more circumspect or less palatial surroundings. The powers given to the police that reflect the powers given to the RSPCA are certainly welcomed.

The only other issue I want to raise with the minister is to commend the correction in relation to the Food Production (Safety) Act. Amendments made last year had inadvertent or unintended consequences for the many people who harvest wild game for their own consumption. This inadvertent oversight has been corrected. For those people who have been affected in a negative way, I am certain that the correction that the minister is making in the legislation today will bring them a great deal of relief.

I thank the minister for the opportunity to speak to this legislation. However, I am interested in his feedback either when he sums up the debate or subsequently in relation to the possibility of there being a moratorium on further changes to the fishing industry to allow that industry to recover from significant change and upheaval in order to allow the fishing families who work so very hard for themselves as well as us to be able to settle down and enjoy the industry that they so strongly support.