



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard Tuesday, 15 June 2004

SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.50 a.m.): The Queensland seafood industry is the state's fifth largest primary industry. It is an industry that provides over \$800 million in retail value annually to our state. It supports about 7,000 jobs directly and some 10,000 to 12,000 jobs in associated industries. It is a very important industry, particularly along the coastline of Queensland.

I doubt that any other industry in Queensland has taken the hammering that the fishing industry has received from the Beattie Labor government. This is an industry that is continually striking closures, no-go zones, endorsements and arrangements with its licences. This is making it more difficult for fishermen and their families to make a decent living.

It has all come to a head recently, with some 12 port meetings held in Queensland throughout the month of June—at Cairns, Townsville, Bowen, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Tin Can Bay, Mooloolaba, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. I had the opportunity to attend one of those port meetings. It is time for someone to stand up in this parliament and speak up in defence of these hardworking families, many of whom have been involved in the fishing industry for generations. The thing that struck me is that they genuinely want to see a sustainable industry, just like farmers and foresters want to see a sustainable industry. But they are taking this hammering from Beattie government ministers, from Beattie government bureaucrats and from the environmental lobby that is not taking notice of science. It is just going on myth and perception.

In the coral reef line fishing area quotas have been cut from 4,800 tonnes to 3,601 tonnes. Scientists have now come out, through the CRC in north Queensland, and said that there was never any need to have the quota cut that low. In fact, they say that it could easily be raised by 400 tonnes. Now they find that there are major problems with those fishing families that have been involved in this industry for a long time. They did not get the right quotas and the government is going to rob Peter to pay Paul—take quotas off people who have been allocated quotas to try to address that particular problem. All that is needed is to increase the quota a little bit—somewhere in the order of 75 to 100 tonnes—and that problem will be solved and the catch will still have been reduced from 4,800 tonnes to about 3,700 tonnes. Also, the government is giving no thought whatsoever to any form of compensation, regardless of the fishery and the area in which these fishing families are being cut out of their legitimate income.

The other very serious problem at the moment is the complementary zones. The government would have us believe that this is something that just follows on automatically from the RAP zones put in place in the Great Barrier Reef area by the federal government in waters under its jurisdiction. That is not right. The Beattie Labor government has voluntarily gone down to Canberra and said that it will introduce complementary zones to the RAP zones in the Great Barrier Reef. These complementary zones cover some 2.5 per cent of the GBRMP area, but in most cases they contain up to 80 per cent of important fishery habitats in Queensland. For example, 80 per cent of the barramundi and 80 per cent of the mud crabs for Queensland are in these threatened areas that the Beattie Labor government is looking at closing up under its complementary zones plan. Again, there is no true science, no proper consultation with the seafood and fishing industry and no real concern for the jobs that are going to be lost.

Another important area is the Great Sandy Strait Marine Park. This covers the area from the southern end of the Barrier Reef down to the Noosa River—an area where there is a lot of unemployment, particularly in the Hervey Bay area, which has some of the highest unemployment in Australia. This is one area where the government needs to work with the fishing industry. It needs to listen to them—where they say that areas could be closed off and where they say that areas could be protected, but they still could be able to show where they need to fish.

If any member attended any of these meetings they would have been saddened to hear the stories—people who have virtually lost their life's work or the superannuation that they wanted to retire on. I listened to women speak about how their family has taken a hammering and a bashing. It is investment warnings and licence endorsements. If they do not fish every year in every single part of their licence endorsement, they are at risk of losing that. They have been told that they will have their areas closed down. They do not know how to plan. They have no security.

It is time that this state and this government started to appreciate and respect decent, hardworking families like the fishing families along our coastline who respect the environment. It is time to do things on a science basis, with truth and honesty, not myth and perception in the cheap pursuit of green votes. It is about time we realised there is another endangered species in Queensland; that is, the hardworking fishing families of our state.

Time expired.