



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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MARINE PARKS BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (2.42 p.m.): It was quite amazing to hear that the previous speaker in this debate, the member for Mount Coot-tha, is concerned about sewage effluent from yachts in Moreton Bay when his government continues to see 130,000 megalitres—or double the full capacity of the Leslie Dam—discharged every year into the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay and is tardy in getting involved in the recycled water project—that is, cleaning that water up, recycling it and sending it to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs. This bill is supposedly modernising the bill brought in by the National Party government in 1982 which put in place a structure for marine parks—that is, protected areas and sustainable development areas within the marine environment.

There are some aspects of this bill that are literally frightening because of the way this government is trying to sneak in ways in which it can do things. One example of this is complementary zoning, which has caused so many problems. This legislation means that it can almost do what it likes by virtue of some parts of this legislation. I want to speak in particular about complementary zoning and lay to rest once and for all the notion or the excuse that the state government has been putting up that it had to do this to mirror the zones put in place in the Great Barrier Reef by GBRMPA.

As most members are aware, the federal government is responsible for the deep-water areas and the state government is responsible for those areas between the low-tide mark and the high-tide mark, and that is where the mirroring of the complementary zones by this state government is taking place. In a lazy way, it is simply mirroring those zones on the Great Barrier Reef that GBRMPA put in place and on which GBRMPA spent years and years in consultation. Despite the fact that there are many commercial and recreational fishing families who are disappointed about the GBRMPA zones, at least they can say that they had thorough and lengthy consultation. At the end of the day, because their ability to fish commercially has been taken away, there is at least compensation from the federal government. At least it is abiding by the philosophy that, if something is deemed to be good for the nation—something is deemed to be good for the national environment—then everybody should pay, not those people who will be rubbed out or those hardworking people who will lose their livelihood, lose their superannuation, lose part of their assets, be in severe financial difficulty or be under deep emotional strain because of the difficulties their family will face not only in making a living but also in providing for the future.

I want to read into the record a letter from Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell and Senator the Hon. Ian Macdonald, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation respectively. The letter was written to the president of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association. The letter states—

Dear Mr Olsen

Thank you for your letter of 30 July 2004 regarding the Queensland Government's decision to establish a Great Barrier Reef Coastal Marine Park with zoning arrangements that mirror that in adjacent areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

As you are aware, the State Environment Minister, Mr John Mickel—

the Environment Minister at the time—

claimed that the Australian Government was forcing the State of Queensland to undertake such an action and that operators affected by those closures should approach the Australian Government for adjustment funding.

We also have been concerned by the confusion that has resulted from statements by the Queensland Government and welcome the opportunity to clarify the Australian Government's position in relation to the three points you raise.

We can confirm that marine protected area arrangements within Queensland waters and outside of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are wholly the responsibility of the Queensland Government. The Australian Government has not requested that the Queensland Government take any action within Queensland waters to 'mirror' the recent rezoning of the Park.

The Australian Government has no intention to use its powers to override any decisions that the Queensland Government may take regarding marine protected areas in Queensland waters, including where those decisions have been made in consultation with the Queensland fishing industry.

Any structural adjustment assistance that may be required to support Queensland's decisions on marine protected areas or fisheries management is also the responsibility of the Queensland Government. The Australian Government's announced structural adjustment assistance package relates only to those decisions supported by the Australian Government on rezoning within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

We trust that this helps clarify the situation. You should be assured that, notwithstanding any confusion arising from the Queensland Government's statements, the Australian Government intends to work closely with the Queensland Government for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and the promotion of sustainable industries that are based on its resources.

I have raised my concerns directly with my Queensland counterpart. I have suggested that the Queensland Government has an obligation to meet the structural adjustment costs of its biodiversity conservation decisions.

I also indicated that in order to reduce industry confusion, I would be prepared to consider extending the Australian Government's structural adjustment package to cover the Queensland decision, if the Queensland Government was prepared to meet the cost and apply the same principle of fair and equitable treatment of displaced fishermen.

The letter is signed by those two ministers. There have been many closures in recent times, and the effects of those closures on jobs is amazing in not only this year but also preceding years. There have been all sorts of bans, closures and changes. The fishing industry certainly has taken an absolute hammering.

This Labor Party does not seem to care about the working people anymore. It is like the hammering that Mark Latham is about to give the workers in the Tasmanian forests in the obscene chase of any sort of green preference or green votes. The Labor Party will trample and walk all over workers like a dirty doormat. It does not care. The same thing is happening with fishing on our coast. Instead of abiding by the principles of sustainability, true research and science and coming to an arrangement that is sensible and allows the environment to be protected and allows the fishing resource to be sustainable, the Labor Party goes to the wrong end of the spectrum, takes away too much, closes down too much and damages the fishing families and the recreational industry in Queensland to an extent that was never, ever necessary.

One of my colleagues the member for Charters Towers made a pretty down-to-earth and sensible comment. He spoke about some of the fines and prison terms for people who do particular things and how weak some of them are. He said, 'If you go and catch a fish you could be fined thousands of dollars. What is so wrong with catching a fish?' There are many people in his electorate who catch fish as a bit of a break from the hard work that they do throughout the week.

Complementary zoning is going to close some 600 kilometres of onshore fishing in that low-tide to high-tide area along the coast—an area between Baffle Creek near Bundaberg to Cape York. As I understand it, approximately 60 areas are going to be deemed to be complementary zones. A whole range of them are not necessary. I know that the Queensland Seafood Industry Association endeavoured to talk some sense before these complementary zones were announced. When there was the draft plan, there were so many areas where it said that foreshores and creeks could be retained—areas like Margaret Bay, Temple Bay, Cape Direction, Bobardt Point, Port Stewart, Ninian Bay, Cape Bowen to Point Lookout, Cape Bedford, Deception Point, the Russell-Mulgrave area, Hinchinbrook Island, Halifax Bay, Cape Pallarenda, Cleveland Bay, Bowling Green Bay, Pioneer Bay, South Midge Point, Seaforth, Shoal Point, North West Hill Island, Clairview, Broadsound, Shoalwater Bay-Townsend Island, Yeppoon, and Yellowpatch. They are areas within that complementary zoning area where, in some places, there were recommendations to retain the foreshore and the creeks. In other places, they delineated the areas that could be retained.

There is not even a proper environmental reason for doing this. These complementary zones and the areas along the coast contain about 80 per cent of Queensland's barramundi and mud crab fishing areas, which are very important for a number of fishing communities along the coast. Some of them are quite isolated communities. There has been no real environmental reason for these complementary zones. All we get is the bland statement that it has to be done or we will have chaos. I noted that in the previous minister's second reading speech he said that it was designed to bring Queensland back into sync with the Commonwealth and to deliver certainty for all reef users. He said that the alternative would be chaos. We could not have two sets of rules for one body of water. The one body of water was contained under the Commonwealth zones out on the Barrier Reef. All that this state government wants to do is extend those zones to those areas along the shore where recreational fishermen throw in a line and have a fish, or where the barramundi and mud crab fishermen are able to fish for their livelihoods.

As a result of what has been done with the complementary zones in the so-called name of protecting the environment, the government has forced a displacement of effort. It has forced more and more fishing

families into more concentrated areas where it has to try to make a living or they have forced more and more recreational fishing out of these complementary zones into other areas where fishing is allowed so that we have a greater density of effort. If all the fishermen can get into those areas, the poor fish that are left in those areas will not have a chance.

I have been told by fishermen that, in some of the areas, they have been told that they can fish in particular creeks and so forth. The area that I was talking to someone about recently was Bowling Green Bay. But even in those areas where there are creeks where people can fish, there are so many days in the week when they are not allowed to fish, there are so many days in the week when people cannot fish because of the running tide, and then there are three months of the year when people are not allowed to fish there at all. All in all, it ends up with something like about 12 days a month that people are able to fish in some of these creeks. That is how ridiculous that whole issue has become.

This issue is not only hurting the fishing families; it is hurting many other people who rely on the fishing industry. Last week in parliament I spoke about people who operated a small courier service in the Burdekin area. They relied upon the mud crab industry as a core part of their business. They ran a little courier service from the Ayr-Horne Hill area up to the Townsville airport. Those people are going to lose a core part of their business. That has gone. There will be no compensation for them, there will be no compensation for the commercial fishermen; it will be just taken away from them. It is what their grandparents had done, it is what they have done, it is what they wanted to hand on to their families. They wanted to maintain their livelihoods in a viable and sustainable way. The government has just trampled all over the top of them with jackboots and taken away their living for no true scientific reason and made no proper adjustments or tweakings. The minister's staff said that they were going to do some tweaking around the edges. But the government had its mind made up. It was what the government was going to do. It was just going to be carte blanche. It was the lazy way out. It was just going to mirror exactly the GBRMPA zones and forget about the fishing families and forget about decent, hardworking Queenslanders.

As I said, this issue of the complementary zoning is just part of the total hammering that the fishing industry has taken. There have been all sorts of closures, adjustments and changes to the industry. There has been the introduction of size limits, bag limits, sporting closures, and increases to the no-take species list. Even now, while this complementary zoning is an issue, the Department of Primary Industries and Forestry is about to undertake an inshore fishing review. It must have searched around, scratched its head and asked, 'How can we give the fishing families of Queensland another hammering and another kick in the backside just while they are trying to deal with these complementary zones? Let us have a review of inshore fishing and see if we can knock them about a bit more.'

For example, there is the issue of the protection of the grey nurse shark around Double Island Point and some of the areas out to the east of Moreton Bay. I spoke to a fishing family who has been involved in fishing around Wolf Rock, which is out to the south-east of Tin Can Bay. Those fishing families are the ones who have the practical knowledge. If the government had listened to them, it would know that it could protect the grey nurse shark by not having any night fishing and not allowing any deep fishing, because the grey nurse shark stays down the bottom. These people are trolling the top part of the water. That is what they have been doing for 30-odd years. They have never caught a grey nurse shark, let alone seen one in the area. Instead of making some sensible recommendations like no night fishing or no deep fishing, an 800-metre or half-mile circle exclusion zone was made around this rock. So the government has virtually excluded this fishing family and another one from fishing the particular area where they could catch a particular species of fish up near the surface and make a living.

The government should look at the human effect of some of these arrangements. It is all right for the members opposite to stand here in parliament and read prepared speeches and so forth, but they should go out and talk to these people—people who have fished for all their lives and probably had another five years to 15 years of fishing left and thought that that would get them and their wives over the line with regard to having something on which they could retire. At a late stage of their lives, they have had a substantial part of their income taken away from them. It is what they knew, what they did, and what they did best. Worst of all, they have the absolute frustration of knowing that what was done to them did not make any sense. There could have been the maximum protection of the grey nurse shark by some simple, practical rules that could be imposed through the knowledge of the fishermen who knew the area, who understood the species and who had fished in the area for years. But, no, it is just this bureaucratic clampdown on them. The government walks all over the top of them. Those poor people are left to scratch their heads and ask, 'What on earth is it all about? What sort of a government is it that does not care about sensible people, that does not care about practicalities? It is just out there in its obscene chase for green votes.'

Previous speakers have spoken about Science in Parliament. In the coral reef fin fishery the quota was reduced from 4,800 tonnes to 3,061 tonnes. Since then the cooperative research centre in north Queensland has indicated that that was 400 tonnes too much. A lot of heartache would have been

prevented had the government instituted something that was based on science and gave protection but also meant a minimum of disruption to the area.

I have mentioned some of the frightening things in this bill. Some the clauses of the bill virtually state that people can do what they like. We will be getting stuck into that when we consider the bill in detail. The frightening part relates to third parties. This is the way the Labor Party likes to treat people. Instead of this being a government matter that can come before parliament and can be argued and debated in a democratic way, there is an ability for third parties to take action against people. It is the era of government supported professional pimps who go out there and get stuck into hardworking people. Whether it be issues to do with the rivers in western Queensland or issues to do with fishing, there are provisions relating to third parties—to allow these groups of people to get together and to frustrate, attack and maul the hardworking fishing families of this state.

The ability of third parties to come in and take action represents one of the most cowardly and dangerous principles that this government has introduced into this parliament. It would be different if the government wanted to take some sort of action and it had the courage and the wherewithal to do it and then stand for re-election on the pros and cons of its actions or bring its actions into the parliament so that it could explain them and talk about them. But it hides behind the skirts of third parties and gives them the power to start to take action and harass people. Those third parties might have a particular vendetta against people or they might be extreme greens. They could make the life of the fishing families absolutely hapless by their continued harassment and attacks and by taking action against them. This is a dangerous principle. It is a dangerous precedent. It is undemocratic and it is not the sort of thing we want to see in Queensland.

I think it is about time that we in this parliament started to stand up for the decent, hardworking people of this state. If the government is fair dinkum about doing something for the environment, it should do it correctly and accurately so that people will come along with it. They will join enthusiastically and realise that it is better for the future. The government should not destroy these people. It should listen to them. They are practical and they care about their environment.