



Speech by

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MARINE PARKS (GREAT SANDY) ZONING PLAN: DISALLOWANCE OF STATUTORY INSTRUMENT

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (7.30 pm): I move—

That the Marine Parks (Great Sandy) Zoning Plan 2006 (Subordinate Legislation No. 229 of 2006), tabled in the Parliament on 11 October 2006, be disallowed.

The Great Sandy Marine Park extends from Baffle Creek just north of Bundaberg to Double Island Point in the south near Tin Can Bay and wraps around Fraser Island. The park encompasses almost 6,000 square kilometres and absorbs the existing Woongarra and Hervey Bay marine parks.

The marine environment supports a diverse range of activities including fishing, whale watching and turtle nesting. A zoning plan setting out how this marine environment would be managed was announced in April 2006 and took effect on 31 August 2006. It was sneakily put through during the election campaign. The draft plan was released in 2005 and proved very divisive, fuelling conflict between commercial and recreational fishermen in the Hervey Bay area while recreational fishermen in the Bundaberg area staged a number of protests during the state election campaign.

The zoning plan has been on the drawing board for years. A 25-person working group of local representatives, including commercial and recreational fishing representatives, tourism industry stakeholders and local council representatives, to name but a few, was set up in 2002 to advise the state government. This group was disbanded in June 2004.

The Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan identifies five different zones within the marine park and the level of protection for each zone. Green zones, or marine national park zones, provide the highest level of protection. They are 'look but do not take' areas where activities such as fishing and collecting are banned. There are yellow or conservation park zones. They have a high level of protection. Commercial fishing is banned, recreational fishing is limited to one line and one hook per person except when trolling and crabbing is limited to four devices per person. Blue or general use zones are where most activities are permitted, although permits are required for some activities—for example, aquaculture and harvest fishing for aquarium fish.

Habitat protection zones, which are dark blue, is where most activities are permitted but trawling is banned. There is also a buffer zone, which is olive green, around Wolf Rock, which is similar to the green zone but allows trolling or top line fishing with lures only. There are also designated areas generally to manage marine park issues that are relevant only in a specific area or at a specific time of the year—for example, turtle nesting or shorebirds roosting. Examples of designated areas include the Mon Repos turtle protection and monitoring areas, which set out the entry and use provisions, while in turtle protection areas trawling is banned between 1 November each year to 31 January the following year.

The largest designated area is the Great Sandy designated area, which incorporates the Great Sandy Strait and Tin Can Bay Inlet. Commercial fishing is permitted, recreational is fishing permitted and they can use three lines and up to six hooks. In the draft plan, recreational fishers were to be limited to one hook and one line, so the change to the final plan was in response to the pressure from recreational fishers

who claimed that they were discriminated against by that particular ruling. Also, a number of go-slow areas have been established which are aimed at protecting turtles and dugongs from boat strike.

The view of the tourism industry in the Great Sandy Marine Park, which employs about 15,000 Queenslanders and more than a million people from around the world visit the area every year, is important. Ten per cent of Queensland's total number of domestic and international tourists each year visit the Great Sandy Marine Park area for tourism purposes. This information was sourced from the Beattie government media release of 18 April 2006.

Fraser Island Defenders Organisation honorary project officer, John Sinclair, described the marine park as a 'lose, lose situation' in a letter to the editor of the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on 28 April 2006. Fraser Coast charter boat operator Paul Dolan, who takes tourists out for catch-and-release fishing, including to two of the newly designated green zones near Duck Island and Little Woody Island, says that his business may have to close. In the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on 19 May 2006 he stated—

My life is in the green zones where they want to ban fishing. I run a strict catch and release policy. The evidence is in my log books but it doesn't seem to matter.

In an enlightening article in the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on 17 February 2005, whale watching operator Jason Brigden, who was a member of the working group that spent three years advising the government on the Great Sandy Marine Park plan, described the consultation process as a joke and described the draft plan as 'so flawed environmentally, morally and economically that you wonder if anything we say and write is going to be acknowledged properly.'

The Fraser Coast South Burnett Regional Tourism Board also prepared a detailed submission in March 2005 in response to the draft Great Sandy Marine Park plan in which it expressed disappointment that the working group was disbanded. In a submission dated 11 March 2005 the board stated—

This has resulted in a plan which does not take into account the need of all stakeholders and specifically tourism operators and visitors to the Fraser Coast.

What are the concerns of the recreational fishing industry? The proposal has angered recreational fishermen throughout the Wide Bay region. The regulatory impact statement for the draft Great Sandy Marine Park plan pointed out that 75 per cent of visitors and people moving to Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Strait region claim that access to recreational fishing is one of the reasons for moving there, while 15 per cent of these people claimed that it is their sole reason for visiting, or moving to, the area. This regulatory impact statement also quotes a 2001 report that estimated recreational fishers spent more than \$100 million on accommodation each year and a further \$38 million a year on fishing related items such as fuel, tackle, bait and safety gear.

Sunfish Fraser Coast chairman, Rob Watkins, has raised the question about anglers knowing where they are in relation to the new zones. In the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* of 6 September 2006 he stated—

There are many people on the Fraser Coast who just go out and fish in canoes and they will not have any idea whether they are breaking the law or not.

The manager of Hervey Bay bait and tackle shop Fisherman's Corner, Ray Ozich, told the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on 19 May 2006—

People are talking about selling their boats and moving on ... People love coming to Hervey Bay for fishing ... People thrive on fishing here but they will not return if we put obstacles in their way and stop them enjoying themselves.

In the *NewsMail* of 25 August 2006, Bundaberg amateur fisherman Bob Pope reflected the views of many recreational fishermen when he said—

I've been fishing here for the past 12 years and now I have to stop. These politicians are either idiots, or they are taking note of idiots, there is no commonsense in the plan.

In a letter to the Queensland coalition in August 2006 Don Robinson, the director of Tackle World in Bundaberg, outlined a series of concerns held by recreational anglers and families about changes to fishing zones between Burnett Heads and Elliott Heads. Mr Robinson pointed out that a large portion of the area between Burnett Heads and Elliott Heads is virtually a natural green zone because of the rocky shoreline that makes fishing very difficult. Barolin Rocks is the safest area and where most people fish, and that is now closed. Burkitt's Reef is the only inshore reef in the area and is now totally closed. Mr Robinson stated—

These two closures, plus the closure of Hoffman's Rocks because of the way the yellow zone is calculated, means that there are now no safe accessible inshore reef areas for families in this area to go fishing.

I have spoken to families and seniors who love to go fishing in that area. This plan has left them with just an inaccessible area to go fishing in. In these places, they could hardly crawl through the vegetation to get down to the water's edge and then, when they did get to the water's edge, there were massive black rocks everywhere that an older person or a family would have difficulty clambering over. However, these other areas I have mentioned that were ideal and safe for people to fish in have been closed off. It is a tragedy to be doing this to families. It is taking away the social benefit to families, retirees and seniors who

like to throw a line in and have reasonable access to the area in which they have put their life savings and where they wish to retire.

Mr Robinson pointed out that a public meeting of more than 100 recreational anglers and families on 22 August 2006 moved a motion which was unanimously carried. This motion stated—

This meeting demands that the State Government puts a moratorium on the implementation of the Great Sandy Marine Park Northern Section until the Zoning Plan is revised with true consultation with all stakeholders using genuine science.

I now move to the concerns of the commercial fishing industry. During the state election campaign, commercial fisherman Brett Fuchs confronted the Premier about the impacts of the Great Sandy Marine Park on his business. He said that the new fishing green zones were taking 30 to 40 per cent of his business away. That was in the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on 6 September. In the same paper on 18 April this year, commercial fisherman Wayne Fuchs predicted the zoning would put some skippers out of business, while the Queensland Seafood Industry Association Urangan branch president, Des Finlay, said that they would be asking the state government to enter into a compensation scheme similar to what was done in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park area by the Commonwealth government. But we all know that this government does not pay compensation—we know that from the government's most recent act in the parliament—if a marine park is put into place. So no such scheme has been developed.

Urangan Fisheries spokesman William Fitzsimmons told the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* in April this year that he feared the zones would restrict the amount of fresh seafood being sold. He said—

Fishermen won't be catching as much so we will have to start importing to keep prices level.

There are also concerns from the fishing industry about go-slow zones. Both commercial and recreational fishermen are worried about the impact of new go-slow zones in the Great Sandy Straits. Sunfish executive officer David Bateman told ABC news in February last year—

The problem with it is that those shallow areas can be rough at times and anglers in small boats tend to have to travel at a certain speed to keep their nose up so they don't get swamped, so to go slow, it creates a very dangerous situation and it's not very safe for the people in the boats.

Writing in the August 2006 edition of *The Queensland Fisherman* magazine, the Queensland Seafood Industry Association president, Mr Neil Green, stated that he had explained to fisheries minister, Tim Mulherin, how the go-slow zones would affect the profitability and sustainability of a range of fisheries in the area and had the potential to make some operations unviable. Mr Green said that he—

... explained that fishermen in this area need to travel on the plane to find fish, run their crab pots, etc, as they are dependent on working in shallow waters and can only access these fishing grounds on the top of the tide. This limits them to only a few hours of the tide to cover these areas efficiently.

Mr Green went on to state—

... the Environmental Protection Agency marine park management division could not tell us why the go slow zones were being implemented. The turtle expert informed us there wasn't any evidence that there was a lot of turtle activity in these go slow areas but they were being implemented as a precautionary measure to deter fishers transiting through shallow areas of the Great Sandy Strait.

Mr Green said—

Mr Mulherin was very concerned about the impact this may have on commercial fishing in the area and made immediate arrangements for me to meet with his relevant Departmental officers to go through the extensive impact document that QSIA had put together about the zones.

It would be interesting to hear Mr Mulherin's view, as I have not noticed that he has said anything publicly about the Great Sandy Marine Park area or stood up for the fishing industry that he is supposed to represent.

During the 2006 state election campaign, the coalition committed to overhauling the Great Sandy Marine Park plan if we were elected to ensure that it had broad community support and community ownership. The plan was to be revised and a new plan introduced within six months if we had been elected. We said that we did not need to reinvent the wheel—that there were a lot of good things within that plan—but that all these other issues that everyone from every single industry is so unhappy with are the issues that needed to be fixed. When we see the serious problems faced by the recreational fishers, particularly in the Bundaberg area, we realise the faults that lie within this plan. They could be so easily fixed if we disallowed this tonight and set about reviewing the plan and fixing these problems over the next six months.

The coalition would have ensured that the marine park plan was developed by the community for the community, not imposed upon the community by Brisbane based bureaucrats. The coalition committed to forming a new working group of local representatives to ensure that the plan had broad community support and an appropriate balance between protecting the environment and ensuring the marine park could be used and enjoyed by locals and visitors now and into the future. The coalition also committed to developing an assistance scheme for the commercial fishing industry to offset any adverse impacts and potential loss of fishing rights as a result of the marine park plan.

Here is a chance to get this very important plan right and fix these problems that I identified. Our arguments show that most of the changes that are required have been clearly identified. This disallowance motion gives members of this parliament the opportunity to get it right for the community once and for all.