



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 1 March 2006

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.37 am): Responsibility for detecting, apprehending and processing illegal foreign fishing vessels rests with the Commonwealth government. The Navy and Australian Customs Service—that is, Coastwatch—detect and apprehend foreign fishing vessels while the Australian Fisheries Management Authority has the responsibility for processing the crews, collecting evidence and, if necessary, prosecuting individuals.

For many years the Australian Fisheries Management Authority has contracted state Fisheries staff to deliver these important services on a cost recovery basis. In Queensland, these services are currently being performed by the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. After April this year, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority will be directly delivering these services, with Queensland no longer involved. The authority's response headquarters for foreign fishing vessels will be located in Darwin, and it plans to station three staff on Thursday Island. We are concerned that the change may reduce the work being done in this area at a time when the problem of illegal fishing is in fact increasing, not decreasing—and you would know that, Mr Speaker, as the member for Mount Isa.

Last year the number of foreign fishing vessels detected in Australian waters increased considerably, with 280 apprehensions and 327 legislative forfeitures. These involve seizing the catch and gear but releasing the vessel and crew. Already in 2006 there have been 47 apprehensions and 29 legislative forfeitures. Of these, 16 apprehensions and 18 legislative forfeitures were in waters off Queensland. I understand the vessels have been mostly of Indonesian origin and the species they are targeting is usually shark, with the shark fin attracting prices between \$100 and \$120 a kilogram.

Another worrying issue is that it has been estimated that less than 10 per cent of the illegal fishing vessels are ever caught. In Queensland, foreign fishing vessels are being seen in increasing numbers in the southern parts of the Gulf of Carpentaria, more recently in eastern Torres Strait and even the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. I am aware that the Northern Territory and Western Australian governments are extremely concerned that, far from this problem being solved, things actually appear to be getting worse.

Mr O'Brien: Out of control.

Mr BEATTIE: I take that interjection from the member for Cook because this is right off his coastline, and he has firsthand experience of it.

The Queensland government and the fishing industry have made difficult and costly decisions in recent years to ensure that our fisheries are sustained. Failure by the Commonwealth to grapple with illegal fishing head-on will be disastrous for the Queensland fishing industry and our future fish stocks.

We have a new federal fisheries minister, Senator Eric Abetz. The senator needs to look beyond Canberra to our significant northern waters, which should be his highest priority. I signal to the federal government today that we will be pursuing this matter directly. Unless we get some significant improvement in services we will make it a very, very public issue because, frankly, I think our fishing services, our fishers across the state, are entitled to better protection, and so is our Barrier Reef.