



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Wednesday, 24 May 2006

FISHERIES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (3.19 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Fisheries Amendment Bill 2006. I certainly do not intend to take my full 20 minutes to speak to this bill. The great contribution by the shadow minister for fisheries, the member for Toowoomba South, Mike Horan, was to the point and I certainly do not want to take anything away from his contribution. I listened with a great deal of interest to what he had to say.

I have read the bill, the explanatory notes and the second reading speech, and it is very commendable that the government is trying to enshrine in legislation the shark control program for swimmers' protection, provide compensation schemes, consolidate the declaration-making powers under this act and it goes on and on. So much energy has gone into this legislation and I would hope that the minister, his department and this government are prepared to put a similar amount of energy into trying to ensure the continuing fishing industry in Queensland.

I note that previous speakers have been allowed a minor amount of digression when speaking to this bill, and I hope that I will also be able to make a minor digression from the bill. I would like to read into *Hansard* a letter that I received from the president of the Independent Trawler Association. The letter states—

I am writing to you with concern to a further threat to our Qld fishing industry with regard to proposed changes to the energy grants credits scheme being replaced with a fuel tax credit, due to take effect from 1st July 2006.

Currently our fuel suppliers have our claimable excise payments, which is 38.143 cents a litre, directed to their bank accounts, which means we don't have to pay that up front when we fuel our vessels. Following these changes they will no longer be able to do this, and in turn operators in the fishing industry will have to calculate the amount of fuel tax credit entitlements themselves and submit their claim direct to the Tax Office using their activity statement (BAS) every three months. With vessels using anything up to 1000 litres a night or more, particularly in the trawl sector, you can see how this would mean many extra thousands of dollars that would have to be found before going to sea. Fishing families simply don't have any extra money and this will be the nail in the coffin for the Qld fishing industry.

That has certainly been made very clear to me by the fishing families that I know. They are struggling; they are doing it tough. I would ask the minister to go out on a plank and urge his fellow ministers in other states to take the fight to the federal government. We need the minister to lead on this very important issue. The letter goes on—

I have attached a letter that has been sent to the Prime Minister concerning this issue and I fully understand this is a Commonwealth issue, but we believe the State Government needs to lobby the Commonwealth Government on this as well, to protect one of Qld's largest primary industries.

As the letter to the Prime Minister states, the Qld fishing industry will cease to exist if these changes become law. Fishermen and their families along the entire East Coast of Qld are at crisis point economically right now and with this further barrier, many will simply have to tie up their vessels, as it means many thousands more dollars that will have to be found before they can go to sea.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! That is really a federal issue and not related to the state bill, so perhaps the member would like to write to the minister about that and return to the bill.

Mr WELLINGTON: I have already written to the minister. I will only take another couple of minutes. Perhaps the Deputy Speaker would like me to take my full time—the balance of 17 minutes. I do not intend

to do that. I ask for tolerance. Bearing in mind some of the contributions made by other members in this parliament, I would ask for your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nicklin, you do need to be careful because that is a reflection on the chair.

Mr WELLINGTON: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was not intended. I will be very brief. The letter further states—

Fuel suppliers have already told us that they will no longer provide credit to the fishing fleet as it is too big a risk on retrieving their moneys.

These proposed changes are due to take effect on 1st July 2006.

There is urgency in relation to this matter. I urge the minister to lead ministers in other states and take this fight to the federal government. Interestingly, I was only reading in the paper this morning that one of the National Party senators Barnaby Joyce was considering crossing the floor. Perhaps he may follow the lead of the members of the crossbenches in this parliament who regularly cross the floor on issues of importance to our constituents. This certainly is a matter of importance to our constituents and to all Queenslanders. As the shadow minister says, we need to stand up and fight for Queensland fishing families because they are really at the crossroads and we wonder how much longer they can survive.

Without further ado, I will allow other members to be involved in this very important debate. I am looking forward to the minister leading the charge to our federal government. Before I resume my seat, can I say that other members have spoken about the importance of supporting our Queensland fishing families. I would urge all Australians to buy locally caught products instead of imported products. So often we see Coles and Woolworths not promoting our local products but simply stocking whatever is the cheapest. They will get it from wherever in the world it is cheapest. I ask our minister to lead the other state ministers in the fight to urge all Australians to buy our local products and not to buy the imported products, because it is causing the ruin of our industry.

Mrs Liz Cunningham: And it is rubbish.

Mr WELLINGTON: And it is rubbish! We cannot even guarantee the quality of the products. Take up the challenge, Minister. We are with you all the way—the crossbenches are with you and I am certain that the opposition is with you.

Mr Hayward: You don't even eat fish.

Mr WELLINGTON: My word I do. I will have fish and chips shortly. I commend the bill to the House.