



Speech by

Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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FISHERIES AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (4.08 pm): I rise to speak to the Fisheries Amendment Bill 2006. I note the comments of the shadow minister and I will be supporting this bill. The proposed amendment to formally provide for a shark control program is welcome and in light of recent shark attacks certainly timely. Much of this state's tourism potential is based on our clean, easily accessible and relatively uncrowded beaches, and bather safety is paramount. The moves to clarify the establishment and management of the program will hopefully lead to a smoother operation and more readily understood and definable responsibilities and responses in relation to the control of predatory sharks in bathing areas.

The amendments that affect the commercial fishing industry are, for the most part, positive. After the caning that this government has given our local fishers lately, it must come as some relief to them to see something positive happen. There is no doubt that our commercial fishers have suffered unfairly because of the changes to their industry. Many have already been forced out and many more are still at risk of losing their livelihoods. Fishing is a really tough business. In Queensland, contrary to popular perception, it is not dominated by large multinational conglomerates but instead it is made up of family men and women who are trying to earn a decent living.

That the majority of pain has been experienced by these individuals and has not been shared equally by all of those who will supposedly benefit comes across as rank opportunism by this government in order to appease conservation groups and to prop up its declining vote. There is no doubt that the loss of inshore fishing along a vast majority of Queensland's coastline will be seen as a real win for conservation groups but could signal the beginning of the end for the Beattie Labor government.

A huge area in my electorate of Burdekin, particularly the Bowling Green Bay area, has an enormous number of both recreational and commercial fishers. The flow-on effects of their activities generate jobs and commercial activities are far greater than would at first be obvious. It is incumbent upon any government to ensure that no one sector is impacted upon unfairly without adequate compensation when changes are forced upon them.

The changes outlined in the bill to the compensation schemes and the introduction of the property rights formula will give some security to fishers where in the past security has been lacking. In an industry that has been subject to such an upheaval, I know that Queensland fishers are really looking forward to being able to plan for and to have a future.

The benefits that this bill provides in reducing red tape and providing a more centralised administration should lead to consistency and clarity for fishers and officers alike. It should also lead to a more compatible and tolerant working relationship between fishers and the department.

I am fortunate that the President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, Neil Green, lives in my electorate. I pay tribute to the enormous work he does for his industry and the passion that he holds for it. He is a practical, forward thinker and an asset to the fishing industry. In relation to the moves to establish a new system for the payment of fees and licences, Neil has said that the requirement for fishers to contribute \$6 million over five years could not have come at a worse time. Although there are no fundamental objections to the proposal, fishers are already struggling and the continual exit of fishers from

the industry makes the available pool of fishers smaller. Of course, that results in higher payments for those remaining fishers. If the government is serious about having a fishing industry, perhaps the minister could take that into consideration. The minister may also address concerns that have arisen in regard to the closing of a fishery due to the impact of bycatch. It is possible that, because of that provision, fishers may not be eligible for compensation that would normally be available under the new arrangements.

We are all too aware of the cost of fuel these days. The increasing price of fuel is having a devastating effect on the fishing industry. A boat may typically use 800 litres of fuel a night. The price rises in fuel are cutting deeply into the profit margins that remain. It has been suggested that the current 8.2c per litre off-road tax that fishers currently pay for diesel could be dropped in the interests of the long-term viability of the industry and to allow fishers to survive in the short term. This tax, coupled with the GST payable on an average night, costs them somewhere between \$65 and \$80 a night and to many represents their profit margin. This tax on fuel used by fishers would amount to very little overall to the state's coffers but could mean the difference between profit or loss to fishers. It would not only be a gesture of goodwill on behalf of the government to drop this tax but also go a long way towards ensuring the ongoing viability and future of this vital industry. After the hammering that the fishing industry has copped on behalf of all Queenslanders, it is time it received something in return.

The industry recognises and agrees with the need to maintain our fishing stocks and the health of the industry overall. All they ask is that the burden of conservation be shared equally by all of those who benefit. I support this bill, but I ask the minister to go those few steps further to really evidence this government's good faith towards our fishing men and women.