



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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FAR-NORTH QUEENSLAND, FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (6.22 pm): I rise to discuss the very difficult circumstances being experienced by commercial fishermen in far-north Queensland, where, amongst other issues, including the serious impact that increasing state and federal government regulations are having on the viability of fishermen, extended periods of bad weather over the last 32 months have prevented commercial fishermen in far-north Queensland from getting out on the water, earning their living and providing a secure supply of fresh, domestically caught seafood to Queenslanders. For the information of honourable members and, in particular, the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, I table the daily wind speeds for Green Island, the closest offshore observation station for this region.

Tabled paper: Document by the Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology containing the daily data for Green Island.

Once wind speeds exceed 20 to 30 knots, a strong wind warning is issued. Ideal offshore fishing conditions are wind speeds of under 10 knots. A wind speed of 10 to 15 knots is workable but tends to restrict commercial fishermen to operating closer to sheltered reefs and other fishing grounds protected from the weather. Once a strong wind warning is issued, commercial fishermen must not go to sea, as most vessels' insurance is null and void if they are operated in these circumstances.

Since March 2006 there have been 32 months of wind speed data recorded on Green Island in far-north Queensland. Of the 32 months recorded, 14 months have averaged wind speeds of 15 to 20 knots and nine months have averaged over 20 knots, attracting a strong wind warning. Only nine months since March 2006 have recorded average wind speeds of under 15 knots, where hardworking commercial fishermen have been able to get out in safe conditions without breaching their insurance in far-north Queensland waters to earn their income.

Coupled with this situation is the fact that, as reef line fishermen have been required to observe the three nine-day spawn closures imposed annually, the number of days available to commercial fishermen has been further reduced. The spawn closures this year have closed fishing grounds for one month over a three-month period during which the weather was more favourable. The above circumstances have combined to make for a grim outlook for small to medium sized commercial fishing operations, and even larger vessels have experienced difficulties retaining their skilled crew members.

I say to the state government and, in particular, to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries: commercial fishermen in far-north Queensland need some assistance to get them through these tough times. Land based primary industries experiencing ongoing adverse weather conditions can access exceptional circumstances payments. Commercial fishermen are the primary producers of the sea. Today I plead with the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries to consider how he can assist commercial fishermen, who desperately need help. We certainly need to keep people in jobs in the far-north Queensland commercial fishing industry and secure the supply of quality, domestically caught seafood for Queensland consumers.