



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 8 March 2011

**FISHERIES AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2010:
DISALLOWANCE OF STATUTORY INSTRUMENT**

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (8.48 pm): I rise tonight to oppose this disallowance motion and I do so because it is based on nothing more than irresponsible scaremongering and misleading statements from those opposite. When I entered this House, there were many things that I came in to achieve and one of them would have to be sustainability in all its forms. One of my favourite authors is Jared Diamond. He recently wrote a book called *Collapse*. It is one of the books that I recommend those opposite take a chance to read. In that book Jared Diamond writes about the Australian mining industry. He says that there is nothing wrong with fishing, that there is nothing wrong with exploiting renewable resources such as forests, fish and topsoil and that those resources can be exploited indefinitely provided that one removes them at a rate less than the rate at which they regenerate. However, if one exploits forests, fish or topsoil at rates exceeding their renewable rates, they will eventually be depleted to extinction.

Unfortunately, Australia, and indeed Queensland, has been and still is mining its renewable resources as if they were mined minerals—that is, they are being overexploited at rates faster than their renewable rates, with the result that they are declining. At present rates, Australia's forests and fisheries will disappear long before its coal and iron reserves, which is ironic in view of the fact that the former are renewable but the latter are not.

Australia, unfortunately, has a history of marine overfishing—mining one stock until it is depleted to uneconomically low levels, then discovering a new fishery and switching to it until it, too, collapses within a short time, just like a gold rush. For example, Australia's largest freshwater fish species is the Murray cod, which grows up to three feet long and is confined to the Murray-Darling river system. It is good eating, highly valued and formerly so abundant that it used to be caught and shipped to markets by the truckload. Now the Murray cod fishery has been closed because of the decline and collapse of the catch. Among the causes of that collapse is the overharvesting of a slow-growing fish species.

We talk about regulating businesses and there is a need to do that because the imperative for businesses, particularly those in the fishing market, commercial fishers, is to make money to the extent that government regulations, laws and public attitudes permit. And then, of course, we have recreational fishing. There is a conflict of interest in this. There is a particular form of this clash of interest that has become well known under the name 'tragedy of the commons'—not the tragedy of those opposite, but the 'tragedy of the commons'. Consumers are harvesting a communally owned resource such as fish, the attitude being, 'If I don't take it, someone else will.' The rational behaviour is then to harvest before the next consumer can, even though the eventual result may be the destruction of the commons and thus harm for all consumers.

So how do you prevent this tragedy of the commons from occurring? One obvious solution is for the government to enforce laws and bring in regulation for the common and long-term good. That is exactly what this government is doing. However, misleading statements from those opposite, such as the member

for Maroochydore, would have people think that we have banned fishing totally, not just one of 62 stocks. A person can go fishing; nothing is stopping them from doing so. However, for a period of six weeks they cannot take snapper because there is evidence that it is being overfished. To be honest with members, this time I am on the snapper's side. Let us give them a go. I do not believe in a free rein for a few years—go for it and let us see what happens. I am on the side of the snapper for six weeks and I make no bones about it.

But let us put some facts on the table and not the misleading statements. The government has no fixed position other than the need to ensure that snapper is fished sustainably. The regulatory impact study is a consultation document only. It outlines four variable options to achieve long-term sustainability and it welcomes further options to achieve that long-term sustainability. It is based on fish stock assessments conducted in 2006-07. There is no definitive science. The assessments can be done for 10 years and we will never get the definitive science. We have to act accordingly and responsibly, and that is what we are doing.

The stock assessments have been reviewed by independent experts on three occasions and all have agreed the methods used were appropriate and have broadly agreed with the conclusions. Like I said, we are not banning fishing. A person can go and catch any other fish, except one of 62 stocks. That is what this is all about. Those opposite are being misleading by saying that the whole industry is going to collapse when just one stock is being banned, not every other fish.

There is a six-week ban to take snapper. It has started and I support it. There is also a ban on the taking of those fish that go around with snapper. I believe that includes pearl perch, which is one of the favourite eating fish of the member for Gladstone. Pearl perch is probably there because of the regulations that have been in place over the years. Had they not been in place the member for Gladstone would not be enjoying pearl perch today. It is an interim closure. Let me state categorically once again that it does not stop people fishing, only from taking snapper. Any snapper caught incidentally needs to be returned to the water. Anything else the other side says is misleading and not correct. Whether the interim closures continue in the future will be decided as part of long-term arrangements. That is what sensible governments do. That is what governments that care for the environment do. That is what governments that wish to ensure sustainability do.

I share the concern of the member for Chatsworth about the introduction of fees. I think it is something that the minister is taking on board and I too add my support for that consideration. I categorically will not support this disallowance motion. I believe that it is a sensible step in the right direction and I support the minister in what he is trying to achieve.