




Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Thursday, 16 February 2012

GLADSTONE, FISHING INDUSTRY

 **Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (6.38 pm): I rise to make a plea on behalf of the fishermen, the crabbers and the retail businesses in the Gladstone region for their loss of income and for the loss of fishing grounds that has occurred with the problems in the harbour. For almost 12 months now a compensation committee has been operating to try to negotiate a compensation package for these fishermen and their families, and that includes the crabbers. Nothing definite has occurred. There have been meetings and it has been very frustrating. Some of the fishermen have lost their homes. They have had to sell them just to remain financially buoyant—not even buoyant but financially alive—and to service loans for boats and things like that.

Initially the quantum of compensation was deemed to be around \$15 million to \$20 million. That sounds like a lot, but when one thinks about the commercial future of these fishermen that fish the harbour—the prawners, the scallopers, the crabbers—it soon adds up when you are talking about loss of income well into the future because of the damage to the harbour. I understand the CEO of the local GOC, the Gladstone Ports Corporation, is trying to reduce that down to \$4 million. This is insulting to those people who have been so tragically affected. To my knowledge there has been no interim payments, no financial relief for anyone who has been financially and emotionally harmed by the harbour contamination. The fishermen are unhappy that there is a representative of the Gladstone Ports Corporation on that compensation committee. They understand that information has to be sought from the port authority in relation to the works that are going on, but they are offended and insulted that there is a representative on that committee from the organisation that is carrying out the works that the fishermen believe is contributing to the problems that they are facing.

The package of compensation needs to be finalised now. The government is going into caretaker mode. These people's lives do not have a caretaker mode. They cannot wait. Another month is going to make a difference between not only their financial stability but also their emotional and psychological stability and in many instances the relationships within their family. We all know that the families are affected when there are stresses. They have desperation and concern about financial ruin. In the month before the election I implore this government to get some financial assistance for these commercial fishermen—crabbers, prawners, scallopers and those who run fishing retail businesses in the town. They have suffered greatly. The case is clear and I ask this government to step in before the election and not make these people wait any longer in desperation.