




Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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FISHING INDUSTRY

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.25 pm): I take this opportunity to speak about a serious matter—and one that I have spoken about before—the Queensland fishing industry. In the first place, I am surprised by how many people no longer understand the role of a professional fisherman and the place that the fishing industry has in our economy and our society.

Queensland's marine resources belong to the entire community. The fishing industry provides the vast majority of our seafood-eating population with access to seafood. That does not mean that individuals cannot catch their own supplies of seafood, but it must be recognised that it is equally important for all of the population to have access to what is an important and valuable resource.

Currently, the Gillard Labor government has a proposal that further threatens the fishing industry—a proposal to increase the marine reserves from 27 to 60. This proposal cannot be about conserving our oceans, as we already lead the world in fishing management. We are being deceived. The federal Labor government is prepared to ruin the Queensland fishing industry and cut off a vital food resource so that it can appease certain green groups. Seafood has been found to provide a wide range of health benefits, including cardiovascular benefits, prevention and control of high blood pressure, protection against certain cancers and a reduction in depression. Experts have found that deficiencies of omega-3 fatty acids and iodine, both of which are sourced from seafood, can have serious implications for brain development and mental health. The old saying that seafood is brain food has been found to be true. The experts have called for a new focus to be placed on the restoration of traditional fish and seafood consumption.

Queensland fisheries are recognised as being among the healthiest and best managed in the world. Australia ranks fourth in the world on the UN Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries after Norway, the USA and Canada. Australia has the world's third largest fishing zone, but already imports about 75 per cent of its fish. We rank 61st in fisheries production. I would like to repeat that we have the third biggest fishing zone but we are the 61st largest producer of fish products. I need to stipulate that these low actual catch rates have nothing to do with critical stock levels. They indicate that we are underutilising our marine resources in Queensland because of the extent of management restrictions imposed upon the fishing industry. This has led to a massive rise in imports, most of which come from Thailand, which has a fishing area almost 20 times smaller than Australia's. The country with the biggest ocean catch by kilogram per square kilometre is Bangladesh, with 21,000 kilograms. After that comes China, Peru, Korea and Vietnam. Then there is the United States, which takes 372 kilograms per square kilometre. It would be no surprise to know that the country with the lowest catch is Australia, with 28 kilograms per square kilometre.

So why do we need 3.2 million square kilometres turned into no-go marine parks? The seafood processing industry and workers in my electorate would certainly like to know. The federal Labor government is not interested in encouraging the sustainable production of a proven renewable and vital resource. The proposal to lock up even more of our fishing grounds will actively destroy the industry.

Minister Burke's proposal is to turn 70 per cent of the east coast of Queensland into marine parks. That is approximately eight times the international benchmark of 10 per cent. The Coral Sea will become a

no-go zone. We would have more marine parks than anywhere else in the world. I am talking about an area about half the size of Queensland that cannot be used for sustainable fishing.

In Queensland, the majority of professional fish businesses are small, family based businesses. Those businesses are at risk. Approximately 6,000 professional fishermen, five million amateur fishermen and the charter boat industry will be affected. In the last decade, the Queensland professional fishing fleet has been drastically cut down, with some of the remaining licences having sunset clauses attached to them, which means that they cannot be passed on to another fisherman. More than one-third of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and in some areas as much as 70 per cent or more of the main fishing grounds, are now locked up indefinitely as green zones. Yellow zones are not accessible to the vast majority of professional fishermen, so these areas further restrict professional fishermen's access to fishing grounds.

Unnecessary restrictions only serve to make it more difficult to provide the public with their seafood. The ultimate hypocrisy is evident by the fact that commercial fishers have undergone excessive restrictions and closures in the past 12 years, supposedly in the name of sustainability, only to continue to be relentlessly attacked and criticised and subjected to never-ending further proposals and more restrictions from the federal Labor government.

Governments have an undeniable responsibility to ensure ongoing access to seafood for all Australians and Queenslanders, including those who do not wish to catch their own. No Australian should ever have to resort to buying imported seafood in a country like ours, which is surrounded by sea, simply because there is no available alternative produced by domestic commercial producers. I am proud to represent the fishermen of the Burnett and the commercial fishing industry and I hope that Senator Burke can revise this proposal.