



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2015

## **FISHERIES AND ANOTHER REGULATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1)**

### **Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.48 pm): I rise to speak in support of this disallowance motion regarding the Fisheries and Another Regulation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2015. To say that this issue has divided Queensland would be an understatement. In my Burdekin electorate, I have received more calls and visits from constituents on this topic since I was elected than on all other issues combined. It has divided my community and set at war the recreational and commercial fishers who reside there.

The statistics say it all: 600,000 recreational fishers and 2,000 commercial fishers with 1,437 commercial fishing licences in Queensland. With 293 kilometres of coastline, the Burdekin electorate is home to some of the most productive fishing grounds and marine zones in Queensland. What we witnessed in the lead-up to the election on 31 January was a knee-jerk reaction from the government to appease the recreational fishing industry by proposing three net-free zones at Trinity Bay, St Helens Beach and at Yeppoon/Keppel Bay and the Fitzroy River. Importantly, and I refer to the committee report, the department was not involved in the development of the policy and could not advise the committee who the policy was distributed to or when it was distributed.

The Queensland Seafood Industry Association was also critical of how the fishing policy, which provides for the establishment of net-free zones, was developed. Importantly, the department did not commence work on the boundaries of these net-free areas until after the election. I note in the report that DAF staff undertook targeted consultation in the areas of Cairns, Mackay and the Rockhampton regions. I say: what about the Burdekin? What about Bowen and the Whitsundays? I have two of the largest barramundi breeding areas in Queensland in the Burdekin and Haughton Rivers, areas where hundreds of tonnes—that is right, hundreds of tonnes—of barramundi are caught annually. Where was the consultation with the people who fish in these areas? Even the committee noted that the department did not consult with stakeholders specifically on the regulation or provide a draft regulation to comment on and only consulted on the intent of the regulation.

The commercial fishing industry is a vibrant and integral part of the Queensland economy and we need to ensure that the needs and sustainability of this industry are considered as part of this process. I am not against net-free areas, per se, what I am against is a flawed process that does not take into account the diversity of the Queensland coastline and fishing habitats. Is it any wonder I question the methodology involved in proposing the three net-free zones? I have our recreational fishers calling for net-free zones in these areas because they feel they are being discriminated against and our commercial operators claiming their fishing grounds are under threat by other commercial fishers being displaced from the areas subject to the net-free zones.

Importantly, I question the science behind this proposal, the level of consultation, the detail surrounding the settlement scheme and the lack of evidence around the benefits of establishing these

net-free areas. If you are to believe the government, one of the primary reasons for establishing these net-free zones was to boost tourism and yet we have the ludicrous situation where we have no net-free zones in one of the busiest and largest tourism areas in the state in the Bowen-Whitsunday area. I note the department further advised that current statewide assessments of Queensland inshore fish stocks show that most are harvested at a level where there are no significant concerns about sustainability. Importantly, there is no baseline data on inshore species, the marine environment and recreational fishing which highlights the difficulty in measuring the success or otherwise of this proposal.

I also note that, without a buyback of licences, fishing catch and effort would be displaced into other areas or into other fisheries which is of serious concern in the Burdekin electorate. I note that for the commercial fishing sector the reduction in licences as a result of the voluntary buyback scheme will likely result in a corresponding loss of jobs in the sector. The proposed voluntary settlement scheme, which is designed to give fishers a payment depending on their level of fishing effort within the zones, is fraught with danger. I have anecdotal evidence that a commercial fisher in my area was completing logbooks for his fishing vessel whilst holidaying overseas. This highlights the potential pitfalls of this scheme and the mockery that this regulation has become.

This regulation was ill-conceived, rushed and clearly was designed in the dying days of the election campaign to garner votes. There was a distinct lack of consultation and the science behind the establishment of these three zones is clearly flawed and lacking transparency. We need to find the right balance and for that reason this legislation should go back to the drawing board and be framed in such a way that the proposal to establish net-free zones in Queensland is done in a professional, thorough and transparent manner with input from all sectors of the community. As part of that consultation we should be considering options such as re-investing boat registration fees into the development of boat ramps and the establishment of artificial reefs, which helps to develop our fishing and tourism industry.

Queenslanders love their fishing and we need to get this right. We cannot afford a war between the recreational and commercial fishing industry, which is what this legislation is causing. There are no winners with the legislation before the House. If we are to implement net-free zones along the Queensland coastline then let us do so in a manner that takes into account scientific evidence and data that involves extensive consultation with all sectors of the community and has at its heart the protection and sustainability of our valuable fish stocks and adequate compensation for our commercial fishers.