



Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2015

FISHERIES AND ANOTHER REGULATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1)

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (7.40 pm): I move—

That the Fisheries and Another Regulation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2015, subordinate legislation No. 125 of 2015, tabled in the House on 15 September 2015, be disallowed.

Straight up, I want to set the record straight. We are not opposed to exclusion zones as long as it is by these principles, and it would be good if the Minister for Fisheries listened intently to this point. They should be based on science. They should be based on consultation. They should be based on agreement and, where agreement is reached, compensation. It was imperative that the LNP opposition move this disallowance motion to put the pause button on this rushed, ill-conceived, ill thought out process. Without this debate tonight, there was no opportunity for anyone opposed to this regulation to have their say. This is proven by the general outline of the amendment which says that no prior consultation with commercial fishers has been conducted as there will be no changes to obligations. I am looking forward to hearing the minister justify his lack of consultation.

This disallowance motion is not opposing net-free areas in general. I have committed to working with both recreational and commercial fishermen and do not believe that the positions of each group are mutually exclusive. I understand the importance of the recreational fishing sector for tourism and local economic growth, and I firmly believe there is a place for both in this debate. However, I stand tonight in this chamber to acknowledge those recreational fishermen and those commercial fishermen whose livelihoods are under threat in this House today. I stand here on behalf of those fishing families whose jobs and livelihoods will be ripped away by the Labor government through the introduction of this regulation. I stand here on behalf of the small businesses who will also be directly impacted such as the cold stores, the ice-makers, the transporters, the wholesalers, the retail seafood shops and the restaurants.

I ask: why is Labor so anti small business? Why is Labor so anti primary production? Why do they always set out to make a nightmare of the lives of hardworking, everyday Queenslanders? They are treating our commercial fishermen like they are criminals, like they need to be gotten rid of. This policy was introduced by stealth just three days before the election. Labor claimed it was well known. We know that is not the truth. What we do know is that just before the January 2015 election an email was distributed heralding a big announcement that was signed off by backroom party powerbrokers. Labor then released three days later their sustainable fishing policy listing their zones. Little did our commercial fishermen—over 53 hardworking commercial fishermen—realise when they woke up that by the end of this year their small businesses would be gone and their lives would be torn apart, and again with no consultation.

The LNP has been following this process ever since with complete disbelief. Labor have barrelled through, disregarding the much anticipated and the much regarded MRAG fisheries review, claiming

they have a mandate. What of the MRAG? Had the LNP remained in government, this MRAG review would have guided our response. The angst, frustration, negativity and nastiness created by this Labor government simply would not have existed. MRAG was the first comprehensive, independent review of fisheries management in Queensland. It overhauled 20 years of existing legislation. There were 17 public meetings attended by more than 500 people. There were 279 written submissions. There were people from both sides of the argument. Our former government's ultimate aim was to have a world-class fisheries management system for the benefit of all Queenslanders, but the minister just sat on this report for months. Where is it now? It is sitting on his desk rotting away while he randomly slots in a few bandaids down the coast of Queensland pretending he knows how to fix our fisheries.

That brings me to the lack of consultation during this process. On 16 July I asked the minister a question on notice about how many fishermen he had consulted with in relation to this. He provided a vague list which did not specify any commercial fishermen or anyone from the industry, and there were surprisingly no minutes of any meetings. Labor has completely and categorically failed to consult with the commercial fishing sector, and it has failed to consult with its communities. In response, the QSIA launched a petition that was signed by some 26,000 people. You might think that this number of people might start the minister or this government thinking, 'Maybe we should listen to the people of Queensland,' but, no, the response was again distant and arrogant. Nothing will stop Labor from getting rid of these primary producers.

The minister says that it is all about tourism. He says that these primary producers—our fishermen—should just get a charter boat. I am not sure where they are going to get the money from. He said on radio that this policy is to give tourism in Central Queensland a real shot in the arm. The department says that it is about the relocation of fisheries resources from commercial fishermen to recreational fishermen. For the chair of the Agriculture and Environment Committee, the member for Ipswich, it is about the issue of sustainability, which is one of the reasons the government came to that decision.

There has been no listening to the science. There has been no consultation. Because of this lack of consultation by the government, I have made it my priority to visit, meet and talk with as many of the affected people as possible. I would briefly like to give some of those people a voice. Russell and Rhonda Marriage of North Mackay, a commercial fishing family for over 34 years, have said—

This industry belongs to each and every Queenslander. The sole reason this industry exists is to supply fresh local seafood harvested from our waters to our people.

Ben Gilliland from the Sunshine Coast, in an email to the department, states—

I think you guys need a reality check into the angst, anxiety and I am seriously mentioning mental illness, the Government and DAFF are causing to professional fishers. No information, no plan. We are all out here, sitting on the edge.

Margaret and Graham Stevenson state—

If this plan goes ahead, we will be the displaced, the dispossessed, and discriminated against, all for a party policy claimed to be an election promise that the majority of the population went to the polls knowing nothing about, and which is hypocritical, unfair, unjust, indefensible, unjustified and un-Australian with speculative promised outcomes.

Vicki Bush from Glenmore Seafoods in North Rockhampton, which I am sure is in the minister's own seat, said—

This net free zone closure will effectively mean that we have worked our butts off for 3 years for nothing. Overall 36.6% of our sales through the shop today was from Estuary fish. How can I service the loans for my business if this amount of income is taken away from me?

Then we have the Trinity Bay fishermen. Bruce Batch, a long-time commercial fisherman—

Mr Costigan: Second generation.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Yes, second generation. This story is quite unbelievable. Mr Batch made an agreement with the Labor government in the year 2000. This deed guaranteed him a lifetime right to fish in Trinity Bay until he retires from the industry or until he passes away. Mr Batch and five other fishermen have their names written in the current Fisheries Regulation 2008. This arrangement was facilitated in good faith by the then minister for primary industries, Henry Palaszczuk, and the former member for Mulgrave, Mr Warren Pitt. Those two gentlemen did this deed in good faith with those fishermen. They put it in legislation. I wonder what Mr Palaszczuk and Mr Pitt are thinking right now. Mr Batch has now been advised by this minister and the Premier that this deed means nothing.

I wrote to the minister on behalf of Mr Batch to clarify the legal basis for the termination of these deeds. This was the answer from this government which claims to consult and to listen to people. This was the answer—

... the Government has amended the provisions of the regulations to remove the provisions that allowed a ... number of fishers to use commercial nets in the area.

Full stop. His livelihood was ripped away from him with no consultation. He relied on the good faith of Mr Palaszczuk Snr and Mr Pitt Snr. To get rid of the commercial fishermen, Labor has torn up these lifetime deeds. It goes to show what little regard this Labor government has for guarantees, promises and commitments.

I now turn to the compensation. For our Trinity Bay commercial fishermen, it is \$1,000 per day averaged over the number of days in the zone for three years. Mr Batch shared with me the goodwill payment he will be receiving. It is \$36,000, equating to just one-third of his worst fishing year in the zone. This compensation is an embarrassment and it is extremely disrespectful. The goodwill payment is only \$500 a day for the fishermen in the other two zones. Previously, compensation was based on the value of the catch. This is the first time it has ever been averaged by day. It simply does not work.

Then there is the mysterious voluntary buyback of the fishing licences in the zones. This just does not make sense to anyone. I would like to point out that this seems fairly compulsory to the commercial fishermen who are being told to leave. Commercial fisherman Dave Swindells, who is again from Rockhampton, said this during the committee's public hearing—

For me to do that netting, I still had to purchase a boat—an outboard—and thousands and thousands of dollars worth of nets ... how am I going to be compensated for all of my equipment?

The issue for many fishermen is that their time in these zones may only be a quarter or a third of their business's income. If I took away a quarter or a third of any small business's income, they become unviable, and there is no financial support being offered to any other affected businesses.

I could also touch on the sound, scientific evidence to support Labor's net-free zone policy but there is none. Indeed the data from the government's own fisheries experts shows that all key target species are being sustainably fished. To justify this move, the minister appears to be blatantly ignoring scientific advice from his own department.

What about the issue of displacement? The department has acknowledged that the exclusion of commercial fishermen from the zones means they will have to fish in other areas. It is like saying to a farmer, 'You can't grow your crops here anymore, but just go over next door to your neighbour's place. Plant them in his paddock.' This regulation is not just affecting fishermen working in the zones; it is affecting people in adjoining areas, as we will now see pressure from an increase of activity.

There was one further bombshell which arose during the committee's public hearing. There has been much talk about the availability of fresh local seafood in our fish shops, but the department said—

Due to the nature of the seafood marketplace, these businesses will be able to adapt should they wish by sourcing product from other regions—

fair call—

sourcing product from other fisheries or by developing new customers, potentially recreational fishers.

So the department is supporting the black market. It is illegal for a recreational fisherman to supply his or her fish to a fish shop.

This regulation needs more thought. We need to look at the process. We need to look at the science. When everyone in this House votes this evening, I ask that you think about those commercial fishing families whose livelihoods have been taken away by the stroke of your minister's pen. I ask for your support of this disallowance motion. Let us put some balance back in this process.