



Speech By  
**Julieanne Gilbert**


**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2015

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

**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (8.14 pm): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion. Fishing is close to the hearts of every Queenslanders. We enjoy Queensland's fish and seafood throughout the year. Recreational fishers love wetting a line and bringing home a catch to their family. As elected representatives it is our duty to hear those views and to make a judgement whether or not the management of our fishery resources should occur. Our primary concern is to ensure that fish stocks remain healthy and that we do not put them at risk from commercial activity; however, we must also ensure that everyone has fair access to the commodity and that community expectations are met.

Net-free zones were a key commitment of the government's sustainable fishing policy which we took to the 2015 election. The key action was to introduce three net-free zones in north and Central Queensland. The boundaries have now been established for these zones near Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton to commence on 1 November this year. There is no doubt that the implementation of these zones will shift access rights away from commercial net fishing. It recognises the higher environmental, economic and social values these resources can provide to the community when used for recreational fishing and fishing based tourism.

The Palaszczuk government has not said that commercial net fishing will be banned in Queensland, but we need to have areas set aside to allow these activities to prosper and grow. We all know that pressure has been building on commercial netters over a number of years. The community has demanded that they develop new techniques and refine their gear to reduce impacts on the ecosystems in which they operate and on other marine users. Until now many fishers have resisted management reform. Very few have actively participated in identifying solutions to manage the indiscriminate nature of gillnet fishing and the risks they pose to non-target species. The reality is that the community simply does not support them.

The message that the government received during a call for submissions on net-free zone boundaries was clear. Approximately 6,300 submissions were received during two months of public consultation, and 90 per cent of these were in favour of their introduction. With the member for Mirani, we met with professional fishers and members of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association during the consultation period. I also met with the small group of recreational anglers.

The issue is a very emotive one in my electorate and the divide between the two opposing groups is huge. At no point did there ever seem to be middle ground or a compromise that could be reached by either group. I was disheartened by the behaviour of some of the members from both the recreational fishing groups and the professional fishing groups, who personally attacked each other's character on social media.

Recent independent assessments of the inshore net fishery have been particularly unfavourable, with both the Commonwealth government and Coles supermarket identifying the inshore gillnet fishery

as having unacceptable impacts on important conservation species such as dugong, turtles and sharks. Coles recently announced that it would no longer continue to sell some Queensland fish taken using gillnets because it contravenes its commitment to sell sustainably resourced seafood. While in opposition Labor decided that we would take the policy—to remove the nets from the water in these three zones and to give other resource users a go—to the people of Queensland.

The facts are that the policy is based on sound reasoning and demonstrated effectiveness based on studies of similar zones in other areas. As an example, the benefits of the net-free fishing zones can be seen in the Northern Territory. There, the charter fishing sector's total economic contribution was most recently estimated to be over \$26 million per annum, with approximately 80 per cent of that expenditure attributed to interstate and overseas tourists.

This government understands the objections that industry organisations such as the Queensland Seafood Industry Association have raised on behalf of the commercial fishing sector. However, the government must balance the objectives of all sectors along with the need for sustainable fisheries management.

The facts are that commercial seafood production by nets from within the zones accounts for just 0.1 per cent of Australia's total seafood production from wild harvest and aquaculture. Access to Australian seafood is not at risk from this policy. Seafood wholesalers and retailers who currently purchase Australian seafood from commercial operators will continue to be able to do so through existing markets.

It must be remembered that these zones will only exclude commercial gillnetting. Commercial crabbing, trawling and line fishing will continue to be able to operate in areas within the zones and provide fresh Australian fish and seafood to markets. Over time these fisheries have supported and implemented changes to reduce their ecological footprint, and this effort has been recognised by the government by allowing these activities to continue within the current net-free zones. Net fishers will not be excluded from all of Queensland. Commercial net fishers who want to stay in the industry will be able to do so but must operate in other areas. The need to address the impacts of their fishing will continue, and there must be a willingness to demonstrate the responsible use of the resource in order for access to be maintained. I do not support the disallowance motion.