




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2015

FISHERIES AND ANOTHER REGULATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1)

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.08 pm): The regulation that introduces sections 37, 42 and 223 of the Fisheries Act 1994 and sections 10, 11 and 44 of the Rural and Regional Adjustment Act further adds to systems that have evolved over time to manage and share access to Queensland fish resources, adding more complexity and does not support the best use or stewardship of our fisheries. The industry needs long-term investment and policy leadership, not rushed, short-term options.

At the outset I must reiterate to all that we are not opposed to net-free zones and never have been. History reflects that the National Party in Queensland started this process of fishing reforms many years ago. I speak to support this disallowance motion for very clear reasons. We have an opportunity in this state to finally get this issue sorted, because this regulation does not address the real and tangible issues that confront us. We will be back here year after year still debating the issues because we will not stop and reflect on the vast amount of material available to us to make informed, sensible decisions. This regulation has not introduced management or structural changes facing Queensland fisheries and only raises more concerns and ignites local issues of concern to many fishers

Queensland commercial fishers comprise mostly family-run businesses. They have invested in licences, both net and boat, and they pay annual fees to access state fish stocks. They need a secure, stable operating environment that provides certainty for investment in plant and equipment, and staff training. They need the same certainty that all businesses expect and deserve.

Recreational fishers need further recognition of the potential and contribution that is possible if allocation of an explicit share of key target species is to be made available, and we all acknowledge the important role that they have to play. Under the state government's rushed program this has not happened, and importantly it also appears that consultation with traditional owners and issues of cultural importance have been ignored in the rushed process.

The committee heard many references to the \$10 million fund to compensate or buy out commercial fishers to support an ideological notion to grow the economic benefits from recreational and charter fishing and tourism. Any data to support this notion was anecdotal at best and totally ignores the role commercial fishing plays in supplying fresh local seafood for tourists and those who do not fish for whatever reason. The committee heard from commercial fishers of the big potential loss of wild caught barra, which is eight per cent in the Fitzroy delta alone. I remind Madam Chair of her comments about the quantity of the catch.

We on this side of the House still support a voluntary buyback process which all think was the best way forward. We must ensure that all in this state have the right to a dignified exit from their industry if governments are going to interfere with their property rights. A review of fundamental legislative principles clearly identified problems. The committee heard that the process for fishers to access

compensation was complicated and accelerated. In fact, there is less time available for fishers to review and make a decision to access compensation than there was on the consultation in the first place.

The somewhat complicated license buyback scheme is to be administered by QRAA. The buyback scheme target is to buy back the 46 licenses referred to to ensure that the commercial fishing effort does not move into other areas or into other fisheries. This is a desire with no science or logic, and we have clearly seen slow participation in buyback schemes under successive governments. The committee heard many times about the issue of displacement pressures on adjacent fisheries. This issue again appears unresolved or even not thought through. I suspect it is the result of rushed regulation, and no consultation with the commercial sector will see us back here next year debating another net closure area.

A settlement scheme to be administered by QRAA was less than desirable, and we have heard tonight that people will not be fairly compensated. What was disappointing was the reference to the consultation. As we heard from the chair of the committee, there were approximately 6,000 responses to an internet survey using a survey tool, but they forget that there were 26,000 signatures tabled in this place supporting the sustainable harvest of fresh Queensland seafood. We cannot be selective with our data and we cannot ignore the people of Queensland who are asking for action from their government.

The most disturbing issue was the consultation—or lack thereof—and the apparent rushing through of the regulation. Questions were raised with the committee by affected fishermen and small businesses. With regard to the government's sustainable fishing policy, why would you destroy a business that is profitable and sustainable for an aspirational goal that may or may not eventuate? Statistics were widely utilised in discussions as justification for a particular stance on both sides and they were subjective, excluded key items and were cherry-picked, as we heard tonight from those opposite.

Issues such as the black market were raised, and that has to be of concern to the members of this parliament when we make this decision later tonight. All stakeholders that presented to the committee acknowledged that more work needs to be done, and the MRAG report was rightly raised many times by many people during the process. Of course we want to see that report off the minister's desk and not collecting dust as it is now. The committee also received evidence from the department about the sustainable quantities of fish that are available in Queensland. Why are we asking questions about a rushed regulation and refusing to discuss it with our friends in the commercial sector and those in the recreational sector?

We heard from interest groups with a particular interest in the Great Barrier Reef, and the department's response acknowledged the tremendous advancement in fishing practices. Nets are now more selective and do not do as much damage as was reported to the committee by self-interest groups. There is some evidence that protected species such as turtles, dolphins and dugong are an incidental capture as well as protected fish such as certain species of shark. We can manage this and we need to, but we are saying this is a rushed, damaged process and we do need to look at activities like boat strikes, barra trauma, bag limits and the black market activity that can occur with recreational fishing. Environmental impacts were spoken about by the WWWF, and of course we do need to make sure that we deal with this issue.

With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The committee heard many times about the introduction and proposed increase in aqua culture as a solution to supply and business, but there was no acknowledgment of the impacts of intensive farming of seafood on the coast adjacent to the reef. This is in contrast to the GBRMPA identifying aquaculture as an activity that requires approval under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Protection Act (EPBC Act) and that such approvals are precautionary in principle, given the possible impacts of aqua culture on the reef as identified by GMRMPA and summarized by the draft Queensland Competition Authority report.

Of major concern to the committee was the briefing from the state Government's own Fisheries Department experts, including the Fisheries Manager, which included commercial logbook records (between 2012 and 2014) showing that the commercial catch in the three proposed accounts for 8 per cent of the Queensland east coast net fishery catch by weight, which is significant and also the fact supplied by Qld Fisheries that three zones account for 13 per cent of the total Barramundi catch by weight. The state Government appears to be ignoring this significant loss and has no plans as to how our local commercial seafood industry will be able to redress this potential shortfall.

During the committee process we heard many stakeholders discuss the exceedingly complex and inadequate policies and legislation that have evolved over time in the management of Queensland fisheries. The regulation and potential further proposed changes without a clear direction will continue the passionate debates over resource allocation, but more seriously as the conflict between sectors continues we will see a reduced confidence in Queensland fisheries management.

The committee heard from stakeholders reflecting insecurity about their rights. The lack of clear arrangements in the regulation for resource sharing means we will see conflict over shared fisheries with no process for resolution. As there is no formal structure to allow stakeholders to have their say on the future of our fisheries, we now in Queensland have stakeholders disconnected and disenfranchised from this Government and the Department, operating in a policy vacuum.

Unlike other States, rec fishers in Queensland do not pay a general licence. There appears to be acceptance among rec fishers for a fishing licence. It seems reasonable that we have a discussion regarding the monies from the rec licence being used to compensate displaced commercial fishers in any 'net-free' or 'rec-only' areas.

In considering and supporting the disallowance motion I recommend the Government commit to a more detailed examination of the Queensland east coast fishery with a view to a sustainable policy framework. We need a regular performance review to ensure management arrangements are meeting expectations of Government and stakeholders. What is needed is good fisheries management not the current lazy practice of set and forget. The main observation with this regulation is the clear perception amongst Queenslanders that the current government is unable to articulate a clear decision making process. In the absence of clear strategic policy framework we now have the politicisation of decisions. We cannot have strategic decisions, strategic direction and technical recommendations being made by a Minister in a policy vacuum without utilising and communicating with experts in the field.

We have an opportunity to sort this issue out, and I ask members to support the disallowance motion, because this regulation is not the answer, it is not in the best interests of all Queenslanders, and we can and should develop better policy.

In conclusion, I do support the disallowance motion and recommend the government commit to a more detailed examination of the Queensland east coast fishery. We do need a sustainable policy framework going forward. We do need regular monitoring, and we do need to get the stakeholders in Queensland fisheries not to keep putting in these crazy, lazy policies of set and forget that affect us all. We have an opportunity to sort this out, and I ask the members to support the disallowance motion because this regulation is not the answer. It is not in the best interests of Queenslanders and we should—and we can—do a lot better.