




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 12 February 2019

FISHERIES (VESSEL TRACKING) AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (5.41 pm): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion. Already tonight we have heard some hyperbole about intellectual property. I start by saying most forcefully that what we are talking about is the resources of the people of Queensland, that is, resources that we all own. We have a responsibility to our future generations and, indeed, to people throughout the world to protect those resources. The use of modern technologies such as vessel tracking will ensure the sustainability of Queensland's fisheries and this regulation supports the rollout of vessel tracking. Vessel tracking will lead to more informative and responsive management and it will benefit the marine resources upon which many operators and regional communities depend. That is why vessel tracking is a key element of the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027, which will pave the way for a world-class, first-class fisheries management system.

Already tonight we have heard about public consultation and we will hear more about public consultation. I note that this process started in 2014 under the previous LNP government. It has been going on for many years. We will also hear a list of calamities that may happen to VMS units operating on boats at sea. I point out that the trawler industry has used those units for 15 years. The system has been in use in Queensland for 15 years. It is easy to point out potential calamities that may happen to those units, but we should look at what has actually happened on the trawlers over many years.

Our government has invested over \$20 million in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy, which includes provision for the recruitment of 20 additional Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers and the reopening of their Gladstone base. I know that my friend the member for Gladstone is very appreciative of that. They do great work in our regional communities.

Mr Butcher: After Newman sacked them all.

Mr WHITING: That is exactly right: they have been returned after being dismissed by the previous LNP government. Compliance officers need tools to protect our resources and vessel tracking or VMS is one of the most important of those tools. I point out that this is not about officers lazily sitting in front of computer screens; those officers will be out as much and potentially even more than they ever were, using information from the VMS system to ensure that we have sustainable fisheries. One of the benefits of the VMS units is that compliance officers can know in real time where individual fishers are and they can target their compliance activities in a much more precise way. Instead of spending days wandering all over the ocean looking for vessels, they can go straight to where the fishing is actually happening.

In submissions to the committee we have heard that Queensland trawlers have used VMS units for 15 years. The sector has long experience in working with VMS units. Certainly I rebut the charge that we have been treating those people like criminals for 15 years. Some operators may say that on their particular boats the conditions can be too tough for the units, but we know of great experiences with the VMS units. During the committee hearings we also heard that charter boats have a similar tracking system. Mr Bladin, a witness in Cairns, said that they use an AIS system on their dories. The

member for Mount Ommaney has recalled that. In our hearings we heard that worldwide the industry has used VMS units for many years. In Cairns, Mr Bobbermen said that globally the use of VMS units is an accepted practice. He said that all around the world large-scale fisheries have VMS systems attached. We need to catch up with what everyone else is doing.

Tonight we will hear concerns about the security of information and how fisheries officers may try to use or sell information or that other fishers may get a hold off it. Once again, let us hear about what is happening on the ground. In Cairns, Mr Bladin said that everyone guards their spots but everyone knows where everyone else's spot is located and it is only an issue if it goes outside the industry. As he said, it is a matter of cooperation within the industry. The executive director of Fisheries Queensland said that very few people would have access to that data and PricewaterhouseCoopers is reviewing the safeguards. The data is aggregated and plotted on 30-nautical-mile grids, so no individual is identified.

We will hear concerns about the costs and we have already heard a bit about that. I point out that a \$3 million rebate scheme has already opened and it will be open for two years. Fishers can apply for a rebate for unit costs and installation costs and they can get up to seven units. We have heard concerns about what happens if a unit breaks down in a variety of potential situations. We have also heard that there are many different ways to deal with those situations: they can carry a spare; if the unit breaks down, they can call in every four hours or use a commercial fishing app that has been developed; failing that, they can come back within five days; and failing that, they can report back. There are a variety of ways that unit failure can be dealt with. It was made very clear that all of those contingencies have been well thought through. However, we must bear in mind that this is a new system and there will be some hiccoughs. I congratulate the department for the work that it has done to build in those contingencies.

The benefits of the VMS system include the real-time monitoring of commercial fishing, which assists compliance officers to target fishers who are not following the rules, which may mean fishing in closed areas or during closed seasons, using excessive gear, operating in a fishery not permitted under their licence or avoiding reporting. That information is already proving invaluable to our compliance officers in targeting people who are not following the rules. That specific targeting is one of the benefits of the VMS system.

We need to also bear in mind that the information around which concerns have been raised is already recorded in logbooks. It is already passed on to fisheries officers. That system already exists with logbooks. Vessel tracking will help validate logbook information as well.

The information gathered by VMS is going to be used to protect our national maritime treasures. That is what Queenslanders expect our authorities to do. The Great Barrier Reef will benefit from better regulation and better enforcement. There are very high standards for operating in World Heritage areas like the Great Barrier Reef. Vessel tracking helps fishers and the department measure and demonstrate those sustainable practices.

I urge all members to consider the future of the reef and our fishing industry. Vessel tracking is an important part of maintaining that sustainable future. Everyone knows that we need to protect our fisheries. VMS is one of the best tools to do that. It is a technical solution that can help us better regulate and help our industry demonstrate that it can operate sustainably and in line with best practice standards. I emphasise again that this is what Queenslanders expect and support and that is why I do not support this disallowance motion.