




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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### **FISHERIES (SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES STRATEGY) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (6.40 pm): I rise to support the Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill that is before the House. Our fisheries are a public resource for all Queenslanders. That resource belongs to us all. The member for Gympie talked about intellectual property. Once again I stress that you have no intellectual property if there is no resource available to be used. On the issue of intellectual property, during a committee hearing at Cairns a witness said that within the industry people know where each other's marks and fishing spots are and it is policed by the industry. He said that there is only an issue if outsiders get that information. When we talk about intellectual property, it is very much shared intellectual property. However, we have been focusing on the resource that every Queenslander shares.

The member for Gympie also said that we are driven by an ideological agenda and green tape, which shows how narrow is the focus of those on the other side. Only one party seeks to get a real balance between commercial and recreational fishing, charter fishing and first nations fishers. It is really important that we remember that we are balancing all of those needs to provide a sustainable resource for countless generations to come. We know that all around the world fisheries are under incredible pressure. If we do not take firm and strong action, our fisheries will come under even more intense pressure.

As I have said, our fisheries are a resource for all Queenslanders, now and into the future. Fishing provides jobs. It is a popular pastime. It is an important cultural touchstone for many communities. This bill is an important part of keeping our Queensland fisheries public and viable into the future. I heard the member for Gympie say that we are not looking after workers. Only one side of this parliament is committed to keeping our fisheries going for generations to come. We will ensure that we have an industry for countless generations of Queenslanders into the future. We want to create a sustainable legacy for our children and our grandchildren so that they too can enjoy the benefits of our fisheries.

For that reason, our government announced the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy, which is a strong project of reforms that will take Queensland from lagging behind to leading other jurisdictions. As the minister has said, our government has provided over \$20 million in funding for new initiatives, including 20 new Boating and Fisheries officers, improved marine and scientific monitoring and rebates for vehicle tracking units. It is time for action in fisheries. We know that successive Queensland governments have recognised the need to reform Queensland's fisheries management system. In fact, we have heard that this process started in 2014, under the previous LNP government. At that time it was recognised that Queensland's fisheries management framework is outdated and cumbersome. It is incapable of appropriately responding to sustainability issues. As it stands, Queensland's decision-making processes are slow and unclear. Our ability to respond to issues such as black marketing lags behind other Australian jurisdictions. The amendments in this bill will modernise fisheries management in Queensland. The bill will give effect to the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027, which was developed by the government after many years of extensive consultation.

The State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee heard from a wide range of stakeholders interested in the health and future of Queensland fisheries. We spoke with numerous industry and conservation groups, as well as recreational fishers from all over Queensland. The committee travelled to Cairns and held hearings along Moreton Bay. I acknowledge the help of the member for Nudgee, who chaired the Cairns hearing during my absence. I acknowledge all members of the committee for their participation in the inquiry, as well as the witnesses, people in the department, our secretariat staff and everyone who made submissions. I think our report provides a balanced and fair overview of both the fisheries bill and the progress of reforms in Queensland fisheries.

Queensland's seafood is an important commodity. As we know, it is sourced from public waters. Our fish stocks need to be kept sustainable to maintain environmental balances, while providing employment opportunities and delicious seafood for local and overseas markets. Therefore, it is critical that the government has the appropriate tools and powers to stop illegal operators and deter wrongdoers. A key objective of the bill will provide stronger compliance powers and penalties for serious offences, such as seafood black marketing.

During the consultation this year, we found that more than 90 per cent of respondents supported the adoption of stronger compliance powers and penalties to fight serious fishing offences. At our hearings, everyone had the same opinion: come down harder on black market fishers. The minister has spoken about being in charge of an operation in which a boat was crushed. However, it was not only crushed; if you look on social media, you will see that it was shredded. It was a fibreglass boat, but it is now crumbs. That is a great signal to show that in Queensland there is probably a no more detested person than a seafood black marketeer, because they steal from all of us and they steal from our future generations.

The bill provides fisheries inspectors with the powers they need to effectively investigate offences such as black marketing. Individuals convicted of trafficking in priority fish species could face a maximum penalty of up to 3,000 penalty units or three years imprisonment. It is clear that Queenslanders want action taken to stop the black marketing of seafood, which undermines legitimate fishing businesses. This bill delivers on that.

Under this legislation, fisheries inspectors will have greater powers to inspect commercial premises, but it is important to note that these changes do not provide fisheries inspectors with powers beyond those granted to other inspectors under Queensland legislation. This bill makes no changes to laws that allow access to tents, campsites or places used for residential purposes without a warrant. It allows inspectors to take action on the water or in fish shops to get the evidence they need, on the spot, which is where they say they need improved powers. The opposition says that they want compliance officers to get a warrant and give five days notice. Should the inspectors say, 'Please, Mr Black Market Fisher, can we come back in five days to see if you have illegal fish on your premises?' Will the suspect say, 'Sure, come on back!?' In the inquiry, we clearly heard that that is not sufficient in this modern day and age.

I will not talk any more on the bill, but shall leave it to my fellow committee members to speak about how useful a tool the VMS is. I commend the bill to the House.