




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 28 February 2019

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

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) (5.16 pm), in reply: I thank those members who contributed to the debate on this bill. I table the government response to the committee's report which addresses the five recommendations made in relation to the Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill.

*Tabled paper:* State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee: Report No. 17, 56th Parliament—Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill 2018, government response [290](#).

I am pleased that for the majority of the amendments outlined in the bill members rose to support change. Without these changes we cannot set the framework to balance the needs of all sectors, value the important contribution from our commercial fishers and effectively combat illegal fishing in Queensland.

The changes to the Fisheries Act are long overdue and will modernise our approach to fisheries management and bring it up to a standard we can all be proud of as Queenslanders. These changes will leave a long-lasting legacy for our children and our grandchildren so that we can enjoy fishing and Queensland seafood well into the future.

Queensland is lagging behind other jurisdictions in this regard. These provisions bring Queensland into line with other states which have stronger compliance powers and penalties and have already moved to more responsive decision-making through harvest strategies. These are not just changes that we need. They are changes and policies that Queenslanders rightly expect be put in place and have overwhelming supported over a number of years and through extensive consultation.

I want to acknowledge again the work of the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee and the chair, the member for Bancroft, for their examination and report on the bill. Fisheries is a complex policy area. I commend the committee for taking the time and effort to travel across the state and accept late submissions. I thank those right across the length and breadth of Queensland who made submissions.

In the course of my time and travel as Minister for Fisheries I have seen and discussed many of these issues with people firsthand. I have spoken to shark control program operators and contractors from around the state at their conference and on the water around the Gold Coast during the early hours of the morning.

I have spoken to commercial fishers on their vessels and on land from Parliament House to Hervey Bay and Maryborough in the north. I have also spoken to processors and marketers, trawlers and charter operators about their concerns and their ideas for where the fisheries could go in the future. I have spoken to recreational fishers and business operators across the state from Noosa to Cairns, Mackay and inland.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge again the hard work and professionalism of our Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers and the department team of scientists, field staff and others who support them. Much of our government's \$20 million commitment goes into boosting their ability to do the good work they perform for Queenslanders, preserving and supporting our fisheries.

Many of the provisions of this bill will not impact directly upon the ordinary fisher. If people are doing the right thing, they will have nothing to worry about. I firmly believe that the majority of fishers are doing the right thing. The changes in this bill will help protect fisheries resources for them and stamp out illegal activities that risk our fish stocks.

I appreciate that many fishers, regardless of their background or interest, have a strong interest in keeping our fisheries sustainable and viable into the future. It is for these fishers, and for everyone in Queensland who shares this important public resource, that this bill is introduced. I am pleased that we are formally recognising each sector's interest in the fisheries including our First Australians.

I appreciate the input that members have made and want to briefly respond to some of the key issues they have raised during the debate. In response to the opposition, I am glad to hear the opposition's interest in fisheries. We heard nothing at our last estimates hearing and little in questions on or without notice since.

I was interested to hear opposition members speak of the MRAG report that they commissioned in 2014. What those opposite failed to point out was that the ALP government had to release this report in 2015. I table that report and relevant sections of the report to assist members opposite in their reflections and recollections.

*Tabled paper.* MRAG Asia Pacific report, dated December 2014, titled 'Taking Stock: modernising fisheries management in Queensland' [291](#).

As some members identified, the MRAG report recommended expanding vessel tracking including tougher penalties and stronger compliance powers and moving to a more responsive decision-making framework through harvest strategies. I note the commentary from some opposition members about the government's response to the committee. I note that the government has agreed with most of the recommendations and noted others. I will cover these in detail further on.

Members would be aware that there are two estimates hearings in this time where they could consider asking those questions about fisheries. These are worthwhile reforms and I would be pleased to speak to them.

In respect of vessel tracking, the regulation is now in place and we need to ensure that there is an appropriate penalty to ensure compliance with the new rules. Vessel tracking is an important component of the fisheries reform process and something we remain committed to. We should be using modern technology to manage our fisheries. We have been doing this in the trawl industry for over 15 years. I am confident that we can use this information effectively into the future.

While some may oppose vessel tracking in general, it is now a requirement, and we cannot have people deliberately breaking the rules. I do acknowledge the many commercial fishers who have gotten on with the job, accepted the rollout, bought and installed vessel tracking devices, and applied for the rebate. I can advise that as of last week over 1,400 units have been ordered by commercial fishers and around 900 of them are actively polling. I am advised that over \$225,000 in rebates has been paid out for 260 rebates by the Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority. They can now focus on delivering delicious seafood to Queenslanders.

I also note that, per the committee's recommendation, I provided additional information around the administration of vessel tracking in my second reading speech. It is important to provide facts and context in this reply. A number of incorrect statements or assumptions have been put out over the course of this debate. Some members have said that fishermen cannot fish without a vessel tracking unit. That is the general intent of our policy to implement compulsory vessel tracking. This has been government policy since the announcement of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy in 2017.

I can confirm that under the current arrangements vessel tracking has been compulsory for fishers in priority fisheries of net, line and crab since 1 January 2019 and in existing fisheries like trawl where vessel tracking is established. I would also clarify for members opposite that there are penalties for noncompliance with vessel tracking in the existing fisheries legislation. However, it is important to note that the government has made policies to cover circumstances where units may not work as intended or other circumstances emerge. This is reflected in the guidelines for vessel tracking which have been publically available since mid-last year.

A draft vessel tracking policy and operating guidelines, which describe the responsibilities and rules associated with vessel tracking, were released for industry comment. Officers from Fisheries Queensland have met with over 280 fishers at 22 locations across the state to discuss the policy and guidelines. I encourage members opposite to read the guidelines.

I also note that the Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation was amended to include the rebate system for vessel tracking. The rebate scheme is available upon application from 30 August 2018 to 31 December 2020. I can advise that the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol has adopted an education-first approach to enforcement in recognition that this is a significant change for many commercial fishers. This message has been communicated to fishers.

I am advised that fishers have not been forced off the water, as suggested by the member for Burdekin, and no fines have been issued to date since 1 January 2019. Vessel tracking also allows our fisheries to maintain their Commonwealth export approvals. The Commonwealth coalition government recently endorsed this approval on the basis that vessel tracking continue to occur in these fisheries.

These issues were well and truly ventilated in the last sitting's disallowance motion. The provisions of the amendment regulation have been subjected to this parliament's scrutiny. I thank the Minister for Transport and Main Roads for speaking on my behalf during the debate.

I note that some members made comments on the rollout of the units. With any major implementation rollout, we expect a small number of issues and the department is case managing any issues to ensure they are resolved appropriately. While the opposition has talked about the various issues from fishers, I can advise that the number of issues, faults and compliance is less than five per cent of the units that are currently operating.

There are huge benefits from vessel tracking and we are already seeing commercial fishers speaking of the benefits to their businesses. Our compliance officers have indicated how effective it has already been at helping target enforcement activities to those persons doing the wrong thing. The government has committed to providing a report to the parliamentary committee on the outcomes of the vessel tracking rollout in 18 months time. I welcome the opportunity to talk further about it at estimates to provide an update to members on its implementation.

In respect of the regulatory impact statement, members raised the question why a regulatory impact statement was not prepared for this bill. Prior to answering this, I want to emphasise that a discussion paper covering reforms to this legislation was released in 2018, with 240 responses, with generally strong support for the changes within. This was separate to the parliamentary scrutiny of this bill including its public hearings in Cairns and Scarborough. These processes were preceded by a number of materials—the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy itself, the green paper and others—that led up to this bill.

This legislation and this policy have been heavily scrutinised, well consulted on and actively considered by the government. I want to clarify the processes adopted for the Fisheries Regulation which may assist some of their concerns. They are related to the provisions in the bill.

In line with the process outlined in the *Queensland government guide to better regulation*, my department prepared a preliminary impact assessment for consideration by the Queensland Productivity Commission. This assessment outlined the history of the proposal to implement vessel tracking, the consultation undertaken to that point and the estimated financial impacts upon the Queensland fishery industry.

In considering whether a regulatory impact statement should be prepared on the proposed vessel tracking regulations, the Queensland Productivity Commission determined that further analysis and consultation in the form of a regulatory impact statement would not be beneficial at that point in time. While the financial impacts were acknowledged, this is exactly why \$3 million in rebates has been made available. The reforms will provide long-term benefits to all users of the fisheries including commercial fishers.

In respect of intellectual property, on people's private data we have constantly stated that we will protect people's private information. The penalty set in the bill for inappropriate disclosure of information provides an extra safeguard and sends the clear message to anyone dealing with private data that they cannot share that information. The level of the penalty is appropriate and consistent with other similar legislation.

In respect of the threshold for the trafficking offence, or black marketing, some members have suggested a lower threshold. Given the severity of the penalty associated with trafficking in priority fish, the government is of the opinion that the current threshold is appropriate.

In regard to the issue of warrants, I believe the proposals put forward by the opposition of a five-day head start do not fit the requirements of professionalism of our Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers.

I table the membership of the expert panel. That is an issue which has been raised during the debate. I note that the panel also takes into consideration North Queensland.

*Tabled paper:* Document, undated, titled 'Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel' [292](#).

In summing up, I want to emphasise that this bill supports our government's aims to build jobs and support commercial fishing alongside other types of fishing. Our fisheries are a public resource and Queenslanders expect that they are regulated appropriately, including using technology like vessel tracking.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone for their contributions. I thank the committee for their hard work. I look forward to members supporting this bill and helping to ensure our fish stocks will be sustainable for years to come. I thank my departmental officers and staff who have worked so hard to ensure that this bill and strategy are being implemented.