




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 12 February 2019

FISHERIES (VESSEL TRACKING) AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.05 pm): I rise to speak in support of this disallowance motion. I have been a fisherman in one way or another since I was 17 years old, fishing around the Mackay-Whitsunday area and down as far as St Lawrence—whether it was crabbing or fishing for Spanish mackerel or coral trout. I believe this situation is born out of what happened when the government buyback scheme was in place. I think that real money should have been offered to people and that they should have signed contracts to stay out of the industry when that money was put forward. I believe that all of their associated equipment should have been bought off them so that they could not re-enter the industry and cause trouble. The local knowledge in my area is that that has led us, in some part, to where we are at today.

Trawlers have a large battery bank. They are concealed in a large wheelhouse in an engine room. Small punts will have maybe 40 crab pots, which is an allowable limit for some professional fishermen. They will be dragging up mud. They will be dragging up sticks. They will be pulling the pots around inside the boat. That will lead to a lot of issues to do with electricity and damage to the device itself. I have spoken with Minister Furner's representatives at length. I have also written a letter today that outlines some measures that I would like to see implemented through this regulation as it was introduced through the 1992 regulations.

We may have missed some situations to do with mullet fishermen and even some of the net/L2 fishermen who have access to line fishing, crabbing and also netting barra and crab. They have three different vessels and most of the time they are only in one depending on the fishery they are participating in.

In relation to reef boats and dories, I asked that only the reef boat itself be adorned with the VMS unit. We have laws that protect the dories from going more than five miles or out of the line of sight. Anyone who was using dories who participated in or was fined for breaking into green zones would have to have a VMS as part of their probationary period to be able to monitor what they were doing as far as illegal activities were concerned.

In relation to taking pressure off the resource—the member for Mackay will back this up—we have 35,000 vessels registered in Mackay. If 15,000, or 50 per cent, of those vessels went out and caught their Spanish mackerel quota in the months of May through to September and they took three fish every time they went out, we would be looking at a very heavy take on the resource and the biomass that is out there. If you put that alongside the quota and then times that by all of the towns up and down the coast, it would make the quota system look absolutely insignificant. For the number of fishermen who are doing that, considering that they are under a quota system, it does nothing to take the pressure off the resource when it is outside what is going on in the recreational sector. That is fine. I do not think we should be using that as an excuse to say that we are taking pressure off the resource.

Every person I talk to speaks about the cost of registration of their trailer and anything to do with their boats. Those costs are all going up in the fishing industry as well. This happens annually. They have been monitoring this. On top of that, we are throwing in the VMS, which in some respects is probably unproven on the smaller vessels. On the vessels that we change out and put together, that will make a difference.

Today before he left I handed the minister a letter. In that letter I proposed that the Queensland government waive the first 12 months—and I know that the member for Hinchinbrook asked for 24 months—of operational costs to Queensland commercial fishing operators so that the reliability of the VMS equipment can be adequately demonstrated and proven reliable. I say that because of the different vessels that they will be putting it across. It is not like the trawler industry where there are large boats that have sealed wheelhouses and large banks of batteries; in their situation it is easier for electronics and electrical instruments to run and be reliable.

Secondly, I asked him to further amend the Fisheries (Vessel Tracking) Amendment Regulation so as to better accommodate reef-fishing operations, which often involve a number of smaller vessels each requiring VMS equipment. In effect, the primary vessel should be equipped full-time and only the dory operators that have green zone or other violations should be required to run VMS for a specific or prescribed probationary period at their cost. In the spirit of it, that should be the way it is. I know myself that a lot of the vessel operators who go to the reef strictly adhere to the rules surrounding green zones; they are very aware of them.

The final measure is more to do with keeping secure the information that comes in from the vessels that are going to be monitored. In the early days we always did our logbooks. When we went to the quota system we were told that the logbooks would never be used against us. Now they are the basis of the regulation of green zones and other zones that are in place. We do not rotate those zones, which I think is a shame for the zones themselves. We should be looking at that. If we want to manage our industry properly, we should be doing that. I have heard lots of feedback that on the shelf where people go diving there can be 50 big Maori wrasse and not another fish to be seen. That situation has come about because we are just pushing things around, and it is not working. When we used to fish for coral trout, if we stuck a big wrasse in the bottom of the tank, we would wake up in the morning to see a big fat wrasse with no coral trout. We ended up having to take measures to try to stop the wrasse from eating the coral trout. I have also heard that from experienced divers.

The third measure I asked the minister about is to ensure the necessary risk assessments and continual compliance of VMS data are in line with the Queensland Government Enterprise Architecture, the QGEA, policy to ensure commercial-in-confidence and privacy concerns of all industry stakeholders are met. I believe that is important. I believe it is important that no data gets out to other people. If that data did find its way to fishermen overseas, they could potentially come in and fish the waters, or other people in recreational sectors might want to go and take those spots. When I was growing up we would go to one spot to fish. Then we would leave it for six to eight months and let that spot replenish. That was the way we sustainably worked. Then we would go back and only take what we needed. Because of the area on the sounder, we took what we thought would not knock the area around and let it regenerate and rejuvenate. That is how we worked. People do not tell you that, but that is how the old fellas did it all the time. That is why there was always fish on the table in the old days—and plenty of it.

The final measure recognises that the VMS equipment transmits sensitive data which is regarded as commercial in confidence via overseas entities. Such an arrangement provides limited legal recourse, the risk of significant commercial losses and wider economic impacts should the data be misused by third parties.

I put this to Minister Furner's office today recognising that the disallowance motion will not be passed because we do not have the numbers for it to go any other way. I am sure that the crossbench and other members agree that we need to find common ground to make this work properly for the fishermen. The cost factor needs to be understood, the confidence factor needs to be understood and everything else that I have mentioned needs to be taken into consideration before we put the regulation through. I do believe that is going to take 12 months. I am hoping that the \$3 million that has been put aside can be used for that so that we can move forward. We need to ensure that we are doing the right thing and that all the vessels that are monitored are monitored properly and that we get good feedback.