




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 12 February 2019

FISHERIES (VESSEL TRACKING) AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.40 pm): I also rise to support the motion tonight but probably for different reasons. I am not here to advocate that the VMS get thrown out altogether. We have to get this right, and this is a botched rollout. As Queenslanders we should at least have respect for an industry that has been treated so poorly. Let us at least have some empathy and dignity for this community. Tonight we need this disallowance motion to pass so that we can renegotiate and rewrite the VMS policy guidelines. The policy guidelines as they stand right now are unacceptable to most Queenslanders, including commercial fishermen, and other seafood stakeholders. Tonight no-one has spoken about all of the other stakeholders involved in this.

I also must talk about the complexity, the costs and the intellectual property before we implement this again. The VMS needs the fisheries bill, as we have established tonight, so that penalties can be enforced. We can imagine a heartless government fining and stalking fishing families when the system this government is championing is failing across Queensland. The fishing bill requires that vessel tracking equipment be fitted by all commercial boats by 2020. The regulatory change occurred under the existing legislation last year on 9 November and came into effect on 1 January, causing the trouble and starting the conversation that this rollout of the VMS—this ideological rollout—is not based on science or on the facts. The minister is so disorganised that he passed the regulation without any penalties.

The rollout of these trackers is nothing short of a farce and there are numerous examples of faulty VMS responders, and shonky government authorised suppliers are the problem. Let us just stop, take a deep breath and at least have some dignity for an industry that has done nothing but comply with consistent regulatory changes and more and more red tape. Fishermen are not permitted to go out and fish and earn a living when these VMS systems go down, and that is a fact. Tonight it is our responsibility to at least give them an opportunity to fix this botched rollout and these faulty devices so that we can use them. Reported problems with the devices have been going on and on. Safety concerns have been spoken about here tonight in terms of the appropriateness of the VMS trackers and of course one could only think that the government is trying to tie up our fishers with more red tape and green tape when it cannot even properly roll out the laws. It speaks volumes for the contempt that is shown for the seafood industry, as has been said, for 30 years.

We need a proper review in terms of what has happened to this rollout. We need to make sure that we conduct a full review and consider a delay. Those of us on this side of the House have heard—not me personally—30 complaints. It is no secret that commercial fishing in this area has been in decline for 30 years under the policies of those opposite. Years of malicious political and ideologically driven policy and neglect has seen Queensland's once proud commercial fisheries industry become a mere shadow of what it once was. For years the Labor Party has overseen an agenda that has not supported the hundreds of family commercial fisheries businesses that supply our state with some of the finest

catches in the world and the reality is that now we import 80 per cent of the seafood eaten in Queensland, some of it grown in the sewers of Asia, yet no-one on the other side of the House has a problem with that. We need to at least have a sensible debate about what the VMS means for us if we are going to keep talking about sustainable fishing.

Instead of working with and modernising our integral commercial fisheries industry, Labor continues to tie up an industry with bureaucracy. I put to the House tonight that there should be a review and I want to put forward some suggestions. I thank Elaine and Michelle for their hard work and support their calls that for the next 12 months the department should obtain advice from the Office of Best Practice Regulation and conduct a thorough regulatory impact analysis and impact statement and release those for public consumption and review.

The commercial fishing industry refuses to accept an exemption as this is an essential aspect of the cost-benefit analysis helping to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of stakeholders, enabling informed discussion. They suggest that the department release the commissioned audit from PricewaterhouseCoopers regarding the safety and privacy of the VMS data for public review and consultation. They also suggest that the minister clarify, as per the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee's recommendation, the indemnity provisions contained in the contracts between fishers and third-party VMS providers, as it appears that the confidential information referred to in the contracts relates to individuals' identifying information—name, address—not the safety of VMS data.

We want to rewrite the VMS policy in negotiation with fishers but only once the mobile technologies and other ideas have been developed that can reduce costs and protect fishers. With that, I again implore the House to pass this disallowance motion. Let us go back to the drawing board and get the VMS right for all Queenslanders, particularly those commercial fishermen who deserve our respect in this place.