




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 28 February 2019

FISHERIES (SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES STRATEGY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.54 pm): It is interesting that we are here again talking about fishing reforms. A lot of these reforms are welcome. A lot of debate and a lot of years of negotiation have to be acknowledged on all sides of government. We look forward to what should be a sustainable fishing industry for everyone.

We do debate fishing industry agendas and, unfortunately, we sometimes see an agenda involving continuing red tape, particularly on mum and dad businesses. No-one can really recall the number of reports, inquiries and committees that have in some cases systematically torn away the rights of commercial businesses. I cannot think of another industry in Queensland that has had as much scrutiny and as much legislative change in the short time I have been here—other than perhaps the taxi industry—which when we pass legislation sends the investment of a lot of small mum and dad businesses down the drain.

I have to acknowledge the 2012 work, after all those years of successive Labor governments in malicious and ideologically driven policy direction until 2011. We must acknowledge the MRAG review, which continued the good work that has gone on here today which has allowed a lot of this policy and legislative reforms to go forward. Taking stock and modernising fisheries is nothing new in this state. It continues to be part of an agenda that sometimes sends shivers up the spine of a lot of men and women in small business who for years have just wanted to get on with their jobs.

That said, we do have a responsibility for sustainable fishing and for what that looks like going forward. It is not just the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy, which we are debating here today, but also other policy agendas that continue to confront us when we are dealing with sustainable fishing. I will talk about some unintended consequences and possible perverse actions that might be coming as a result of the Great Sandy zoning survey—a statutory obligation which we have to talk about after 10 or 12 years. We need to ensure that zoning and issues around the Great Sandy biosphere are accurate and are done in consultation.

When I open these strategies and surveys, I start to see leading questions about possible marine park zones in pristine waterways, particularly in my electorate. I see other issues that have not been consulted on. I would argue that the government is not doing the right thing in engaging with those communities. A good example is just recently over Christmas another minister introduced a zoning survey for the people around the Great Sandy, which can be Gympie, Hervey Bay and Burnett electorates. This survey could potentially have severe effects on what fishing, recreational activities and other economic and ecologically sustainable outcomes might be. I will give the House an example. Unless you clicked on every part of the survey, it would not take you to some of the more perverse questions that are allowed in the survey. I suggest that if they were not a Rhodes scholar, a lot of people in my electorate would not have understood the questions. A question asking, ‘How do you feel about parts of the Baffle Creek catchment being made into a marine zone?’—

A government member interjected.

Mr BENNETT: You would not know what a marine zone is either so do not bag out my constituents.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! The member will speak through the chair and members will cease interjecting.


Mr BENNETT: With all due respect to members opposite, the survey was misleading. It was starting to push an agenda that is somewhat perverse. We cannot talk about changing fishing strategies—which impacts on economic outcomes, conservation zones, conservation values, and areas that commercial and recreational fishermen, in particular, will not be able to access—unless we have an explanation.

I say that because when those surveys were put out over Christmas we contacted the minister's office. We asked on numerous occasions for explanations and engagement. Not one person in that catchment was ever approached until we asked the question. With two weeks to go before the survey closed, some departmental people went up. I thank them very much for engaging with those communities. I thank the minister for giving me a briefing on the suggested outcomes. Again, I acknowledge it was a statutory obligation that the survey be done. However, when we debate policy in this place we need to remember that there are a lot of other conflicting pressures on our environments and on our electorates that run parallel to this. The reason I say that is that it has caused a lot of angst and a lot of disruption in our community about what these surveys with potentially loaded questions can mean.

Another example is the reef regulations which were tabled yesterday. Make no mistake; they will also affect—

Mr FURNER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I have been quite patient listening to the contribution from the member opposite, but my point of order is on relevance. We are here to debate the sustainable fisheries legislation, not some surveys or other matters that the member is freelancing on.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have been listening to the member's speech and he has been addressing matters relevant to fisheries and fisheries management and zoning. However, I would ask that the member now adjourn the debate.

 **Mr BENNETT (Burnett—LNP)** (4.00 pm), continuing: Before lunch I was talking about sustainable fishing strategies around the regions and in particular, as we all like to do from time to time, I talked about my own electorate. I would like to reiterate some of those concerns about the sustainable fishing policy platforms, as the long title of this bill allows me to do. I remind people that some of the strategies that we are talking about here today in this bill also align with other bills currently being presented. I take this opportunity to speak in support of the minister's desired outcome for a review of the Great Sandy zoning issues. In doing so I encourage people to have their say in government surveys because they are trying to engage. I think it is incumbent on us in this place to remind our constituents of that from time to time.

That said, the community has been very proactive in my part of the world about what sustainable fishing should look like into the future. I thank Tony Bridges and the other residents of Baffle Creek who have formed a committee to take charge of their destiny in terms of what a future policy platform might look like, particularly around protection zones, conservation parks, green zones and other things that will affect sustainable fishing into the future. For the people of Winfield, Baffle Creek and all the other residents who use that pristine catchment it is time we engage with the government in a positive way to make sure the outcomes reflect the community's expectations about the environment and, more importantly, the biosphere and the long-term sustainability of that catchment. I can inform the House that when I leave this place, on Saturday and Sunday I will get to spend two days with my wife on the Baffle Creek catchment. There is nothing better than catching mud crabs and fish. We all know that those stocks have been declining over a long period. We need to do something as a government to make sure that sustainable fishing goes forward.

In the time remaining I want to reiterate some concerns, as I did in the disallowance motion, about the VMS rollout, which have also been clearly articulated by many members in the debate. I note there is an indication that some amendments will be moved. I do encourage the House to consider the committee's recommendations regarding amendments. I think they were sensible amendments, heartfelt and well thought out. Committees in this place are charged and empowered with the job of reviewing legislation and making recommendations, so I would hope that we all take the opportunity to pay respect to those committee members who have the fortitude and the experience to make recommendations. When we talk about the amendments later this afternoon, I hope that we do pay respect to those committee members who put so much into this report.

As has been spoken about widely in this debate, the VMS compliance issue has long caused a lot of angst, particularly around some commercial sectors that have engaged with members from all sides of this House. We are just asking that some of those recommendations be considered. Elaine and Michelle have continued to advocate for some sensible slowing-up reviews. The disallowance motion regarding VMS talked about a botched rollout and other things that people have had time to absorb. Clearly, those commercial fishermen who are now obligated, from 1 January, to have these systems installed are feeling complete stress—financial stress—and more worry as time goes on.

If we as legislators in this House also want to show respect to an industry, can we think about some of the proposals that have been put forward regarding the VMS system? We want to obtain advice from the Office of Best Practice Regulation about an impact analysis of what the VMS might look like. We know that the commercial fishermen have spoken about the exemptions for essential aspects of cost-benefit analysis. We must have a review of disadvantages and advantages and what form the consultation should take. We really want the department to release the commissioned audit from PricewaterhouseCoopers regarding the privacy and safety of the VMS data. Some of the safety concerns that have been raised during the implementation, such as fire and other things, have been quite damning. We need to take that seriously in this place.

We would like the minister to clarify, as per the SDNRAIDC's recommendations, the indemnity provisions contained in the contracts with the VMS providers. We would like a rewrite of the VMS policy in negotiation with fishers and operators. We can create a lot of committees when it comes to commercial and recreational fishing. I applaud all aspects of good consultation and stakeholder engagement. Again, the industry has asked with all due respect that we do consider the VMS. Let's have a round table; let's talk about what we can do to reduce the cost, protect fishers' intellectual property and deal with those small items of consideration about the VMS. I know, as do all of us here, if people are going to do the wrong thing they should be caught. If a VMS system on these smaller boats or on charter boats is the way forward, I would like the industry to have some confidence that what they are advocating is listened to. The issue of polling contract fees has also been raised with the state government, and we seek assurances around that.

In conclusion, the LNP is also proposing amendments that are sensible. As a good, functioning parliament we should accept this. I do not think any of us get anything out of political grandstanding when it comes to commercial fishing, the rights of recreational fishing and, more importantly, the outcome for sustainable fishing in our environment into the future—something that we all want. We all want a good outcome.