



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

---

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2021

## **FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL 2021**

### **Introduction**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.48 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Food Act 2006 for particular purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the State Development and Regional Industries Committee to consider the bill.

*Tabled paper:* Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021 [1816](#).

*Tabled paper:* Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021, explanatory notes [1817](#).

*Tabled paper:* Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021, statement of compatibility with human rights [1818](#).

I am proud to continue the tradition in this parliament of Katter's Australian Party recognising the value of domestic production and protecting it by materialising those protections into legislation that has some grunt and is promoted out in the real world. I am pleased to present this bill which is about country of origin labelling in seafood sold through the food service sector in dining outlets across Queensland.

The purpose of this bill is twofold. The first aim is to increase consumer awareness around the origins of the seafood that they purchase and consume. If we want market driven results we need to properly inform consumers, but at the moment we do not have those safeguards in place. At the moment there are some voluntary labels that work and are effective, but if that is not enforced it is quite useless as people can simply choose not to use them. The second aim is to support the Australian and Queensland seafood industry, which supports thousands of local jobs now but many more could be created in the future. As I will discuss later in this speech, there is enormous potential in this regard. We are only scratching the surface with what we are producing now.

When looking at stimulating the industry, the main point is to recognise the natural advantages we have over most of our global competitors in this space and to properly capitalise on them. At the moment we are not taking advantage of that. We have a trusted agriculture and aquaculture supply with very strict ethical and environmental standards compared to many of our major competitors, particularly those in Asia. Australians have come to expect those standards.

Since 1986, across the country the retailers of food—although not the cafes, restaurants and the like in the service industry—have been operating with fixed information. They were forced to do that through legislation. Under the Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard 2016, under section 134 of the Australian Consumer Law, it became mandatory for all retail seafood to be labelled with its country of origin. Major supermarkets, convenience stores, local suppliers—which I like to shop at—and independent grocers are forced to have that labelling. However, if you go across the road to a cafe or restaurant they do not have to do it.

Businesses preparing food for immediate public consumption have long been exempt from the code and that exemption exists throughout all the states. The code is an Australian and New Zealand food service standard code; it crosses the Tasman. The standard that was introduced has been effective and is well accepted by the market, but there is now a significant gap between the retail and hospitality

sectors, and I would say that leads to misinformation for consumers. Consumers are used to seeing the labels at the supermarket so when they see a barramundi sold in a restaurant naturally they think that, because it is an Australian fish, it must be from Australia. There is data to support the fact that that misconception exists amongst consumers.

The Northern Territory is the exception. In 2008 they legislated to make it a requirement for venues to identify imported seafood. The Northern Territory is an anomaly. Good job, Northern Territory. We would like Queensland to be like them in this respect. We want labelling such as the Northern Territory has to support our seafood industries, whether it be wild-caught catch or seafood from the aquaculture farms.

When it comes to seafood no-one could argue about the quality of the Australian product, but our capacity to produce is under-utilised. The interesting point is that currently only 30 or 40 per cent of what is consumed in Australia is produced locally. That means that 60 per cent of what we eat comes from overseas. That is a shame because we have a strong capacity to enhance the amount of catch that we bring in. Whether it is through aquaculture or wild-caught catch, there is a great capacity to expand.

In 2019-20, in Australia a total of 334,615 tonnes of seafood was consumed, which is about 12.4 kilograms per person. As I said, 60 per cent of that was imported. I think that is something that we need to remedy and we can do that by passing legislation in this House, which is what the KAP is proposing in this bill. Overwhelmingly, Australian consumers have demonstrated that they want to eat local seafood, so the question is: how do we properly educate people? This legislation will go some way towards doing that.

In 2018, the *Food demand in Australia: trends and issues* report found that the demand for Australian grown produce was on the rise domestically. I think that the onset of COVID has enhanced that even further. People want to know that they are eating under the protection of the environmental and ethical food safety standards that we have in Australia. I think that desire will only increase. While nearly all of the beef, lamb and chicken that we consume is domestic product, seafood is the anomaly, with 60 per cent being imported.

**Mr Dametto:** Shame.

**Mr KATTER:** It is a shame, as the member for Hinchinbrook says, but it is something that is really within our capacity to fix. This situation can result in an elevated risk of inappropriate pricing. People can exploit the fact that there is confusion and misunderstanding at the point of sale. A cafe or restaurant can sell imported barramundi for the same price as local barramundi simply because people are not properly educated on what they are eating. This bill seeks to address that issue.

Australian seafood industry representatives have said that more than 50 per cent of people often incorrectly assume that the seafood they are eating is produced in Australia when no country of origin is stated. As I have said, currently supermarkets are required to inform shoppers, but the service industry—the pubs, fish and chip shops, restaurants—is not required to do that. Many in the Australian seafood industry, including the Barramundi Farmers Association and Seafood Industry Australia, explain that the exemption is to not only the economic but also the social detriment of the industry and local jobs, which is probably the more important issue.

To expand the industry we have to ask if we have the capacity to meet an intended increase in demand for domestic produce. In 2018, the national production of farmed barramundi was valued at \$90 million, which represented a doubling of production since 2014, so there has already been a great increase in production rates. There is a target to double production and become a \$200 million industry by 2025. Therefore, it is quite clear that we have the capacity. Anyone who has spent any time in North Queensland, the Northern Territory and other remote parts of Northern Australia will know that there is plenty of appetite for expansion and a desire to do it.

**Mr Dametto** interjected.

**Mr KATTER:** Yes, I understand and acknowledge that the state has indicated their intent to expand and we welcome that, but it has to hit the ground and materialise into something real. You have to create the demand for the product domestically, which is what we are trying to achieve here.

The federal Competition and Consumer Amendment (Country of Origin) Bill 2016 received bipartisan support and was applied to retailers. Why not expand that to the hospitality industry? There have been a number of inquiries into this issue: the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee's Inquiry into the current requirements for labelling of seafood and seafood products; the Joint Select Committee of Northern Australia report titled *Scaling up: inquiry into opportunities for expanding aquaculture in Northern Australia*; the government response to Senator

Xenophon's Food Standards Amendment (Fish Labelling) Bill, which recognised the consumers' desire to know the origin of food; and the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry's report titled *A clearer message for consumers*, which states—

The Committee acknowledges that many consumers want to support Australian businesses by purchasing Australian made products—consumers express a strong preference to support local industries including food processing and manufacturing.

In addition, there is the *Food demand in Australia: trends and issues 2018* report. Finally, in 2015 the research conducted by the federal department of industry, innovation and science found that being able to identify the country of origin was either important or very important to 74 per cent of the consumers surveyed. There is pretty strong rigour behind this and it all points in the right direction, which is that we need to better educate consumers. This is about a subtle expansion of what we are already doing in the retail industry.

What are we seeking to achieve through this bill? We want to remove the country of origin exemption on the food service industry so that it must include the mandatory labelling of the seafood that is sold in food service venues. We want to ensure that food service menus identify the origin of seafood through country, region or specific location. It would be at the discretion of the business to say, for example, it is Australian barramundi or it is Northern Territory barramundi.

Debate, on motion of Mr Katter, adjourned.