




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (6.13 pm): I rise to make a comment on this bill. I want to thank everyone on the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for their fulsome examination of this private member's bill. I want to make a few points. Firstly, I think we can agree that we all in this House want to promote Queensland seafood. There is no doubt that the quality of our seafood is superb. I mention some of our fisheries. The iconic reef fisheries produce the Queensland reef fish which are famed throughout Australia and beyond. Our wonderful gulf fisheries are incredibly underrated and productive fisheries in Queensland. Then there are our eastern seaboard fisheries. The Bribie Island oysters—the member for Pumicestone knows all about those—and the Hervey Bay scallops are iconic. The minister talked about new operations by people such as Tassal and hopefully the production of rock lobster into the future. The quality of our seafood is superb and it has a reputation of being clean, fresh and safe; there is no doubt about that.

The committee report sets out that the industry generates \$200 million a year for the Queensland economy. It employs 1,500 people directly and 1,200 people indirectly. Also, as evidenced from our report, and as we found via examination of this bill, the Palaszczuk government is very actively promoting Queensland seafood. The minister referred to our campaigns. The 'Ask for Queensland Seafood' campaign is done with the seafood industry and seafood marketers. Minister Furner also talked about the #eatqld campaign, which encourages people in Queensland and further afield to eat the best of Queensland produce. I commend the minister for his very passionate and dedicated promotion and championing of that campaign. I also mention the Great Australian Seafood—Queensland campaign, which is done by the Australian government.

There is no doubt that our seafood producers and marketers are passionate. As part of the examination of this bill, we talked to fishers and marketers around Queensland—in Karumba, Bundaberg, Townsville, Cairns and Brisbane. We stood on that dock at Karumba, in the gulf, where we saw the boats. We went inside the production facilities and saw the massive freezer compartments that are the start of the journey of Queensland seafood to all over the world. We saw the level of investment that is made by fishers around Australia.

I will talk briefly on the Barramundi Discovery Centre at Karumba. It is an absolutely wonderful facility celebrating this particular seafood. I encourage anyone travelling around Queensland to go and see that; it really is a wonderful experience.

In Bundaberg, the member for Bundaberg brought in Lincoln, who produces a smoked mackerel which is absolutely wonderful. These are all people—

**A government member:** The best.

**Mr WHITING:** The best one in the state—might as well make it the state.

**Ms Grace:** In the world!

**Mr WHITING:** In the world. No-one does better smoked mackerel than Lincoln from Bundaberg!

We talked to the fishers, the marketers and people in the industry all around this state. They are very passionate and they want to do everything to promote this industry not only throughout Queensland but also throughout Australia.

As members can see from the report we produced, the labelling of seafood is a federal issue. The Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard 2016 is a national standard. It was created under Australian Consumer Law and is enforced by the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission. They deal with food safety. If we want to change this national standard, it needs to be about food safety. This 2016 standard requires food for retail sale in Australia to carry country-of-origin labelling. That is why we see country-of-origin labelling in Woolies and Coles but not at the local fish and chip shop or restaurant.

One of the things we learned in the examination of the bill is that this issue has been raised many times in federal parliament, and it is yet to get up. I will list some of the times it has been raised in the federal sphere. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments and the Australian and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council had an independent expert panel to review this. In 2014, the Senate referred an inquiry into requirements for the labelling of seafood to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee. In 2015, the inquiry into the Food Standards Amendment (Fish Labelling) Bill 2015 was voted down by the Senate. In 2016, the Australian parliament's Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia conducted an inquiry and the Australian government noted that recommendation. In 2016, the Productivity Commission produced a report which explored country-of-origin labelling. In 2021, there was a report, *Evaluation of country of origin labelling reforms*, commissioned by the Australian government. This has been examined at length in this federal sphere and it has not managed to get up as yet. I do note that the members of the Katter's Australian Party have rightfully pointed out that there was a private member's bill in New South Wales on country-of-origin labelling that did not get up in 2017.

One of the things that this report identifies is that maybe this bill focused on the wrong act. It does seek to amend the Food Act, which is administered by Queensland Health. As we know, this legislation is all about food safety. State and local authorities enforce legislation to ensure the food that we consume is safe. It may have been better to amend a different act because seafood labelling is about consumer values and consumer choices. It is about consumer behaviour. If we want to promote seafood this way we really need to focus on educating consumers and hospitality workers; that became very clear. I point out there is nothing wrong with a variety of these associations and the individuals labelling this food on their own initiative.

It has been pointed out that the Northern Territory has this labelling system. However, it operates under their Fisheries Act and it is their fisheries officers who enforce the act in the Northern Territory. Bear in mind that this standard covers what happens in restaurants in the Northern Territory, but their industries and hospitality sector are much smaller.

In conclusion, I want to return to talking about the Barramundi Discovery Centre and hatchery we visited. This is funded by the state government. It is an absolutely enormous and well designed facility. I would really encourage grey nomads who are visiting Queensland to go and see this. There is a pond containing live barramundi plus a hatchery. It was a bit unnerving to see huge barramundi in this pool just staring up at us. I could finally understand what sort of creature they were with those eyes perched on top of their head silently watching us. Then we gave them a bit of food and bang—glop!—they had it. They are such fast-moving creatures and grow at an enormous rate.

**Mr Perrett** interjected.

**Mr WHITING:** I say to the member for Gympie that they are a wee bit frightening. They are fast moving, huge and powerful, and I have to say they are delicious as well. I commend that council for operating this centre. I want to finish by saying please take the chance to go and see it. I think it is a great reflection of the health of our fishing industries within Queensland and our seafood industry.