




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (6.08 pm): I am pleased to speak briefly on this private member's bill, the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill, introduced by the member for Traeger. I wanted to speak on this bill because, despite the fact that I represent a fairly metro electorate, Queensland produce is obviously a matter that is close to my heart. I worked in the hospitality sector for what I would call a relatively short period of time—six years or so—but my father, David, has worked in this sector as a chef for over 40 years. He turned 65 recently and since coming to Queensland and starting his career as a very young man in his late teens and early 20s his life's work has been honing his understanding of the fantastic Queensland produce and featuring it on his menus, with a few jaunts overseas peppered throughout those 40 years.

Dad was also one of the first Queensland produce champions about 15 years ago, so I can probably say that every childhood meal that was put on our table was because of Queensland produce. In fact, the clothes on my back as a kid would have been because of Queensland product. My family's restaurant would not have been a patch on what it was without Queensland produce and I had the privilege of meeting many producers of all kinds of different Queensland produce during my time at Restaurant II. One of our favourite things to do—one of my father's favourite things to do; I should not take credit for his fantastic menu—was to feature the produce of Queensland producers and mention the provenance of the product. When I look at menus today such as our own parliamentary menu, it is very proud to state the provenance of not just its seafood but a lot of different kinds of products which is a real trend that we are seeing increasing.

What I also saw from my time in the hospitality industry from a policy perspective was the push and pull of the carrot and the stick when we are regulating and how we encourage or punish or a mix thereof. That is really important, especially when dealing with small family businesses like hospitality. How we incorporate the carrot and the stick aspects into any potential policy or legislation is also very important. I commend all members of the Katter party for their full-throated support of Queensland produce, and I am right there with them on that. That is part of the reason why I am such a big supporter of #eatqld. For the benefit of anyone in the House who has been sleeping under a rock, #eatqld is a program that highlights Queensland produce—whether it is Kalbar carrots, Mooloolaba prawns, Pinkenba soft shelled crab or anything in-between. It is a fantastic program. If members are not already involved, I certainly encourage them to get involved and to get their local venues involved too.

I also want to highlight some potential challenges with any legislative or policy changes. In the restaurant that I worked in, we did not list our fish on the menu. Rather, we had a fish of the day. The fish of the day was listed on our printed menu and on any given day the waitstaff would convey that information to the customer. They would say, 'Today's fish is a Cone Bay barramundi,' or, 'Today's fish is a beautiful Tasmanian salmon.' My question then is: do we print the menu each day and explain the provenance? Can we just say verbally that the fish is local because that is how we are conveying the rest of the information as well? A lot of restaurants do that right now. What if some days the fish is from Australia but other times it is from New Zealand, which similarly has those high-quality standards—that

is, it is orange roughy from New Zealand; it is not Australian fish? That would be overseas fish, but it also devalues some potentially really premium product. Would a chalkboard be sufficient because it is written down? There are a few things that we would need to work through because venues do need a little bit of flexibility. If there are garnishes and sides that go with a particular kind of fish they might not go so well with other kinds, so restaurants cannot just put any piece of Australian fish on the menu. If there is a piece of Tassie salmon that a restaurant is hoping to put the dish with but they cannot get any good ones from their supplier that day, they cannot necessarily swap it out for a piece of mackerel because the sides will not match the dish because the flavour profiles are different.

The good news is that right now there is nothing stopping hospitality venues from advertising if they want to that they do have that Cone Bay barramundi from WA for sale. Indeed, it is likely—and we certainly found—that by sharing the provenance of all of the produce wherever possible, restaurants could charge more for that product because customers like to know where that product has come from. However, if this same shop were to wilfully misrepresent the provenance of its products, it could face significant penalties from the Office of Fair Trading—as well they should—and I want to share with the House the penalties for that kind of offence.

Under Australian consumer law, businesses must not make false or misleading representations. If someone is telling you that they have Cone Bay barramundi and it is actually basa, there are penalties for that. The regulators have a number of enforcement options available to them if businesses breach this provision—for example, from the lower level of education and informal warnings if it is a first offence through to civil penalty notices, infringement notices, court enforceable undertakings or court action. Civil penalty infringement notices can be issued and there are maximum court penalties, so there are some fairly significant and hefty fines and other punishments that can be inflicted if businesses are found to be in breach of those rules.

If a customer is told at the table by the waitperson that they are going to be served a beautiful piece of Tasmanian salmon but they walk past the kitchen and see a big box of frozen basa on the bench and there is no frozen basa on the menu—there is nothing like that on the menu—they definitely have cause to ask some questions and potentially follow up with Fair Trading less that restaurant be up to anything fishy. The member for Traeger is not wrong when he says that many restaurants do already advertise the provenance of their product. That is just good policy for those venues. With the assistance of the Fair Trading department and our fantastic #eatqld policy, those are just some of the ways that we can support our Queensland restaurants to proudly share the Queensland producers that they do feature, whether that is Kalbar carrots, Daintree vanilla or Mooloolaba prawns.

The member for Traeger—and this is really important—may also be aware that the federal government is currently exploring country-of-origin labelling more broadly and obviously those provisions would apply at a national level. I quote the federal industry and science minister, Ed Husic, on the progress of that. Mr Husic said in a recent statement that—

... the department is working on the best way to take this commitment forward, which will include engaging with stakeholders. The government is considering all of its election commitments in the budget to be handed down on October 25.

Mr Husic said country of origin labelling had a 'complex history' and he wanted to ensure 'we take the time needed to get it right'.

This includes taking all previous investigations into account, gathering a comprehensive evidence base to inform decisions, and working closely with the seafood industry and hospitality sector to consider options for implementing mandatory labelling.

I do not think anybody in this House doubts that it is a great idea to be sharing this information with customers more broadly. Good ideas can of course still have really significant implementation challenges. I really love and acknowledge the enthusiasm of the Katter party in promoting these ideas and starting these conversations. I think we are going to see a good outcome in this space at a federal level, and that is really important and that is where that work needs to happen. I will not be supporting the bill but certainly support the intent.