




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.47 pm): I rise to make a small contribution to the debate of this bill, which I support. My question is: why do those on the government side not support it? It has come from a party that is not a part of the government but it is a good idea. In Queensland and Australia, we all want to protect our locally produced seafood. It is important. All we are asking is that Queensland and Australian seafood is identified in restaurants as Australian. The Queensland seafood industry is the envy of the world given our unique offerings and the unrivalled quality and taste of our product. Opposition members and the crossbenchers want to ensure consumers are aware of the origin of the seafood they are buying. We believe that, if passed, this bill will go a long way towards ensuring a better uptake of locally farmed products as opposed to foreign offerings.

I know that I am the member for Gregory and that there is not much sea in the Gregory electorate, which is 100 kilometres away from the ocean. I am glad about that. I do like the land. Many people here would realise—I know that the chair of the transport committee understands from our recent committee hearings—that my sea legs are not that good. Travelling to Keswick Island on a small boat in 25-knot winds and then getting on a tender to get to the island was not really good for me, but I do love my seafood.

I have a few mates I played Rugby Union with who are in the fishing industry and are struggling to make ends meet. They have to put money into their boats. They have to get out to sea. Obviously, there is no guarantee they will get a catch. What we as the Queensland government can do is recognise the brilliance of what they bring from offshore into our restaurants—that is, first-class seafood. Whether it is barramundi, oysters or scallops, I think we need to recognise that it is the best seafood we can get in this country. That is why I support this bill. It would allow people who go out to eat seafood and are prepared to pay a little more to buy Australian seafood. That way not only am I getting the best quality seafood I can get but I am also supporting a commercial fishing industry that has been struggling over the last 20 years. There have been significant regulatory changes over the last 20 years. We have seen a massive drop in the number of commercial fishermen able to ply their trade.

This is a simple bill which would allow people who go out to restaurants to be able to say, 'I am prepared to pay an extra \$5 or \$7 for Australian seafood.' That way I would be not only getting a great dinner of clean, green and environmentally sustainable seafood, but I would be supporting a commercial industry that brings that seafood from offshore into our restaurants. I would ask members on the government side to consider supporting this bill and supporting a commercial industry that is so important to us. I hear horror stories about imports. Someone said to me the other day that 70 per cent of seafood that gets served up in Australia comes from overseas. I have been to Vietnam and seen the Mekong and it is not that hygienic. If we can support the Australian industry and allow Australian commercial fishermen to make a little more to survive and to keep their boats going I think it is a good thing.

I note some of the comments from the committee hearings. In Cairns, Mr McAtamney from the Independent Seafood Producers said—

At the end of the day, the crux of this bill is about allowing the consumer to make the choice at the dinner plate, which is no different to what they do at the retail counter. It is overdue. This bill is vital for Queensland. Obviously it has been in place in the Northern Territory for a number of years ... I think it will have far-reaching ramifications and not just in terms of consumption levels ... Certainly from my perspective, we are second generation and have 40 years in the industry and this bill is vital.

That is basically a commercial fisherman coming out and saying that they need this bill to survive. If we do not have commercial fishermen in Australian waters then the alternative is imported seafood, and I do not know where that comes from.

It was only a couple of weeks ago that my youngest daughter decided she wanted some calamari so she went and bought it from Woolworths. She pulled out the calamari and said, 'Dad, would you like some?' I said, 'Darling, let me have a look at its origin.' It came from Vietnam. I said, 'Darling, if you want to eat calamari from Vietnam that is your choice, but I would rather have Australian calamari or Australian seafood.'

This bill is easy to implement. It is simply asking restaurateurs and people who sell seafood to put a mark against what is Australian and what is international seafood. It is a stroke of a pen. Some people are saying that they will have to redesign their menus and that sort of thing. I will go around with a black pen and identify it for them. Then they can photocopy the menu and the job is done. I think it is important that we support Australian people.

I come from a rural and regional area where we support our wool industry. There is a fantastic program starting with the Tambo-Blackall council and AWI, the Australian Wool Institute. We are identifying wool grown in the local area. It has a barcode on it which tells a story of how that wool was produced—organically, ethnically and sustainably. It is taking off in Europe. Europe loves that. They want to know where their product is coming from. I want to know that my seafood is coming from Australia. I want to know that I am supporting a commercial fisherman, his family and the generations before him. That is absolutely important.

The Northern Territory framework is working. Why do we not copy that? It is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a mandatory labelling requirement for seafood sold in the food service sector. It is working and people are embracing it. I went to the Northern Territory a couple of years ago and I made sure that my seafood came from the Northern Territory. It was beautiful seafood.

I know that we have thrown out regulatory frameworks and all that sort of thing, but let us be different. This policy has come from this side of the House—from the Katter party—but it is a good policy. It works. It is a simple policy so why not embrace it? The government is not the fountain of all good ideas. Some ideas that come from this side might work. We need to work together for Queenslanders. We need to work together for the seafood industry.

A good mate of mine who I played Rugby with—he is a pretty hard nut sort of bloke—is in the trawling industry. He has a genuine concern about his future. He has young kids. He has a boat. He has to fill it up with diesel and diesel, as members know, goes up to around 230 or 250 cents a litre. He is struggling. I want him to succeed because he brings that produce from offshore onto my plate in a restaurant. I want to know it has been caught locally. I do not want my seafood to be caught overseas. I do not want seafood from other countries. I want our local seafood because we have the best seafood here. The important thing for those in the Labor Party to note is that it is sustainably and ethnically caught and it is organic. It is a no-brainer for people in this chamber to say, 'Let's give this a go. Let's put this on the table and let make sure we work this out.' The industry needs help.

Mr McDonald: Some help.

Mr MILLAR: I take that interjection. It also needs some sort of support from the government of the day. It needs to have some confidence. This is not going to cost a lot of money. They are not asking for licences to be brought back. They are not asking for billions of dollars. What they are asking for is that we identify Australian seafood and Queensland seafood on menus. I support this bill and I ask members to support it as well.