




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (5.55 pm): I rise to speak on the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021. I acknowledge the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for its work on examining this bill. I also want to acknowledge all of the members, particularly the chair of the committee, the member for Bancroft.

I want to turn to the recommendations of that report. As the Minister for Health pointed out, the committee recommended that the bill not be passed. The second recommendation of the committee was that the bill be sent to the federal government because this matter needs to be dealt with under the consumer law. It is not a health matter. This bill is aimed at the wrong jurisdiction and it should be dealt with by the federal government.

I am proud to speak in this House as the fisheries minister because Queensland's fisheries are the best in the nation. I want to acknowledge the member for Traeger and his Katter's Australian Party colleagues for their interest in this issue. The intent of the bill before the House is sound, but there are problems with respect to it which I have just identified and other members of the government will also identify in their contributions. It is not the case that the government is opposed to this. They are as passionate about Queensland's fisheries as the Palaszczuk government is.

We understand how important this sector is not only to all Queenslanders but to the state economy as well, and I will get to some of the comments and submissions in the report. The commercial, recreational and charter fishing sectors contribute \$1.1 billion to Queensland and support more than 7,600 jobs. This government wants to ensure a sustainable and profitable fishing industry for generations to come—not only for our children but for our grandchildren also. That is why we have been implementing the Sustainable Fishing Strategy. That is why we are also backing the expansion of aquaculture in this state.

The Palaszczuk government has supported companies like Tassal to set up in Queensland. In the last financial year aquaculture contributed nearly \$194 million to the economy and supported 786 good, full-time jobs in the regions. An example of another Tasmanian company is Ornatas, which will farm rock lobsters in captivity. They call them slipper lobsters but we all call them Moreton Bay bugs. This will be a world first. I know how important it is that local seafood producers are supported and that locally caught seafood is promoted and adequately marketed in food service outlets.

I have previously been involved in the Palaszczuk government's ask for seafood campaign and the Great Australian Seafood Campaign. It would be remiss of me not to mention our ongoing Eat Queensland campaign also. Not only does it encourage people to take a photo of their great Queensland produce but also post it to social media with the hashtag #eatqld.

During that period, we have promoted a number of seafood outlets as #eatqld champions: Fraser Isle Spanner Crabs; Ian Hamilton from Aussie Seafood House, and I know the member for Pine Rivers gets her seafood from there, as do I, because it is great Queensland seafood, and I always ask for

Queensland seafood because it is the right of a consumer to ask for it when they purchase it; Marshall Betzel, the Queensland Seafood Markets Association president; and Tobin Fish Tales in Townsville. They are all great seafood producers and retailers.

Most food sold in retail, including seafood, is required to be labelled with its country of origin under the Australian Consumer Law. Food service businesses can already choose to identify the origin of seafood on their menus and, under the Australian Consumer Law, claims about the origin of food sold must not be false or misleading. I encourage businesses to identify the origin of seafood on their menus, especially Queensland products. We should all be proud of the great quality seafood that this state produces.

I note that the Food and Beverage Importers Association in their submission to the committee argued that there was no evidence that mandated country-of-origin labelling would lead to improved profitability for domestic fishers. In fact, they went one step further. They identified that it could put an impost on retailers and indicated there was—

... no evidence that the perceived increased demand can be met with Australian products. ...

and—

... no evidence that the cost of producing those products can be absorbed in the supply chain, and profit maintained.

The Restaurant & Catering Australia submission stated—

A mandatory CoOL is redundant as restaurants are already eager to advertise their locally caught seafood products to promote certain dishes and increase consumer demand.

In terms of cost and implementation, there are imposts on not only governments but also retailers. The committee report stated—

The Food and Beverage Importers Association expressed concerns about the cost of implementation for a mandatory labelling scheme and the increased liability of end users. Restaurant & Catering Australia expressed concerns about the “enormous amount of red tape and the financial burden that this will force upon venue operators”.

It is clearly identified in the committee report that there would be an increase in red tape as a result of this bill before the House. The Deloitte paper went one step further in identifying the cost impost upon governments. It was said that the Deloitte paper indicated—

Projected costs of the mandatory labelling scheme and the compliance issues that your government will have to pay at \$13.5 million. That is the federal government. If you scale that down to Queensland, it still is in the high millions.

The concerning underlying issue here was indicated in the evidence provided to the committee by Queensland Health. They identified that, if this bill were passed, they would be the ones responsible for enforcing and mandating the requirements under the bill and this may divert resources away from other public health and safety initiatives. One example they identified was responding to elevated notifications for salmonella. We have seen indications of salmonella in this state as a result of eggs being imported from New South Wales in the past. If that salmonella had been picked up by consumers, it could have led to the death of Queenslanders. As a result of the good work of Queensland Health as well as food safety legislation in this state to make sure we have—

Mrs Frecklington: How is this relevant, Minister?

Mr FURNER: If you read the report, you would understand.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Let us not have any cross-chamber chatter.

Mr FURNER: Once again, we see incompetent opposition members who have got no idea. They come into this chamber and want to refer to reports, but they do not have a clue. They should sit down and examine the reports on important issues like this. We want to support Queensland seafood producers and make sure they grow and continue to prosper in our state, yet we have this incompetent opposition. It was identified today in question time that they have not met once as a shadow cabinet—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Minister, I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr FURNER: I was just taking the interjections, but I will return to the bill. It is extremely important that members who make a contribution in this House have read the report and identified the matters that have been addressed and supported by the committee. If members do not have an understanding before they stand on their feet or make interjections, they will look like absolute fools, like some of those opposite.

At the moment, the testing of seafood to determine the origin of seafood is not routinely available nor cost-effective. While I understand the intent of the bill, country-of-origin labelling of seafood is not a public health and safety issue and thus it is not an appropriate subject matter for the Food Act. That

has already been identified not only in the report but also by government speakers on this side of the chamber. The act as it stands prevents misleading and deceptive conduct in relation to the broader supply of food, rather than specific industry or commodity sectors.

I concur with the committee that the federal government is the national lead on country-of-origin labelling laws. The Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard 2016 is a regulation enacted under Australian Consumer Law and is enforced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. I note one of the Albanese government's election commitments is to work with the seafood and hospitality sectors to implement mandatory country-of-origin labelling to support the Australian seafood industry. This is the appropriate channel and the approach that should be taken. A national approach is needed on this issue, not a piecemeal approach by the states.

In the meantime, I encourage everyone in this House to head to their local fishmonger and ask—or actually demand—Queensland seafood. This is what we can do currently when we go to our local seafood shop. We should support our fishers right across the sector. We have the best seafood in this country.