




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2022

FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (6.33 pm): I will make a relatively brief contribution on the Katter's Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill. Before anything else, I give the member for Traeger and the party more generally credit for having brought in a private member's bill. This is not supposed to be the exclusive remit of the crossbench, but we are almost halfway through the term and it appears to be the case this time around.

At the outset I will say that the Greens do support this bill. The Katters and I often do not agree on policy questions, but in many respects this bill strikes me as being commonsense. We can see that from the fact that a similar approach has been adopted in other jurisdictions and the government's federal colleagues have indicated their intention to pursue similar kinds of reform. Country-of-origin labelling for seafood helps to support local fishers over massive multinational corporations and it allows consumers to make informed decisions. Recent media reporting suggests that, as I said, the federal government agrees with this approach. While it is not extraordinary—in fact, it is entirely predictable—it is unusual to see such vehement opposition from the government on this as I would have thought that they would be on the same page as their federal counterparts.

In Queensland, most people entering a fish and chip shop, a cafe or a local restaurant, especially along the coast of Queensland, would assume that the fish they will be eating was caught here, whether that is in Moreton Bay, off the coast at Yeppoon or by a small business operator at Port Douglas. They would have no idea if the fish they are biting into was caught off the coast of Vietnam, bought by a Norwegian seafood company, processed in California and distributed here by a company that is ultimately run out of Tokyo. Nor would they know whether their meal is undercutting local industry and jobs, is reliant on unsustainable fishing practices or is even enabling modern slavery.

Meanwhile, from the net to the plate, multinational seafood corporations are absolutely making bank off the misery of everyday people across the world. As has been reported by Human Rights Watch and the International Labour Organization, in the Gulf of Thailand the seafood industry is tainted with labour violations, human trafficking and slavery. Often smuggled in from Cambodia or poorer regions of South-East Asia, workers are coerced or deceived into working on trawlers with no pay. They face physical abuse and even murder if they speak out and they do not have the opportunity to step on land again for several years. It is from those conditions that multinational seafood companies buy the barramundi and the prawns that are sold on and distributed in Australian restaurants, cafes and fish and chip shops. There is a direct line between that enslaved Cambodian worker, the profits of a multinational corporation and the fish that everyday Queensland families sit down to eat in their local fish and chippy.

Under current law, Queenslanders may be unknowing participants in this chain of human rights abuses because, when they enter that restaurant and look at the menu, they have no idea where the seafood comes from. It is those same dodgy multinational seafood distributors that imported from China frozen prawns diseased with white spot, which devastated our state's prawn farms in 2016 and is still causing so much financial strife and misery for the aquaculture and fishing industry workers in Moreton

Bay and the Logan river area. Those multinational corporations also contribute to the global decline of fish populations and the death of threatened species such as sharks, seabirds, dolphins and turtles that are caught up in bycatch. By removing the country-of-origin labelling exemptions from restaurants and dining venues, Queenslanders will have more certainty and knowledge about the product they buy. It is really straight forward. They will be able to understand better where their meal is coming from and make better informed decisions as consumers.

Perhaps most importantly, this bill provides some hope for those small aquaculture farmers and professional fishers—the trawler operators in Moreton Bay and line anglers off the Gulf of Carpentaria—that they can compete with the giant multinational fishing corporations. It gives hope to the dozens of towns dotted along our coastlines and waterways where multinational corporations have steamrolled once-thriving fishing communities, and farming communities for that matter—multinational corporations that are more interested in the extra profits they garner through exploiting an indentured worker in Thailand than they are in paying fair wages in Queensland.

It also gives a bit of extra hope for a world where our food systems—what we eat, where our food comes from and who benefits from the labour of farmers and workers—are not controlled by CEOs sitting in boardrooms in Sydney, LA or Tokyo. We want a world where our food is made by and for everyday people and where the food industry is controlled by those who actually work the land and seas—those who steer the fishing trawlers, drive the produce trucks, prepare and cook the meals and clean the dishes afterwards.

Of course, the Queensland Greens think there are plenty of other policies that we could introduce to tackle the big money that controls our state. As a start, we should also be making them pay their fair share of tax, increasing royalties so we can get a fair return on natural resources and putting a levy on big banks. Bills such as this from the KAP are one of the many steps needed to chip away at corporate control of our communities. It is genuinely commonsense reform. As much as the government might like to pick away at the details, we know that it is not about the details; it is simply that it has come from the wrong side of the House. We really do need to be taking these steps to avoid the kinds of global humanitarian atrocities that international practice contributes to and to give Queenslanders real choice about what they eat.