




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (5.46 pm): If the member for Stretton had read the report or even the bill for that matter, he would understand that this is quite a simple process to identify seafood. It does not mean that all these menus need to be changed constantly. They could be changed just once. If the restaurants followed through with what they had in their menu, then it would not be an issue. This is all about indicating to people who go to a restaurant whether the seafood is local or not and it is about supporting local seafood. It is hard to understand why the government does not support the local seafood industry.

If the member for Stretton had read the report and the dissenting report, he would understand that. This is a report of the committee. Well, it is supposed to be a report of the committee, but it is actually a report of the government. We know that the committee system in Queensland does not work most of the time because the government controls the outcomes of the committee, the government controls the voting on the committee, the government has the chairs of the committee. It is actually a chair's report or a government report. Nine times out of ten, it is not a committee report.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr HART: For the information of the member for Pine Rivers, I am on the committee. I have read the committee report. In fact, I had a small hand in writing the dissenting report so the member for Pine Rivers needs to be corrected. As part of the committee process, we went around and talked to a lot of seafood companies. We talked to restaurants in our local areas. I spoke to restaurants in my local area about these things. A lot of them said this was not a big issue. The catering association did not like it for sure—and I accept that—but the wholesale seafood industry already does this. They already have to tell their retailers where their seafood is coming from, so it is not a really hard thing for them to expand on.

As we travelled around all over the place—we were in Bundaberg, Cairns, Townsville, Karumba and—

Mr McDonald: The first inquiry ever to have been to Karumba.

Mr HART: I will take the interjection from the member for Lockyer. This was the first inquiry to ever go to Karumba, and we talked to the seafood industry there. I can guarantee you—and I think the member for Lockyer might back me up on this—that as we went around the place, the government members of the committee were very sympathetic to the bill. In fact, I would have almost guaranteed that they were going to support this bill, but then somebody whispered in their ear and they decided, no, they were not going to support it. The chair basically said, 'No, that is the end of story there. We are not going to pass this bill,' and the lemmings on the committee just followed along with that.

When we travelled around, as I said, we spoke to the industry in a number of places. In Townsville, Mr Partland from Ingham Seafood told us—

I am very vocal about supporting the local industry, which is under huge threats from government implementing quota and that type of thing. The labelling or identification of seafood in pubs, clubs, restaurants and the like should have been done years ago when it was implemented into our retail sector. This needs to be brought into line with that so that people have a choice and people are aware of what they are buying.

We heard from many of the contributors that you go into a restaurant and the restaurant says that they have barramundi, or something similar, and it is not in fact barramundi; it is imported fish. All we want to see at the end of the day is that if people are ordering barramundi they get barramundi and to know whether it is coming from a local supplier or it is an imported fish. It really is not that hard. In Cairns we heard from a gentleman from the Independent Seafood Producers who told us pretty much the same thing. He stated—

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, so for the member for Stretton to say that this is unworkable in Queensland—it already works in the Northern Territory. Unfortunately, the committee could not actually hear from the people in the Northern Territory to see how it was going. For some reason, we could not arrange to talk directly to them about that, which is a real shame, but it has worked successfully there for years and years, and it can work here if we just give it a chance. That is all we really need to do.

The problem is that this is not a government bill. That is the only issue here. If the government had put this bill forward, the committee recommendation would have been, I am sure, that it be passed, but because it is a non-government bill in this form—a Katter's party bill—the government is just not going to support it. I suspect that the member for Stretton's speech will come back to bite him at some stage because this government is in a habit of denying crossbenchers or the opposition the opportunity to pass a bill. They say what a bad idea these things are for a number of months and then the next year they actually introduce it themselves. The member for Stretton will be back here in 12 months time saying, 'What a great bill this is. This is something we really need to pass. The government is fully in support of the local seafood industry and we need to pass this bill.' I can tell you that I, for one, will be reminding him what he said here tonight.

This is entirely workable. The government just needs to get out of the way of the seafood industry and support local seafood. We have some of the best seafood in the world. Everywhere we went—everywhere—everybody supported this bill. As I say, even the Labor members on the committee supported this bill but then they changed their mind at the last minute. That is a real problem with the committee system.

The member for Bundaberg should go back and look at the transcripts of the hearings that we had in Bundaberg, Townsville and Cairns. The types of questions the members asked there and the responses they got would have indicated to everybody—it certainly indicated to me—that they were in support of this bill and in support of the concept. If the government members thought there were issues with the implementation of this bill, they could have suggested amendments to it. They could have said, 'We will do this a slightly different way.' Instead, we got something from the health department that basically said that it may not be consistent with national law. It did not say it was not consistent; it just said it may not be consistent. I am sure we could have worked around that if the members had been real to what they said and what they did at the committee's hearings.

I am in full support of this bill, and the restaurants that I have spoken to in my area are fully supportive of this bill. In fact, a lot of restaurants already have on their menus that they are providing local seafood. They know when they buy it from a wholesaler that it is locally provided or wild seafood and they put that fact on their menu. In fact, sometimes they can charge a little bit more for that. What is wrong with that? What is really wrong with the system we have now and the system that the government wants to continue to be in place is that people do not know where the seafood they are putting in their mouth comes from. That is an issue. The government are being pig-headed about this because it is not their bill; it is the Katter's bill instead. I urge the members to reconsider that whole thing and support this bill.