




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.30 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I rise to speak to the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021. To start, I reflect that I had some barramundi for lunch today at the cafeteria. It was a lovely piece of tempura barramundi. I meant to get it grilled. The problem was that I did not know where it was from. It would have been nice to know. I am sure it was taken locally, but we do not know. That happens all too frequently in Queensland. The purpose of this bill is to ensure we know where seafood comes from and we are informed consumers. I will go into the detail of why that is very important.

This bill offers two clear choices for the government which has the right to say whether or not this bill passes. The first choice is to continue to endorse the deceit of consumers. We need to protect consumers from deceit. That is happening now. There is strong evidence to suggest that the fish going onto plates is not locally grown and locally sourced and is rebadged as something that it is not. The government can choose to allow that deceit to continue. The other choice is to inform consumers and, at the same time, stimulate our seafood industry. What a great endeavour. What a great thing we could do. How much should this cost? It will not cost very much at all. Why would we not do this?

The KAP always has a pretty ambitious policy agenda. Sometimes we put bills into parliament that we know will be pretty difficult to get through. This is one of the easy ones. This is the one where we thought, 'Crickey, it is not a game changer. This is one everyone should support because how could you possibly not.' It is a no-brainer bill. I have become entirely cynical after being here for 10 years. Despite that cynicism, I still thought that this one should be easy. How wrong I was. The participants in the committee process—even restaurateurs and those in the hospitality industry who are supposed to be the aggrieved in this situation—are aghast that this bill will not go through.

Ms Pugh: Really!

Mr KATTER: I take the interjection. Yes really, because most of them are saying, 'We do this already,' but unfortunately not everyone does it. That is why we need this legislation. You might be ignorant to that fact, but I actually talk to people on the ground.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Direct your comments through the chair, member for Traeger.

Mr KATTER: That provided a great opportunity to engage with the industry on this and that is what they told me. I would love to introduce anyone who would like to meet these people.

We want better transparency of seafood origins by labelling where it comes from. That provides a great opportunity to stimulate jobs, local business and a primary industry—a primary industry that gets belted around the ears in this House quite often. Here is a good way to pay it back and stimulate that industry.

There was hardly any resistance to this proposal throughout the committee hearings, which were extensive. The committee did a good job of touring around and engaging with local producers and local restaurant and cafe owners. There was a healthy combination of people involved in aquaculture and wild catch and marketing as well. There was a broad cross-section of contributors to this debate.

I was surprised when the government report came back saying that it does not support the bill. With all my cynicism, even I was surprised. It enhanced my surprise when I learned that Labor in New South Wales had put a carbon copy of this bill forward twice and the LNP blocked it. You can pardon my cynicism about the intent of voters in this place when we have a bill that is copy of what the Labor Party has put forward twice in New South Wales and was blocked by the LNP. We have the opportunity to pass this legislation. I hope people consider their conscience before they choose which way they will vote. Despite me saying it is not a game changer, it does mean a hell of a lot to those people who will benefit from this.

The basis of the bill is CoOL, country-of-origin labelling. It ensures that seafood is treated the same in the hospitality sector as in the retail sector. In 2016 the federal government enforced this on the retail sector. There was a lot of resistance then—a lot more resistance than we are getting now. For some reason, they failed to extend that beyond the retail sector. Ever since, we have been saying that we should expand it to the hospitality sector. It makes perfect sense.

The purpose of this bill is twofold. Primarily, it enhances consumer awareness about the seafood they purchase and consume. Let us talk about coal and mining. Everyone wants to know where things are sourced and whether it is environmentally safe and sustainable. We are all about the sourcing and origin of things. What about applying the same rationale to seafood. Would that not make perfect sense?

The second objective is to support an Australian primary industry—the seafood industry. Thousands of jobs in many members' electorates rely on this industry. We will be interested to see how they vote on this.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Members, there is far too much background noise. I cannot hear the member on his feet.

Mr KATTER: To achieve its purpose, the bill: removes the country-of-origin labelling exemption on food service that currently exists and extends it to dining outlets and hospitality venues; and ensures food service menus identify the origin of seafood. It could be the specific location, the region or the country. That is at the discretion of the business. There is flexibility for the business. Failing that, they just need to put an 'i' on the menu. We have 'gf' for gluten free and 'v' for vegan. This would require an 'i'.

The only argument against this from the hospitality industry—and from memory it was from the one person against this in all the public hearings; members will have to excuse me if the words are not entirely correct—was that it would be too much of a cost impost on small business. As I recall, it was a government member on the committee who said, 'What are you talking about costs? Is it the cost of a printed sheet in the menu? Are you talking about that, are you?' He said, 'You could have to print another 100 of those.' It does not cost nothing, but 100 new printed sheets if that was required, which it usually would not be, is not a huge impost. That was the biggest argument put forward. There are all the benefits on one side and the biggest argument against was the cost. If in doubt, they could leave the 'i' on the menu so they are covered. That is what they could do in the case of a seafood mix, if it gets a bit complicated or if things change every day. If in doubt, leave the 'i' on and it will be okay.

Most restaurants like to showcase where they get their fish from anywhere. We are probably talking more about a few Chinese restaurants and fish and chip shops. A lot take advantage of selling something called barramundi but which is Asian sea bass or whatever else. They buy it cheaper and sell it for more and get a better margin and compete with the guy up the road who is doing the right thing by the consumer and paying for the domestically caught fish and labelling and pricing it accordingly. We are trying to avoid that.

COVID-19 taught us a lot of lessons about relying on imports. Sadly, we are now a net importer of seafood in Australia, but we shouldn't be. This is a way to stimulate the industry to get us back there. I have tried to give you an opportunity to stimulate the industry and you seem to be turning it down.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr KATTER: That is an interesting groan. Tell me where I am wrong here, because I am trying to give you something to help.

Ms Boyd: You've got the wrong act to start with.

Mr KATTER: I would like to hear that interjection again from the member, but they do not seem too interested in engaging. I am interested in any argument you have. I would like to address it because this is important for us.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Traeger, it does not assist to have an argument across the chamber.

Mr KATTER: I am very interested to hear what is going to be said in this debate because any opposition needs to be addressed. I would love to argue the substance of the bill that we have here. We are buying a lot of seafood. Like I said, the Northern Territory has been doing this since 2008 and it has been a roaring success. It has stimulated economic activity. We have a copy of the report that was done on that—it was a review of it. The New South Wales opposition tried introducing this legislation twice.

(Time expired)