




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.30 pm), continuing in reply: I rise to make what seemingly will be the final contribution to the debate on the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill. I will continue from my speech during the previous sitting week when I spoke a little about the politics of this topic, which is certainly very confusing. We have heard Murray Watt saying that we need to act on this federally. He agrees in principle that this is a worthwhile endeavour and that country of origin labelling is required—

Mr Andrew: It's the right thing to do.

Mr KATTER:—and the right thing to do. He said in principle that it is the right thing to do. Then the New South Wales state Labor Party twice said—and I will go through some of the things that were said—it is the right thing to do and we should be doing it here. Of course we should. In the Northern Territory the Labor government said that this is a good thing to do. It has been operating there since 2018—no, it has been longer than that. They have had a formal review done that said what a roaring success it was. It was a glowing report.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KATTER: It was 2007 when that was introduced. They have had glowing reports. Everyone speaks highly of it. There is certainly nothing negative coming out of the Northern Territory about it. It is confusing when we then try to introduce the same principle into the Queensland parliament and members are not supporting it.

I mentioned that the government made some respectful contributions, saying that this is a worthwhile endeavour and there is a lot of good sentiment. The problem in this place is we need to marry that sentiment with actions and something real for the people out there. The sentiment in here really means nothing unless we are converting that into something real that benefits them. Unfortunately, saying nice things in this place might make members feel a little bit better, but it does not help the people we are trying to help. We are paid to come in here and pass legislation and to help those people.

Honourable members can see why we are so frustrated when we try to introduce something that is simple, that does not cost the government anything and barely costs hospitality anything, despite the arguments about the exorbitant cost of printing paper and the exorbitant cost of chalk and Nikko markers on the board or glossy Chinese menus. It is so expensive to print a second set of those menus with an 'i' on it! That already is done to denote items are vegan and gluten free, but apparently it is so hard to add an 'i' on it! That is a big cost! Suddenly members are very interested in the costs facing small business. I thought we were debating small business. We were here defending small business from seven-day trade, which is the ongoing warfare between big business and small business. We were trying to defend small business against the government passing laws to open up seven-day trade. All

of a sudden members are interested in backing small business on this, but not on the 30 per cent power increases they are looking at facing down the track. This is the one that is hurting; that is what the government is going to stand their ground on. That was the big argument that came out.

The cost of reprinting the menus and the paper was talked about—and I will say again the hospitality lobby group came under scrutiny, and there were good, objective contributions in the committee from all and sundry. Under scrutiny—and it did not all come from me—they said that the main cost would be in reprinting menus. Under further prosecution with words along the lines of, ‘Does that mean printing 10, 50 or 100 new pages for the night?’, he said, ‘Yep, that can cost a lot of money, 100 pages reprinted for the night.’ They will not be changing their seafood every night, but that is the big cost, and I recognise it is a cost. It is not nothing, but let’s weigh this up against the benefits. Let’s go through those benefits now.

Before honourable members cast their vote and think about this—because they will have to live with their decision forever after this. They can turn around and say, ‘They are going to do it federally anyway.’ They have it within their power now to change the outcome for those people who would benefit from this legislation, and that is most people in Queensland because they buy seafood, and we will get to that. I want to go through KAP’s motivation for pushing this.

It simply came from people on the ground saying, ‘Hey, we would really like some help here. We have a lot of pressures on us. This is an easy way the government can help us. Would you mind promoting this?’ Fine. What are the drivers behind this? It is pro-Australian, and I would like to think all of us are trying to do whatever we can to stimulate Australian industry, particularly when we can align that with the environmental outcomes we all desire. The government places all these harsh measures and environmental standards on our fishing and aquaculture industries, but they are happy to allow other fish to be imported and have it labelled however the importer likes. They are happy to enable that. Some of the standards that apply to imports are horrible. The government is inadvertently enabling that by allowing people in the hospitality service to label fish however they like. That does not happen everywhere, but it does happen.

The bill is pro-Australian. It is what the public wants. We in the KAP are pretty focused on the industry side of things, but we also have to be mindful that everyone out there is a consumer—there are very few people we meet who are not consumers of seafood—and they deserve the right to know what they are putting in their mouth. That is a pretty simple proposition and I would say an implied right that people would expect to have. The problem is that most people do not even realise that what they are buying on occasion is not what it is labelled as. The example that is constantly given is Asian sea bass, which comes straight out of the Delta Mekong and can be labelled as barramundi in the shop. That is an insult for so many reasons. It is a traditional Australian Aboriginal word and this imported fish that is grown under horrid conditions is being imported and sold at the same price, and that person is well within their rights to sell it at the same price. I have to be honest I love my fish, but I cannot always tell what it is. I am sure that quite often I am paying a price for something that is not what it should be. This will catch out some people. It will hurt some people who cannot get access to it. We have to think about what we are trying to achieve here. What are our aims and objectives? There might be some costs, but there are also some huge benefits.

Thirdly, it is practical and achievable. The KAP bring things into the parliament sometimes to make a statement or to generate a debate. The topic might be difficult, it might be a bit of a stretch, but we still want to debate it. However, this one was an easy one. This is one we thought would easily be taken up by the government because it had been done before in other states, it had performed successfully and the sentiment seemed to be positive everywhere. We then have to ask: why are we not supporting it here tonight? Is it because of the cost of the reprinting of menus or the cost of the chalk on the seafood board at the seafood shop? I am going to go out on a limb and say I think there is a bit of politics being played. It is practical and achievable.

Here are a few facts I want to go over before the vote is cast.

A government member interjected.

Mr KATTER: This is nowhere near the end of my speech. I am not sure where that came from.

A government member interjected.

Mr KATTER: Sorry, my apologies. In 2019-20 a total of 334,615 tonnes of seafood was consumed in Australia, equating to 12.4 kilograms per person. Unfortunately, 62 per cent of this consumed seafood was imported. I heard a lot in the debate, ‘If you cannot access it, tough luck. That is an impost on the people who cannot access it.’

Of course that is a problem, but how do you stimulate more production? You want to drive demand to lift production—that is how it works. As stated in the report that was done on the Northern Territory review, we have the ability to enhance the value of our locally produced product by comparing

it to the inferior overseas product, but those opposite are denying us the opportunity to do that. We have enormous capacity in aquaculture, let alone fishing. There are attacks on wild fishing. Here was one opportunity to throw both industries a bone and say, 'Here is an easy way, we are going to stimulate things and help you out.' That would have gone a long way towards improving the relationship between the seafood industry and the government, but that opportunity has gone.

On average in Australia we import 60 to 70 per cent of our seafood per year. We are now a net seafood importer; we never used to be. People must wonder how that is possible. A lot of the demand is driven by the fact that people think that if they could obtain the decent fish that they wanted they would pay for it, but there is no recognition of locally-grown products.

Returning to the Northern Territory example, in 2007-08 they introduced a similar scheme. There was no evidence in the Northern Territory report that were detrimental effects on small business. I am sure that they would have manifested in some form and that would have made its way into this debate if they existed, considering the scheme has been operating for so long. It is worthwhile remembering that the provisions in this bill were introduced into the retail industry, which was a cost and an impost on them, but we need to expand it one step further into hospitality.

Biosecurity, which has not been talked about much in the debate, is an enormous issue. We have seen evidence of this through white spot in prawns. Importing seafood brings with it risks. They have inferior standards overseas, but you enable this risk when you do not give us a leg up in our domestic industry and deny us that right. The example of the high importation rate of seafood was highlighted when recent reports indicated that ISKNV-like and SGIV viral DNA—showing severe fish viruses—were present in uncooked and head-on eviscerated non-salmonid finfish commodities imported into Australia at a prevalence greater than five per cent. It is happening. There is seafood being imported now that represents a threat to our local fishing stocks. This was a way to try to restrict that. That experience highlights the importance of having our standards and biosecurity compliance. The example I gave highlights the noncompliance we have and the need to restrict those imports as best we can.

One of the other points that was raised in the debate surrounded the technical issues of operating through the Food Act. Why did that not pose a problem in New South Wales or the Northern Territory?

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr KATTER: I listened to the contribution of the member for Pine Rivers and I was quite confused. You offered all this great sentiment and you have the vast resources of government, but you say you cannot find a way to do this because it does not fit into the Food Act. Is that the reason you cannot do it? We can do it federally and in the Northern Territory and New South Wales, but we cannot do it here for that reason. Do not give me the excuse—offer it to the producers in your own electorate. I will be giving you a lot opportunity in your local media to explain that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Member, direct your comments through the chair please.

Mr KATTER: Those members who want to vote against this will have plenty of opportunities to explain it to their electorates after they vote on the bill. I said I would mention that the member for Bundaberg was a great passenger on the plane. We had a good conversation, thank you very much. There may be some imposts on the poor fish and chip shop owner; that point is not without merit. The poor aquaculture farmer and the poor fishermen are forced under the strict environmental conditions in this country—which you could say are a good thing—to now compete with overseas imports. It might be the minority, but there will be some people who are pricing fish that is imported and people are buying it, paying a price for it, and thinking it is local domestic catch. We can never escape that fact because if they have to import, they are going to try to get the best price they can. That will always be a problem. I do not see how putting that 'i' on the menu is a big impost. I fail to see how that is a big impost.

We were talking about technicalities and people were saying that this cannot be done through the bill. We saw the ethanol mandate bill passed by this place. Not one fine has been issued as a result of that. There have been a lot of policies that I have seen go through this House that send a signal. That one was not successful in sending a signal because clearly people saw the government was not serious. There have been a lot of things in this place where the government has sent the signal and without policing it, it has generated a change in behaviour. If those opposite want to say it will be difficult to police and it will create dramas—if they want to create those excuses—that is fine but it would not hurt to send a signal to those industries to say we are trying to do the right thing.

We have a lot of local operators. There are small businesses—Chinese restaurants, fish and chip shops and pubs—that are battling away. We have Ben Heath at Innisfail Seafood and Lindsey Hughes at Farmer Meets Foodie. A lot of people are battling away out there trying to showcase local products, attract that premium and benefit from that so it can lift our market. Again, if we do not pass this bill then we deny them the opportunity to do that.

In terms of economic nationalism, we should be thinking about being able to feed ourselves and ways to stimulate the economy. There was a lot of talk through the COVID pandemic about being more self-sufficient. There was a large appetite generated throughout that period in terms of what we can do domestically for our protein. Here is a terrific source of protein that we have available, whether through wild catch or in aquaculture. There are amazing opportunities, but it needs to be stimulated. That is the space where government has to be. We have not said throw millions of dollars into the industry to subsidise it or stimulate it; we are saying here is a passive way that is cost effective for taxpayers.

I will table the position that was taken by the Premier and the agriculture minister prior to Christmas where the sentiment towards fisheries was that we need to stimulate production and support our fisheries.

Tabled paper: Joint media statement, dated 5 December 2021, by the Premier and Minister for the Olympics, Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk, and the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, Hon. Mark Furner, titled 'Fill n' Chill with plenty of Queensland Seafood this Christmas' [1740](#).

That is a good sentiment to promote. I find it very confusing to marry that sentiment up with this passive way of trying to stimulate the industry. I think this is a constructive method that is endorsed across most of Australia. Surprisingly, we find this too hard. With all of the resources of government and all of the people in government, there are no amendments to improve this bill or modify it to make it work. They say, 'We cannot do it.'

To use the words of Labor shadow minister for primary industries Jenny Aitchison—

Given the choice I think most people in New South Wales would choose to buy locally caught fish, but the Nationals refuse to back local fishers. The Northern Territory has done it and the Queensland LNP have advocated for it. Even the New South Wales Nationals and Liberals promised it back in 2016, but the New South Wales Nationals and Liberals have failed to deliver on this or their long-promised industry marketing packages. It's disgraceful that in fish and chip shops across New South Wales we see collateral from the Queensland government promoting Australian seafood but nothing from the New South Wales government.

I read that because there are mixed messages in amongst that and I feel that we owe the people better. We owe consumers better and we owe the producers better. We may disagree about a lot of things in this House, but we are generally trying to be constructive here with the government and do something good for the state and it is disappointing that people will be let down in that respect.

Finally, I want to thank a lot of the people who contributed to getting us where we are today. Janis Rossiter is a passionate Queenslanders who outlined how disappointing it is how much we import fish and that that should be turned around. The Australian Council of Prawn Fisheries supported this endeavour heavily and the country-of-origin labelling and outlined that COVID-19 served to reinforce Australians' desire for the origin of their food in their quest to seek out local food and to be self-sufficient. Thanks also to Seafood Industry Australia, the Australian Prawn Farmers Association, the Queensland Seafood Industry Association and the Australian Barramundi Farmers Association. We run across these guys all the time and we saw Tim Bade in Townsville on National Barra Day last Friday. We were saying, 'Let's eat domestically produced barramundi.' They said, 'How do you think the bill's going to go?' It is always exactly the same response: a shake of the head. They ask, 'Why? Why could they possibly not support this?'

We all know why and it is disappointing that there are some people in this House who would vote another way if we did not have this rigid party structure pulling people in despite the fact that we are denying Queenslanders some good outcomes and some productive legislation that we could work together on. That is not the path the government chose to take here.

I forgot to mention one other person, David Wren at Karumba. We had a great visit with him. He is an enormously progressive fisherman who has tried to work in with the government and we had the benefit of going out there for the day. Again, I will be explaining to people like David and saying, 'We couldn't get it across the line, mate, I'm sorry. You've taken a lot of hits over the years and you feel like you're being battered from pillar to post and you feel like the world's against you and you're working hard up there in the hot sun trying to make a living and we can't help you. We tried to do something to stimulate you, but we didn't get it across the line.' I think we all look bad in this. I really hope the government reconsiders its decision or individuals within the government consider what is the right thing to do here by their electorates, not by their party. I will certainly be doing my best to let everyone in the Queensland public know how people voted on this and they can do their best to explain to them why they voted that way. With that, I commend the bill to the House.