




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR HILL

Record of Proceedings, 30 August 2022

FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (6.06 pm): I commend the member for Traeger for introducing the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021. I would like to read from the explanatory notes under the heading 'Policy objectives and the reasons for them'. There is massive merit behind this bill. It says—

The primary policy objective of the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021 is to require by law mandatory Country of Origin Labelling ... of seafood sold in the food service sector, through "dining outlets", across Queensland. The purpose of this is two-fold: 1) To increase consumer awareness around the origins of seafood being purchased and consumed, and 2) To subsequently support the Australian, and Queensland, seafood industry and the thousands of local jobs it supports.

I will state that again—

To increase consumer awareness around the origins of seafood being purchased and consumed

The bill is about increasing consumer awareness. Two weeks ago we debated the trading hours bill where we heard the word 'consumer' used 300 times and were talking about how we should look after the consumer. Well, this bill is about the consumer. We heard that 300 times in the last sitting. This is about why we should support the consumer in having a choice and being able to go to the supermarket on the weekend. When it comes to the average mums and dads having a choice and having consumer awareness, they are being totally denied.

There are also no requirements to identify the species or the region or country of origin of imported seafood, which equates to around 62 per cent of seafood consumed. If we look at these two ideas together—firstly, 'to increase consumer awareness around the origins of seafood being purchased and consumed' and 'support the Australian, and Queensland, seafood industry' and, secondly, that 62 per cent of the seafood comes from overseas—there is still no requirement to identify the seafood. It is only the food that is produced and caught here in Australia, and that is fresh seafood. I cannot understand why anyone would want to oppose this bill.

What is most concerning about these figures is how unaware Australians who buy seafood from dining outlets—whether they are fish and chip shops or restaurants—are about where their seafood comes from. There is evidence that the absence of country-of-origin labelling of seafood served at restaurants and cafes often negatively impacts consumer awareness and understanding, with more than 50 per cent of people often incorrectly assuming that the seafood they purchase is produced in Australia when there is no stated country of origin. That means that 50 per cent of the people out there think they are eating barramundi or whatever it is from Queensland but they are actually eating seafood from South-East Asia.

I commend the member for Traeger for this and for listening to constituents. Outside of parliament we met representatives of the seafood industry and they were basically telling us that they could not understand why this bill would not be passed and why it would not get over the line, because it is just about consumer awareness. They were absolutely flabbergasted; they could not understand how this could not be supported. The member for Hinchinbrook read out earlier that in 2017 and 2018 the New South Wales government debated a very similar piece of legislation, moved by Labor MP David Mehan.

Disappointingly, the Food Amendment (Seafood Country of Origin Labelling) Bill 2017 was voted down 46 votes to 35, with the National and Liberal MPs of New South Wales opposing the bill. The reality is that it is more about politics than the best outcome for consumers in Queensland.

Speaking of politics, the same thing applied when the KAP introduced the fair milk logo bill. The bill was intended to provide consumer awareness. That bill basically provided that if a farmer was able to produce a litre of milk and he was to receive a sustainable price for that litre of milk, a fair milk logo would go on that milk bottle. In other words, when mums and dads would go into a supermarket or a shop and see the milk bottle displaying that logo, that would identify that that farmer had been paid a fair price. It is pretty simple. It was not Shane Knuth or the KAP that introduced it; it was the dairy farmers who prepared the bill for us. However, it was opposed by Woolworths, by Coles, by Labor and by the LNP. I do acknowledge that the minister afterwards recognised it was a good idea and provided a million dollars to help the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation implement that logo, but since we introduced that bill we have lost 270 dairy farmers.

Here we have a great opportunity to support, save and protect the seafood industry. This bill is about consumer awareness, as I mentioned before. It is about identifying whether the barramundi you are eating is from South-East Asia or is caught locally and is fresh. Many times while out driving you will see a sign outside a fish and chip shop or a local restaurant which says 'fresh gulf mackerel'. You can guarantee that mums and dads would be racing in there to purchase that because they know exactly where the fish comes from.

We are a massive island of, I think, three million square miles. We have an abundance of fish. However, we are that stupid that we import 60 per cent of our seafood and no-one knows where that seafood comes from. This bill puts it out there: it provides awareness, transparency and the opportunity for people to know, as they sit in that restaurant or go to that fish and chip shop, that their fish comes from the local area and not South-East Asia. I commend the bill to the House and congratulate the member for Traeger for introducing it.