




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2022

FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.02 pm): It gives me great pleasure to speak in wholehearted support of the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021. I would like to make a declaration that to this day I still hold my master fisherman's licence. As a very proud fisherman, I was one of the first people to cryovac fish at sea. We used a nice brine to ensure the product was the best it could be. That product was Spanish mackerel. The season has now been shut down—and I used to own eight tonnes of Spanish mackerel quota. Sadly, the industry has been devalued and a lot of people who now own the Spanish mackerel quota do not even know if their industry is going to survive the next couple of months.

I would like to thank and congratulate Katter's Australian Party for introducing the bill which proposes mandatory country-of-origin labelling for all seafood sold in Queensland hospitality venues. Many Queenslanders are probably not even aware that most of the state's seafood is now imported from countries where labour costs and food safety standards are a lot lower than those that apply here. I can vouch for that. When we started getting basa in the country, people were telling me that some of the fillets were a certain size but now they are a lot smaller. It goes to show that some of these things are not sustainable either.

Mr McDonald: They call them delta catfish.

Mr ANDREW: Yes. According to the Commonwealth department of agriculture's website, 70 per cent of the seafood consumed in Australia is imported, predominantly from Asia. With such a long coastline and a relative small population, this is really a disgrace. I have no idea of the carbon footprint of importing so much fish from overseas, but I am willing to bet it is huge.

In 2018 country-of-origin labelling in Australia became mandatory in retail shops but not in restaurants, clubs and takeaway food shops, where most seafood is consumed. If enacted, the bill will ensure that when we order fish from a restaurant or at our local fish and chip shop, we do so knowing whether it was imported or sourced from Australian waters. This bill therefore fills a big gap in consumer awareness here in Queensland. If passed, the bill would also send an important and long overdue message of appreciation and support to the men and women of the state's commercial fishing industry—an industry, I might add, that has suffered more than any other at the heavy hand of officialdom here in Queensland.

Currently, the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction to have enacted seafood labelling at the point of immediate consumption. This is important for the purposes of this debate. In 2008 the Northern Territory government introduced legislation requiring licensed fishery retailers to label seafood as imported if it was not harvested in Australia. In 2011 the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation funded an assessment of the impact of laws which was undertaken by industry consultants under the supervision of a steering committee comprising industry and government representatives. This assessment used face-to-face interviews with food service establishments and consumers to gauge the development of opinion and the impact of laws on consumers and businesses in the Northern

Territory. Consumers indicated a strong preference to purchase Australian seafood—and I do not blame them, because it is the best in the world—with a willingness to pay up to 25 per cent more for Australian product than imported.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation report also found that fish wholesalers reduced imported products and began to source more local products, which was driven by the consumer. The report on the implementation of legislation in the Northern Territory indicates that the cost of labelling is not significant. In fact, the study found that in the Northern Territory experience, changes to labelling were supported by fishers, seafood retailers and consumers alike and that they were very happy with the result. The report is the only authoritative study on the impact of labelling in the food service industry.

Queensland consumers want to have local and freshly caught seafood. That is why we need to know what fish on the menu is local and what is not. Fish producers also want country-of-origin labelling laws changed to give them a better chance of competing against cheap imports. When we consume seafood at a restaurant, a takeaway shop or a fish and chip shop in this state we should do so knowing its origins and we should not have to ask. The bill achieves that aim with the least possible impost on business. Above all, it offers valuable support to the fishing men and women of this state. Believe me, that means something. It means something to me.

I would like to close my remarks by offering a big thankyou to all the professional fishermen in Queensland—and the fisher ladies as well—many of whom have fished this coastline for many generations. I was taught by some of these generational fishermen. One man, Jim Edwards, who has sadly passed away, who was called the 'King of the Red Emperor', taught me just about everything I know. He was a good man. These fishermen deserve to be honoured for their hard work and dedication to providing one of the healthiest and most sustainable food sources in this state.

The Queensland commercial fishing industry may be small but it is a mighty industry that I believe still has plenty of great potential. We live in a state that borders an ocean. That gives us vast economic value and vast quantities of resources that we make very little use of. Developing and maintaining a diversified market base in Queensland is vital for the state's food security. Honourable members only have to look to the president of the World Bank, who just forecast that in coming years starvation and death will be paramount. This has just been said. We need to ensure our food security.

Mr Dametto: Self-sufficient.

Mr ANDREW: Yes, we need to be very self-sufficient. That would protect our sovereignty and our way of life in this state. It is also important that the skills of this industry are passed down to the next generation and are not lost altogether. This is why I am very happy to commend this bill to the House.