




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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### **FOOD (LABELLING OF SEAFOOD) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.40 pm): I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate of this bill. I thank all of the submitters to the committee, in particular Barry Ehrke from Australian Seafood at the Bundaberg port and Lincoln Kirchner from the Seafood Smokery, for their contributions to the regional hearings. We have an opportunity to do the right thing and to support the Queensland seafood industry and consumers of Queensland seafood, the best seafood in the world. It is not unreasonable for consumers to have confidence and be fully aware of the origin of the seafood they are buying.

With the continual attacks on the fishing industry, we know that at least 77 per cent of all seafood is imported from overseas. I and the people I represent want to know whether we are consuming food that originated in the sewers of South-East Asia. I am not surprised that the government is not supporting the Queensland fishing industry, because it has a long track record in terms of how it treats the fishing industry, particularly around policy and reforms.

I refer to the Queensland trawl fishery. Since the introduction of the new fishery management arrangements and coastal zoning, the government has created a massive level of industry uncertainty and curtailed investment and seems incapable of providing information needed for industry to adapt to poorly developed fishery management within the trawl fishing industry.

As well, the reef line fishers have raised their collective disgust at the management of Spanish mackerel, king threadfin, mud crabs and sand crabs. The list of fisheries under threat has nothing to do with sustainability but everything to do with mismanagement and political manipulation.

The coral trout fishery right now is also on the brink of collapse thanks to quota manipulation and price fixing, an all-too-common scenario. The industry had 200 tonnes stripped away by Fisheries Queensland in recent years under the fable of stocks that are in decline. The introduction of new reporting regulations was promoted to achieve better management of our fisheries. The impact of this reporting is to introduce red tape for no benefit and is used as another means to make a simple task of running a small business almost not worth the extra effort.

The government needs to reset, follow due diligence and get all of the briefs and recommendations independently fact checked and audited before continuing along a ludicrous path to destroy commercial fishing families—families who want to see seafood labelling introduced.

Fisheries Queensland's management of the east coast trawl fishery under the sustainable seafood strategy, a jigsaw of regional zones along the coastline, will soon bite into the state's local seafood supply, with closures of these trawl operations under this system imminent. Closures of this regional zoning system are rapidly looming, within weeks. The trawl fishing allocation zone from Hervey Bay to Mackay at 87.4 per cent exhausted is really disturbing. Of course, when you talk about that amount of fish—

**Mr WHITING:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. This bill is not about a government fishing quota policy; it is about the private member's bill. The subject covered by the member is not in the explanatory notes or in the bill.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): I have been listening to the contribution. I think the member is being broadly relevant to the bill, but I would ask the member to come to the long title of the private member's bill.

**Mr BENNETT:** When we talk about labelling the origin of our seafood, the remaining 12 per cent of the allocation which is supposed to sustain local business reliant on the sourcing and selling of locally caught products will come to a crashing halt in November 2022. For seafood lovers who want to see labelling of origin and who reside in or visit from Hervey Bay to Mackay, it means a whole range of local trawler caught products—prawns, Moreton Bay bugs, cuttlefish and squid—that are currently caught in these waters, along with the already banned Hervey Bay scallop, will be off the menu until the government allows businesses to recommence after the November closure.

Under regional management, the pattern of statewide closures and prohibitions will impact the supply and cost of local seafood for long periods during any one year—the same seafood that we want to label in terms of origin and freshness. Resident trawl fleet families working from Hervey Bay, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Yeppoon and Mackay, who all gave evidence to the committee about seafood labelling, face the prospect of businesses closing. They might lose their local and winter tourist clientele, remaining idle at the wharf without income during peak prawn season. They will become nomadic to distant waters in other jurisdictions that will be overfished.

The silent stakeholders in fisheries management about whom we heard a lot tonight from other contributors—home cooks, tourists and food service industries—can expect to experience shortages, higher prices due to logistical costs and interrupted supply. It is not a sustainability or overfishing issue; it is about labelling and it is about the action of a government which impedes and stops the right to source seafood from our own locality. Notwithstanding that fishery managers notify fishers of closures, seafood consumers have been overlooked and need these issues brought forward.

If the government needed any reminder of why we need to back industry and support this bill, I remind the House of the almost 13,000 Queenslanders who reacted to the industry's social media post within a 24-hour period. The silent stakeholders want a say on this particular issue. The Queensland community want fresh, local seafood provided by Queensland professional fishermen. They always want the right to know from where the product originated.

I want to pick up on a couple of issues that I found really interesting. I thank the member for Burdekin for raising the black market issue. It is a present and real issue out there. The member for Maiwar raised issues about biosecurity and white spot within the prawn industry. Again, knowing the origin is really important.

In closing, I will give one example. I have been visiting the Solomon Islands for a long time with a charity I work with. When we talk about origins, it is interesting to see the canning factories and so on clearly identifying where that seafood came from. The member for Maiwar raised issues concerning overfishing. It is evident. In the first year you could hardly see anything out to sea, but over the years there has been an increase in the big mother boats coming in every night and taking all that seafood to go out and catch tuna. It is a big issue.

As a community, we should know where seafood comes from and we should have confidence in our seafood industry—the best seafood in the world which is clean and green. Let us back the bill and support what the Katters are trying to do here tonight.