




Speech By  
**Hon. Yvette D'Ath**

**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 August 2022

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

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (5.41 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Food (Labelling of Seafood) Amendment Bill 2021, introduced by the member for Traeger on 17 November 2021. The bill proposes to amend the Food Act 2006 to require, by law, mandatory country-of-origin labelling of seafood sold at dining and takeaway food outlets across Queensland. The stated purpose of the bill is to raise consumer awareness around the origins of seafood being purchased and consumed and to subsequently support the Australian and Queensland seafood industries and the local jobs they provide.

I would like to make it clear at the outset that the broad policy intent of this bill is certainly valid, and I appreciate the member for Traeger's efforts to support Queensland seafood producers who I am sure, we all agree, provide products of outstanding quality. At its core, providing consumers with more information regarding the provenance of their food is a positive policy initiative, as are efforts to support our seafood industry.

In that vein, I note that initiatives are in place at both a national level and in Queensland to promote local seafood such as 'Great Australian Seafood, Easy As' and 'Ask for Queensland Seafood'. It is also noted that many businesses already choose to identify the source of their seafood. For those businesses that make misleading claims about the source of their seafood, there are already legislative frameworks in place both nationally and within Queensland. With all this in mind, it is the government's view that this particular bill, as it is drafted, must be opposed.

I turn to the report of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee's inquiry into the bill, which included industry consultation. The committee recommended that the bill not be passed and that the seafood country-of-origin initiative proposed by the bill be referred to the Australian government, requesting that they take the national lead. Consultation on the bill by the State Development and Regional Industries Committee showed there was support from the fishing, aquaculture and seafood sectors. However, restaurant and food importing sector submissions did not support the proposal, arguing it would significantly increase regulatory burden and compliance costs.

More importantly, however, in concluding that the bill should not be passed, the committee noted the advice of Queensland Health that the amendments would potentially be incompatible with the national Food Regulation Agreement and that any reform in this area must be led by the Commonwealth in collaboration with all states and territories. On this basis, it is clear that these proposed amendments are not a suitable vehicle for the policy intent the member seeks.

In addition to the position adopted by the committee, I note that the country-of-origin labelling of seafood is not a public health and safety issue and should be considered a consumer protection and information issue. It might also be reasonably seen as a trade issue. For comparison, I note that country-of-origin labelling requirements for all packaged foods were moved from the Food Standards Code to a regulation under Australian Consumer Law and is no longer the responsibility of food regulators in

Australia as of six years ago. Accordingly, the Australian government is the appropriate lead, as the existing country-of-origin food labelling requirements are enacted under Australian Consumer Law and are enforced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

Another consequence of including these provisions in the Food Act—and one that I think is particularly important—is that compliance and enforcement of these consumer information protections would fall to Queensland Health public health units. This would divert resources away from important public health and safety priorities. Compliance would also be difficult due to challenges in testing the origin of seafood. This is a consumer issue about knowing the source. It is not a health issue and it should not be put in the Food Act requiring public health units to enforce compliance.

In relation to the recommendation that the bill be referred to the Australian government, I note that the Australian government has recently considered this issue nationally and undertook a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis in 2021. It concluded the costs of introducing mandatory seafood labelling in the food service industry outweighed the benefits. For this reason, the government will not be referring the matter to the Australian government as this matter has already been recently considered. As I have stated, the policy intent of this bill is worthy of consideration, but the bill itself must be opposed by the government for the reasons stated.