



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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**FISHERIES (STRUCTURAL REFORM STAGE 2) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT REGULATION**

**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (4.58 pm): I move—

That the Fisheries (Structural Reform Stage 2) and Other Legislation Amendment Regulation 2024, Subordinate Legislation No. 52 of 2024, tabled in the House on 21 May 2024, be disallowed.

This debate is about much more than just the regulations this motion seeks to disallow: this motion is about food security, protection of agriculture and the sovereignty of our country. The KAP is giving the government a prime opportunity to right the wrongs of the former Labor government with regard to the commercial fishing industry and the former Labor government's ideologically-based policy which was lacking in evidence—it was not evidence based or evidence driven—and driven by ideology.

This new government made a comment that we have a chance to set policy based on evidence and science, not ideology, and to lead Queenslanders from this House, not from a UNESCO office overseas. Members might remember that there was a comment made by the federal environment minister during the last parliament which created scrutiny over the east coast fishery, presumably just to smash the commercial industry on the east coast. Almost as an afterthought they said, 'We're pretty interested in the interaction that fish have with the gulf as well.' They were worried about the fish that swim all of the way from the east coast of Queensland and into the gulf and back down towards the Northern Territory border. It was like they said, 'There's nothing to back it up. We've got no science at all to back that up, but we're worried about it so we might throw that into the mix as well and ban commercial fishing through the gulf. We haven't really done any testing to see if the fishery is secure or if it's healthy, but let's just ban that as well while we're at it.'

That is pretty bad news for those who live in Karumba, the area that I represent, Weipa and the member for Hinchinbrook's area on the east coast. Karumba is a fishing mecca. Yes, there are a lot of recreational fishermen who go up there and there are a lot of recreational fishermen who do not like commercial fishermen, but the big fuel depots, the food supplies, the grocery stores, the trucking industry with the trucks, the prawns and the commercial seafood out of there have a symbiotic relationship. All of those industries rely heavily on that commercial industry and the grunt that it gives, and to see that one only has to take a trip around there. I went out there with a committee with the member for Lockyer and saw David Wren's place. A tiny little town like Karumba, where the base population is 500 or 600, is a powerhouse because of that industry, and that is being smashed on the head. The government needs to talk to David Wren now with his \$10 million investment that he is getting smashed on.

This regulation has halved the area that people can fish up there—cut that in half—and bought out a lot of the licences. Some of these regulations are about paying out that compensation, so most of those cases are closed and people cannot apply for them anymore, as I understand it, and most of

them have been paid out. Members might say that we cannot undo that, but when can we not undo anything? What is more important? I would argue again that food security and the protection of agriculture are so important that we should find a way. It might be hard but it is not impossible. We need to send a signal to the rest of Queensland that we do care about these issues and that we care about agriculture and having the fishing industry. This must be wound back. There can be no other way.

Some 20 licences have been taken away in the gulf, but most of those licences were latents. There was not much effort associated with them, so these regulations have now effectively compressed all of that effort into that one area. Tensions among fishermen have already started in those areas. Many of these regulations were predicated on threatened and endangered species, but now this has only exacerbated that same issue. If we cared about threatened and endangered species we would not have compressed all of that fishing effort into 50 per cent of the area in the gulf, but that is exactly what has happened.

We can stand here and say, 'It's pretty hard and it's all done,' but this is our last chance to try to at least stop this and turn it around. I will be the first to admit that it will be tough and it will be difficult, but it must start. These regulations lock in ceding that sovereignty over our food production to the likes of UNESCO. How many times do we hear the media in Canberra saying, 'We've got to do this. UNESCO will give us a downgrade or they will say nasty things about us'? In that last election no-one voted for UNESCO; they voted for us in this parliament and for us to make decisions for Queenslanders, and that is what we are trying to demonstrate by moving this disallowance motion tonight.

In terms of what we are talking about in the gulf—I will concentrate on that area because I do not know the east coast as well—the regulations have not reduced any effort. They have increased the conflict between fishermen and they have compressed the fishery. The fishermen who are still left there know there is a target on their backs, but they are the ones who really want to be there so it is going to be a tough fight trying to get rid of any more out of that area. However, we need to bear in mind that a commercial fisherman in the gulf or Karumba may try to get a loan from the bank for their next boat motor or their next vehicle. They will say, 'I'm in commercial fishing and I need to get a loan to buy a house,' or 'I need to extend my loan to get through the next season to get the upgrades on my diesel motor.' They will try to do that, but we have sent the signal. Until we turn that around, which is going to be tough, we are still in exactly the same position in terms of a decline in fishing.

We have to understand what this means. Some 34 out of 84 have handed in their licence and 50 remain. Of the 34 licence holders who are out, all were highly unproductive licences. This goes back to what I was saying about the compression of the fishery. The NX cameras have proven to be the bad idea that we said they probably would be. We in the KAP were dead against those and all they have done is proven that the interaction rates with those threatened and endangered species were much less than anticipated by the—

**Mr Dametto** interjected.

**Mr KATTER:** Yes, if at all; I take the interjection from the member for Hinchinbrook. As I was saying, they were much lower than the anticipated exaggerations that were put out by the environmental groups or environmental activists who were rallying against this industry in the first place. Therefore, the electronic monitoring has really worked in our favour. The evidence is showing that the industry has not been doing the damage it was accused of.

We are rapidly losing the ability to feed ourselves. Australia consumed 350,000 tonnes of seafood in 2021-22, yet 65 per cent of it was imported. We have become a net importer of seafood. Some say that farmed fish is the only way, but barely a third of Australian consumption is farmed species. We do not—let me repeat: we do not—have the capacity to fill this gap with farmed seafood. If this disallowance motion fails, together with all of the other structural reforms in fishing, we are guaranteeing that the people of Queensland will not be eating fresh, sustainably caught fish into the future. Rather, we will be importing it from those countries that we do not have control over and that often have bad track records in terms of the environment and sustainability. They will be sending their cheap fish through to Coles and Woolies. That is what we will be forcing Queenslanders to eat, denying the right of people in places like Karumba, Weipa, Townsville and Lucinda a job, an industry and meaningful work to help their country feed themselves with freshly caught and sustainably caught seafood—all in the name of ideology. Gone now from our dinner tables are species such as fresh-caught barra, wild-caught barra, king salmon, grunter, jewelfish, blue salmon and jewfish. Queenslanders will now be faced with Taiwanese or Malaysian barra and poorly managed overseas farmed fish.

The evidence does not stack up on all of this. One of the big song and dances made about king salmon was that it was claimed it was as low as five per cent. A heap of the take was done out of the Mitchell River and none of that was studied, apparently, because it would throw out the metrics when they were trying to show the argument that king salmon was under threat. It was said that it was as low

as five per cent and now they are saying 24 per cent. I will say that that is still not healthy, but that is a hell of a lot higher than five per cent. If it was not for us kicking up a stink in this place, it would have been accepted that it was five per cent when people from Mount Isa were going up to Karumba and catching king salmon off the beach. I can assure members that you do not catch multiple king salmon off the beach if the fishery is at five per cent. It made an absolute mockery of the Fisheries advice that was being repeated in this House and being used as evidence to drive this home.

We have been sold a lie, as we have with so many things that affect agriculture and industry in remote areas. It is killing towns like Karumba. Many people in these towns have lost hope and say no-one is ever going to help them. They cannot argue with the rubbish that is coming from these ideologically-driven groups. Last year we were talking about Spanish mackerel. People were saying you could just about walk across them in the water and yet we were in here talking about them being a threatened species. The science does not reconcile with what we hear from people out on the water, either recreational or commercial fishers. We had the strange and rare occurrence where the recreational fishers were agreeing with the commercial fishers on the state of the Spanish mackerel fishery. There was that much rubbish associated with it that these groups were agreeing on the fact that we were being fed a dud.

Whilst on this topic, it is important to recognise that a lot of recreational fishers will be patting themselves on the back and saying it is brilliant that it is end of the commercial fishing industry, they are no longer competing with them, but do not think that the environmental activists will not be after them next. Do not think they will not be fighting for a licence for recreational fishing in a few years time. There will be bag limits on everything. There will be many more restrictions than there are now. They should not think they are safe because commercial fishing has been the whipping dog. There is no finish line for the environmental activists, UNESCO or the plethora of politicians who like waving around their environmental credentials in the city at election time and beating up on smaller remote communities like Karumba and making them pay just to win the favour of these environmental activists that prey on the ignorance of young people who fall for this garbage they keep getting fed.

Tonight we are here to say no. We are here to say there is still someone in here who will stand up for agriculture, food security and our sovereignty as a state and as a nation. We will be brave enough to challenge the science that keeps getting fed to us through these government departments that think they can bulldoze their way through with dubious findings, as we found they have done with mackerel and king salmon. I think it is time that we all stood up. It cannot be us all the time. We have a lot of newbies who need to think about a time when they stand up. I have been here for 12 years and it is not getting better. It is getting worse. These are very serious problems.

Let me remind members that there will be people from this year on not eating fresh fish. They will be forced to eat imported fish because of decisions like the one we make tonight. We must turn it around. It is difficult. I accept that when compensation is paid out it is tricky to go back and open up that effort. I did not even mention all the regulation. There is stuff in it that is hard to turn around, but we have to start somewhere. This is the start of many things that need to be turned around in this place. There has been a direct assault on food security and agriculture in this state, usually involving those small remote areas and industries that we represent.

I implore all members of parliament to think for themselves. Think about those families who have made a living off fresh seafood and who want to continue to be producers for our nation. Over the last 20 years their practices and standards have got a hell of a lot better. There is a sustainable fishery to be had. We are not studying the fishery in the gulf to tell whether it is sustainable or not, but for the last couple of years the fishing has been fantastic. We do have good fisheries out there. We should celebrate them, not punish them. Tonight is our opportunity to turn it around. The KAP is proud to be standing behind this industry and these people.