



Speech By
David Kempton

MEMBER FOR COOK

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ADJOURNMENT

Cook Electorate, Illegal Fishing

 **Mr KEMPTON** (Cook—LNP) (9.23 pm): My electorate of Cook includes the top end of Cape York and the Torres Strait, which is the home to over 5,000 Queenslanders—Queenslanders who are a long way from Canberra or Brisbane and have been too long overlooked by successive Labor governments. Well, no more.

Since being elected nearly 18 months ago, I have turned up, listened and taken action on many occasions for the people I represent. There can be no better example of my advocacy than in the recent unfolding debacle involving the incursion of illegal Indonesian fishing vessels in Australian waters in the Torres Strait. As more and more evidence emerged of breaches of our closest international border, Prime Minister Albanese, Tony Burke and Matt Smith claimed there was nothing to see and everything was hunky-dory. There was no visit, no consultation and no discussion with the population in respect of this critical issue.

In late January this year, the news broke of an illegal fishing vessel attempting to land on Mabuiag Island. I immediately called for Tony Burke, the minister responsible for the protection of our borders, to come to the Torres Strait and talk to the people. I travelled to Bamaga and Thursday Island for several days to hear firsthand from leaders including councils, TSRA, traditional owners, fishermen, residents and business owners.

Not only do these foreign vessels pose a health and safety risk to islanders; the leaking border exposes all Australians to the vagaries of disease, pests, illegal drugs, firearms, human trafficking and so on. In just the past month we have seen dozens of illegal vessels as far east as Mer Island and on the mainland in Jackey Jackey Creek, attempted landings at Mabuiag, locals threatened by armed fishermen on Crab Island and a large barge washing up on Badu Island. Prime Minister Albanese's only response was stern words from afar.

Now, without discussion or consultation, the Albanese government has decided to launch Operation Broadstaff to rid our northern waters of this scourge. It sounds stern, but the problem is that half of the ABF Cape Class patrol boats are out of action, and the two Bay Class patrol boats are responsible for Torres Strait and Northern Territory waters. Even if Broadstaff does chase a few vessels away, they will simply return as the status quo is returned. The federal government must get real and fully resource an appropriate border security force in conjunction with all agencies and engage all local islanders in extensive monitoring and surveillance, as no-one has the knowledge and experience of the Torres Strait Islanders.