

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 725
Asked on Thursday, 11 May 2006

MRS NELSON-CARR asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

Have new measures announced in the Federal Budget to apprehend illegal fishing vessels in our coastal waters gone far enough in the battle to protect Queensland's commercial fishing industry and border security?

ANSWER:

There is growing concern about the impact of illegal foreign fishing on the sustainability of northern Australian shark and red snapper stocks, and on the future viability of Australia's northern domestic fishing industry. The Queensland Government and the commercial fishing industry have for some time expressed growing concern about the impacts of illegal foreign fishing in northern Australian waters.

The responsibility for managing those species that are most at risk from illegal foreign fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria lies with the Queensland Fisheries Joint Authority. The Joint Authority was established as part of the 1995 Offshore Constitutional Settlement between the Commonwealth and the State of Queensland. The Queensland Government therefore has a significant interest in ensuring the impacts of illegal foreign fishing are minimised.

However, it is the Australian Government which is responsible for enforcing the laws that prohibit foreign fishing in Australian waters.

The recent announcement in the Federal budget that extra resources will be committed to combat illegal foreign fishing attempts, in part, to double the current rate of apprehending illegal foreign fishing vessels. It will also establish burning stations that will be used to destroy the apprehended boats. Two of these burning stations will be located in Queensland, one in Weipa and one on Horn Island.

The additional financial allocation and enhanced Commonwealth attempts to overcome this problem are supported. The Queensland Government will continue to work cooperatively with the Australian Government on this important issue.

It is still too early to determine whether the announced measures will be successful in combating the impacts of illegal foreign fishing and addressing border security issues, however both the Queensland Government and Queensland fishing sector will be closely monitoring the Commonwealth's progress in dealing with this illegal activity because of its potential to impact on the sustainability and profitability of the Queensland based fishing industry.