

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 1596

Asked on 13 September 2016

MS PEASE asked the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries (HON L DONALDSON)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister explain the intent of the Fisheries Management Green Paper and correct the House on any misinformation being spread about the Green Paper?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to ensuring Queensland's fisheries are managed in a sustainable and responsible manner that recognises the interests of all Queenslanders. The Green Paper on fisheries management reform, which I released for public comment in July 2016, puts forward a possible framework to manage our wild harvest fisheries into the future.

The need to change how fisheries are managed was recognised in the Government's sustainable fishing election commitment. The 2014 independent review of fisheries management in Queensland, commissioned by the previous government and conducted by MRAG Asia Pacific but published by this government, also recommended significant change.

The Green Paper on fisheries management reform sets out a vision for Queensland's fisheries where 'fishing is a low risk to Queensland's aquatic resources and these are shared to optimise benefits to the community'. It proposes ten areas of reform to deliver this vision, including managing target stocks, managing impacts on the ecosystem, managing access between and within sectors and putting in place a clear and responsive decision-making framework. It also contains proposals to enhance the systems supporting fisheries management relating to data and information, consultation and engagement and fisheries compliance.

It is unfortunate that misinformation is being circulated in the community about the Green Paper. Let me address them one by one.

Number 1: The proposed reforms threaten Queenslanders' access to fresh local seafood. This is not the case. The reform agenda outlined in the Green Paper has been developed to ensure ongoing access to fresh local seafood. The commercial sector requires certainty around long-term access to fish stocks. The proposed reforms will provide this through the allocation of resources to the sector. In fact it is the inverse: access to local seafood will be threatened if reforms are not progressed.

Number 2: Managing for higher stock sizes will halve commercial catch. This is not correct. The Green Paper proposes to manage stocks to achieve a 60 per cent unfished population size for shared stocks, or maximum sustainable yield for predominately commercial stocks. These sizes are most likely to optimise benefits to the community. A number of our stocks are already around this level, for example coral

trout, red-throat emperor and some species of prawns. As stated in the Green Paper, stock-specific targets will be set in proposed harvest strategies.

The Green Paper also explicitly acknowledges that for some stocks it may not be feasible to set a stock target at this level in the first instance. The proposed framework will allow for stocks to be rebuilt over time while still balancing the social and economic objectives. A drastic change such as halving the commercial catch would clearly not achieve this balance.

The key is moving towards a target over an agreed period of time. A higher benchmark would improve the viability of the commercial sector, yield higher recreational catches and provide greater resilience to adverse environmental conditions such as the effects of climate change.

Number 3: *The Green Paper will cut recreational bag and size limits.* The Green Paper contains no specific proposals to cut recreational bag and size limits. It does acknowledge that fishing pressure from all sectors need to be considered. The Green Paper makes it clear that there is a need however, to work with stakeholders to develop a simpler and more responsible system of size and bag limits for recreational fishers. The level of fishing pressure by all sectors will be considered on a fishery-by-fishery basis.

Number 4: *The commercial fishing sector is not being engaged on these reforms.* The government has gone to great lengths to ensure that participants in the commercial fishing industry are engaged during the consultation period on the Green Paper. Letters were sent to all commercial licence holders and the department has met face-to-face with individual or small groups of fishers throughout the State. The feedback on the smaller meetings has been positive and fishers have appreciated the opportunity to be heard.

Through the Green Paper the government is genuinely seeking the community's feedback on the future management of our fisheries resources.

The Green Paper is the platform for people to have their say on how Queensland's wild harvest fisheries are to be managed into the future. If people believe there are better alternatives to managing the resource the Green Paper is the opportunity to put those views forward.

Reform is a long-term process and change will be difficult for some. Continuing with the current management arrangements is not a viable option for something as important as our wild harvest fisheries.