



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

REGULATIONS AND DETERMINATIONS

**Small Pelagic Fishery Total Allowable
Catch (Quota Species) Determination 2012**

Disallowance

SPEECH

Wednesday, 22 August 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Scullion, Sen Nigel

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Senator SCULLION (Northern Territory—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) (18:04): I rise somewhat flustered, as I was not actually sure that this was coming on for debate and I just happened to be here at the time. I would like to make a bit of a contribution. Firstly, I would like to congratulate Senator Whish-Wilson for his contribution. It was from the heart, and I believe as a Tasmanian he is reflecting the will of the parliament in Tasmania and, to some degree, the people of Tasmania.

As some of you would know, I have been around in fishery politics for some time—it is a pretty tough game—and I have also been around for long enough to know and to perhaps provide some insight about what we should not be doing. We see the headlines in the papers: 'Supertrawler!' and we read that it is not extraordinarily good, that it is large and a fishing boat—and children have to go to bed earlier—and that this is a very serious threat to our way of life. In fact, from my perspective, it is quite the opposite, and I did not think for a moment that the Tasmanian parliament would come to that conclusion. I thought it would simply pass on.

I had a passing look at the work that AFMA, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, had done—and, again, I acknowledge the credit that Senator Whish-Wilson piled on the scientists from that august body. I will deal with some of the issues about the size. Particularly to Senator Whish-Wilson and the Greens, I would say that the supertrawler is catching a particular amount of fish; it is not just catching any amount of fish. This is actually an output control fishery. So, for example, we say, 'We don't care how you catch it, but you are only allowed to catch 10 fish.' That is how it is. For those who are not familiar with input and output controls, with an input control fishery you are allowed to catch as many fish as you like with one hand behind your back or with a captain with an IQ of four—and I have been in fisheries that have that impediment, I have to say. An output control fishery is considered one of the best ways to manage fisheries.

I will give you a bit of a quantum on that. There is a benefit to this, because you could have maybe 10 or 20 trawlers go out there now and 'pelagically' trawl. So there is a great deal of efficiency with this. You could certainly call it a super-efficient trawler. There is no doubt about that. The efficiency is all

about using less fuel to gather the protein. This trawler would undoubtedly provide for a much smaller carbon footprint—and we have certainly been lectured on those sorts of issues by the Greens a number of times in here, and perhaps rightly so.

The last issue I will touch on is that we provide protein. It is a very important foodstuff and we should think very carefully. Last night I was listening to Tim Costello on the television expounding the virtues of looking after people in Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa, who are going through the most extraordinary drought. We keep talking about extraordinary droughts in Africa, but certainly this drought is having just a horrific impact on the population there, who have, right at the moment, almost no access to protein in particular. This is a market. This particular boat and this particular fishery is targeted specifically at filling that market. I just want to make that clear.

I will just quickly go through the process. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority have made an investment in science. They have not just run out and said, 'Big trawler—no worries, fill your boots; it will all be okay.' They have put so much work into ensuring that they have the total allowable catch. This particular boat will take 18,000 tonnes. That is a lot of jack mackerel—and four other smaller species—but it is out of a conservative estimate that built in precautionary principles of 360,000 tonnes annually, just to put it in context. The total allowable catch for the fishery is about 36,000 tonnes, of which this vessel will be taking 18,000 tonnes. We are talking 3.6 per cent of the total fishery, just to put it in context. It is a big trawler. It can hold it flat, it can do what it likes, but that is the maximum that it is going to be able to take.

I have only just stood up—I am not really across some of the things—but the senator did provide some interesting statistics showing that 99.6 per cent of the quota was not actually fished. I know we may have fundamentally different views on this, but my view is that we have a responsibility to be able to fish and allow fishing sustainably, within sustainable levels. I think if everything stays to the model that AFMA has got, then that is certainly what will happen. I think you could reasonably say that it is an unfished fishery. The senator made a comment along the lines of 'We are only using a super trawler because it is an unfished fishery'.

I will use an analogy. I live in Darwin and I can tell you there is a very good reason we do not hook up the house trailer, put some vegies in it and tow it behind the Holden to Darwin, because we have got to use big trucks. It is a critical mass and efficiency issue. I would never be able to afford vegies if we used the house trailer and I can tell you that catching fish in pelagic fisheries any other way would simply would be too much for the market and I think we should also take that into consideration.

This has been heavily politicised in a short time and I have had the experience in my home territory of similar things. I will just deal with a couple of the key issues. I notice that in terms of local fish depletion there were a couple of other issues that the senator brought up. I will quote from a scientific paper by Colin Buxton, Gavin Begg, Jeremy Lyle, Tim Ward, Keith Sainsbury, Tony Smith and David Smith. If you do not know them, take it from me and google them: they are the key scientists in small pelagic fisheries internationally. In regard to local depletion in this exact fishery, they say:

Localised depletion is evaluated as unlikely with the proposed harvesting fractions applied in the SPF because most small pelagic species, and their predators, are highly mobile and local areas replenish quickly provided the overall stocks are not depleted. This has been the experience with small pelagic fisheries that have been similarly managed in Australia.

People say this is the first time this has ever really been done. We have a total allowable catch in the sardine fishery of South Australia, and that total allowable catch is 34,000 tonnes. It is double the quota we are talking about here. They are a very similar fish to manage, and this sardine quota is taken in an area half the size. I am not saying this as a contradiction. I just hope those listening will take that into consideration and that it will provide them with some comfort. I also note their recommendation in regard to by-catch:

AFMA has committed to 100% observer coverage to monitor by-catch and other aspects of fishery operations for the factory trawler.

I think that will give everybody an awful lot of confidence in what is happening.

I want to briefly touch on fishing politics. We can manage fisheries from this place. We can manage them from here. I was part of a political party that managed fisheries in the Northern Territory. Way back in the day, if we put an Aboriginal and a commercial fisherman in a paddock and threw rocks at them, everybody in the Northern Territory would vote for us. But I tell you, it did not do much for the management of fisheries. It was not useful at all. I would urge all

those involved in this debate to simply allow this to be left to the scientists. If you have a question with the science, if it is a question about the validity of it, if it is about 'have not had enough time', I would be the first person to say we need seriously to consider the precautionary principle and go back and look at that particular element. I know Senator Whish-Wilson has called for further consideration and that in the future we might go and do these things. Perhaps I do not know enough about the issue, but I am certainly concerned that this is simply a delaying tactic and that this will never happen. It is a real boat, there is a real quota, it is a real fishery and there is a real protein need in Africa. I have not heard in the debate that there is a particular piece of an element of the science that is flawed or that the scientists do not know enough about it or that somehow the application of the precautionary principle is not there. I suspect this is a reaction after recreational fishermen have come to you and said, 'Look, this is going to cause fish depletion.' And I am sure they have but, frankly, local recreational fishermen—I love them; I am one of them; I have bred them—probably are not quite as switched on to the science as the scientists are. I think we should leave this to science and we need to really think about the fact that a super trawler is actually a super-efficient trawler.