

## Legislative Council

Wednesday, 18 June 2008, Page 3371

### PIPI FISHING QUOTA

**The Hon. C.V. SCHAEFER** (20:22): I move:

That the regulations under the Fisheries Act 2007 concerning Pipi Units, made on 13 December 2007 and laid on the table of this council on 12 February 2008, be disallowed.

This motion is to do with the Pipi fishing quota system in Goolwa and the Lower Lakes, in particular. The Hon. Mark Parnell is not here, but he often mentions that I give history lessons in this place, which is probably another reason why it is time for me to leave. It would be of interest to the chamber to understand a little of the history of what is, in fact, the cockle fishing industry in South Australia. For a very long time cockles have been merely a low value bait commodity and, as such, their original licences were generally attached to the commercial licences of wild catch fisheries.

There was always a small number of cockles sold for human consumption, but a few years ago it was discovered that the cockles in the Goolwa area were highly prized and sought after, particularly in the Sydney and Melbourne markets. They are a larger cockle and their value has gone, I believe, from something like \$1 per kilogram for bait to up to \$40 per kilogram for human consumption. In order to catch for human consumption, however, there is considerably more work required. The cockles have to be cleaned and purged before they can be put on the open market, so there is a greater expense to catching those cockles.

Obviously, when any commodity moves from \$1 per kilogram to \$40 per kilogram the interest from those holding licences grows exponentially, and that is exactly what has happened in South Australia. Of the 32 licensees with access to the fishery, 29 are Lakes and Coorong licensees and three are marine scale licensees with cockle endorsements. It was decided by the government late last year to introduce a regulatory system to ensure that there is a sustainable industry, as has been done with fishing for most, if not all, species in South Australia.

A review committee was set up and the decision was taken to introduce a total allowable catch quota regime for the fishery. Let me make it very clear from the start that the opposition is not opposed to a regulatory system and is, in fact, very much in favour of a sustainable fishery and sustainable licences. So, we agree with the regulation of the industry.

It is also acknowledged that a number of the fishers over time have not exercised their rights to take cockles over recent years, possibly not even ever. As I have said, their traditional market has been for bait and only in recent years has a human consumption market (mainly domestic and some export) been developed.

In the winter of 2007, it was estimated that approximately 40 per cent of the harvest went to the domestic market in Sydney. So, an allocated advisory panel was set up to decide on what would be a fair and equitable method of distributing the licences as

they were held and allowing people to rake for cockles, because that is how they are caught. This is where the opposition has a disagreement with the method that has been used by the government to sort out these licences.

In particular, there is one fisher (but there are others) who has been severely disadvantaged because they bought their licence, taking the opportunity to develop a commercial market. They paid what was considered at the time to be an outrageous amount for that licence and, as I say, were, I think, some of the pioneers of developing a domestic market for human consumption.

However, when they bought that licence it was an unregulated market and so they had no catch history. The total allowable catch (or tonnage) that these people were allowed was, therefore, nothing, or very little, because they did not have the catch history of those who had been licensed for a long time. So, that is where we, as an opposition, disagree with the decisions of the government.

Let me give you an example. If one fisher had concentrated wholly on the lucrative human consumption market he would probably have a moderate catch history, because bear in mind, as I have said, that it is considerably slower and more difficult to catch, purge and prepare cockles for human consumption than it is to simply catch them for bait. If fisher 2 had traditionally supplied the low value bait market he would probably have, therefore, a large catch history, but he can now move straight into the domestic market as it has been developed in Sydney.

Both fishers have the same stake in the fishery, because it provides their living, but fisher 2 will have a significant advantage by getting an allocation based simply on historic catch and subsequently applying that catch to another higher value market. When the committee was set up to decide on a method of allocating, 22 of the 29 Lakes and Coorong licensees put a joint submission to the advisory panel outlining a different method of proportioning the total allowable catch. That submission appears to have been ignored.

It also needs to be noted that the catch taken from the cockle fishery in 2007-08 is substantially down on what has been taken in recent years. It has been suggested that the total catch has only been approximately half of the 1,150 tonne total allowable catch for the 2007-08 season and so, as with most of these licences, everyone's total allowable catch will be allocated downwards in order to retain a sustainable fishery.

This would, therefore, put people who had bought into this regime in good faith out of business. We believe it would be unconscionable for the government to change the management of a fishery in such a way that it would destroy the business of an individual fisherman without compensation. Those of you who have heard me wax lyrical about compensation for fisheries because of decisions of the government will not be surprised that I am opposed to this method of deciding who shall and who shall not make a living, without compensating those who are most disadvantaged. My understanding is that the minister and the shadow minister have agreed to enter into further discussions on this matter and, given that development, I seek leave to conclude my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.