

Legislative Council

23rd September 2009

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CONDUCT BY PIRSA IN FISHING OF MUD COCKLES IN MARINE SCALEFISH AND LAKES AND COORONG PIPI FISHERIES

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. J.S.L. Dawkins:

That the report of the select committee be noted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (19:48): I would like to thank the research officer, Geraldine Sladen, for the report she wrote. She did an excellent job and was very precise. I would also like to thank committee members: the Hons. Caroline Schaefer, Russell Wortley and Ian Hunter, and the Hon. John Dawkins as Chair.

As the Hon. Ian Hunter just indicated, we did work well together as a committee. I still do not agree that this inquiry was not necessary, and not just because I moved for that particular inquiry. Problems were aired from both sides of the fishery, and it is sad that it had to be divided into two sides. As the Hon. Ian Hunter said, it gave us an opportunity to learn more about that particular industry and how it works or does not work, as the case may be.

However, after sitting on this particular committee and on other committees, I have come to understand that select committee inquiries put constituents in a difficult situation, because they do not seem to understand the value of evidence or what evidence is and somehow believe that hearsay, gossip or innuendo constitutes solid evidence. One thing that I found difficult to reconcile in this inquiry was the fact that, on one side, we had a group of fishermen who, literally, were trying to claw back a quota system that was never going to be and it was not practical. We all came to the conclusion at the end of the inquiry that what they were seeking could not happen.

However, the evidence they provided was given to the best of their ability. These guys are average fishermen. It would have been like asking shearers in your day, Mr President, to appear before a select committee and present evidence about things that they did not believe were being done in a righteous fashion. Let us face it, fishermen do not walk around with cameras strapped to their back or with notebooks, and they do not get people to witness what they have seen and they do not think to take notes of what they are seeing.

Perhaps one side was a little disadvantaged in that they could not afford to hire a temporary CEO to plead their case, whereas the other side was able to do that. I think that put them at a great disadvantage. I am not saying that that changed the evidence that we received, but I believe it certainly tipped the scales in favour of that side. The Hon. Ian Hunter said that we found no fault with PIRSA. Although we did not necessarily find fault with PIRSA, I think the committee believes that the recommendations it made will perhaps improve the process in the future for any other areas of the fishery that need to go to quota.

The two most relevant recommendations for me were, first, the recommendation for PIRSA to conduct a full audit prior to going to a quota system to verify catch and effort data, because, even to the end of the inquiry, there were allegations that were neither proven nor disproven, but one particular person from one of the groups had

faced court for that and similar charges. It was not necessarily disproven that those allegations did not have any foundation at all. Secondly, the recommendation to prohibit off-beach grading. That did not come about simply because there was no evidence that the off-beach grading was being done in a proper manner.

In my view, it all gets down to the fact that PIRSA has a huge task to do and it works in a difficult area. As the Hon. Caroline Schaefer said, there will always be winners and losers when we go to quota. That is a sad thing, but it is a reality. I also think that some of the recommendations may help PIRSA to improve its consultation methods and communication level with the people of that industry. I also concur with the Hon. Caroline Schaefer that it was not necessarily true that inside information was leaked about going to quota: it was probably a case of some people choosing to read the documentation and letters that were sent out and others did not. All in all, I believe that it has been a valuable exercise and, if the seven recommendations are taken up, it will be a step towards helping to make that transition from open slather to quota a little easier both for PIRSA and the people involved in the fishery.