



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
AMENDMENT (RECREATIONAL
FISHING FOR MAKO AND
PORBEAGLE SHARKS) BILL 2010**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 15 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 2398
Questioner
Speaker Georganas, Steve, MP

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Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (1.46 pm)—At a time when the environment attracts emotions and headlines in equal parts, we have a responsibility to deal with environmental issues. We need to deal with them responsibly, well and appropriately. Today I rise to speak on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Recreational Fishing for Mako and Porbeagle Sharks) Bill 2010, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act more broadly, the findings of the eagerly anticipated Hawke report and how we all need to address the matters that were raised within that report. Released in December last year, this particular report says a lot about how seriously this Rudd Labor government is taking the environment. Instead of paying lip-service to environmental needs, we commissioned a report on the right way to address perhaps the most pressing issue in the world today. Now we have to act on the findings and also bring all the parties together in a bipartisan fashion and effort to achieve something for future generations.

Dr Hawke put together a team of eminent people who were prepared to do the hard work, look at the particular issues and not take shortcuts. They include the Australian National University's Australian Centre for Environmental Law director, Tim Bonyhady, and the University of Melbourne's Professor of Environmental Science, Mark Burgman. The report reflects the government's stance on the environment—that it is something to be taken seriously and not just a means of grabbing a headline or a few votes. The Hawke report makes some recommendations that are just plain common sense and all of us would agree. These include making the environment the first consideration instead of weighing it equally with social and economic factors. Economic and social factors are important, of course, but the report recognises strongly the need for the environment to come first in the statute concerned with the environment. Anything less would be a cop-out, making it a Clayton's act.

The report makes many recommendations—in fact, 71 recommendations—including establishing an independent environment commission to advise the government on matters such as project approvals and strategic assessments in all areas. It suggests giving the government additional powers to protect ecosystems and list vulnerable ecosystems as matters of national environmental significance and, at the same time, overhaul regional forestry agreements to keep logging companies accountable if they intend to keep their licences. It also recommends the establishment of an environmental reparation fund and a national biobanking scheme—very important. There are too many recommendations to list here today, but one deserves special attention: the need for environmental performance audits. The need for environmental performance audits is something that we cannot step away from. We need to be accountable when it comes to the environment. The Hawke report recommends we reduce the regulatory burden, maintain and enhance environmental protections and provide an integrated and balanced package. It is an interesting point. It stipulates the environment must come first but also acknowledges that a balance can be achieved.

The amendment to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act currently before us is a perfect example of this balance. It provides an exception to the act to allow for a continuation of the recreational fishing of longfin and shortfin mako sharks and porbeagle sharks. Why? Because, despite international changes to the status of these sharks, fishing them here in the Southern Hemisphere is not a threat to them within the Northern Hemisphere. Their numbers and exploitation may well be a problem in the Northern Hemisphere. It is an issue that governments need to address. In the Southern Hemisphere we can make an assessment of the numbers and critical mass of these types of sharks and the degree of risk that they will face as a result of the amendment before us and the continuation of recreational fishing.

So we have made a common-sense decision on this matter. We have made a decision that is sensible and has been thought out. The decision has considered the relative needs of recreational fishers and any threat to these sharks. Of course, if recreational fishing contributed to a greater threat, recreational needs would not need to have been entertained. Recreational fishing, as we know, is a great hobby and sport for many people around Australia. The seat of Hindmarsh which I represent has Gulf St Vincent as its western boundary and there are many jetties along that coastline. I see many people go down there to go fishing with their children and enjoy this recreational sport. In fact, I have participated in recreational fishing many times over the years, especially growing up in my electorate, which has one of the most pristine coastlines. Recreational fishing offers great joy

to many families, and we would not want to see that spoilt in any way. The government remains committed to shark conservation measures and will continue its involvement under the convention of migratory species. The amendment makes the point that we do not need a knee-jerk reaction to every issue that has an environmental tag attached. It is far better to address the real issues and treat them seriously than to win a few points without thinking an issue through.

In Parliament House we recently saw the film *The End of the Line*. It was characterised as the first major documentary about overfishing and the depletion of world fish stocks. Many members on both sides saw this very interesting film in Parliament House a couple of weeks ago. As I understand it, it retains some power and some very interesting statements from people working in the fishing industry as well as fish conservation experts, fishermen, scientists, et cetera. The website states quite boldly, 'Scientists predict that if we continue fishing as we now are, we will see the end of most seafood by 2048.' That is not too far away. It goes on to talk about the need for controlled fishing by reducing the number of fishing boats across the world. It also talks about protecting large areas of the ocean through a network of marine reserves off-limits to fishing and through educating consumers—that is us, the people who eat the seafood. We have a choice to purchase fish from independently certified sustainable fisheries. We have all heard about the big trawlers that go out there and basically clear up everything on the ocean bed, taking with them every single kind of sea life that is available.

When I see and hear statements such as these, when I hear these quotes, especially the first quote, I know that, irrespective of any science, some people will disbelieve anything said in the interests of the status quo. We continue to see those vested interests and the prospect of comparative disadvantage driving action. It is a pity that we factor in automatic disbelief in any debate, because these are serious issues. In this case, what does the science actually say in relation to fish stocks in our ocean? As I said earlier, scientist predict that, if we continue fishing as we are now, we will see the end of most seafood by 2048.

Today I can only touch on the subject and give one answer in part. In mid-2009, a report was released on the impact of overfishing and the effectiveness of current restoration efforts in the Western world. It was prepared by 19 co-authors from around the world, including from the University of Washington in the USA and Dr Beth Fulton from our own CSIRO. 'Troubling trend of increasing stock collapse across all regions' is not an encouraging title and not an encouraging start. But in the paper prepared for publication in *Science*, 31 July 2009, the author states:

In 5 of 10 well-studied ecosystems, the average exploitation rate has recently declined and is now at or below the rate predicted to achieve maximum sustainable yield for seven systems. Yet 63% of assessed fish stocks worldwide still require rebuilding, and even lower exploitation rates are needed to reverse the collapse of vulnerable species.

Efforts here and around the world are making a very positive impact. Overfishing clearly was leading us as a global community towards the brink of radical ecological upheaval—the permanent interruption of the known marine ecosystems and the food chain that keeps species of fish in balance. The effects on jobs in our own fishing industries and the balance of species within our oceans would have been radical. We may have turned the corner. The global community is aware and it has argued that it is responding, to an extent. We here in Australia are highly affected by our marine environment—its weather, its resources, its beauty and its perils. Work around this country in harvesting the sea responsibly and sustainably is very much a feature of our economy, our lifestyles and our legacy to future generations.

The people and businesses in my electorate of Hindmarsh in South Australia understand that balance between everyday life and the environment. As I said earlier, the western boundary of my electorate is Gulf St Vincent, with its pristine beaches, its golden sands and its lovely jetties. The area is home to industry, tourism, major retail outlets and even Adelaide airport, but they are not damaging the local environment. All forms of government, local, state and federal are committed to ensuring—

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member for Hindmarsh will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.