



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**  
**Marine Conservation**  
**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 20 June 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 20 June 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Burke, Tony, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BURKE** (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (15:35): It is a pleasure to be here today and have the opportunity to respond to the MPI from the member for Wide Bay. I think there are some very useful things I could do elsewhere, but it is always a pleasure to be here with you. You get about as much sunshine in the meeting room over there as I expect you do in a meeting room over here, but it is a pleasure to be here in tropical Canberra.

I want to deal with a few issues at the start that were raised by the member for Wide Bay. First of all, the claim that there is a lack of a scientific basis for the work that is being undertaken is more than a little bit silly. The member for Wide Bay, Leader of the Nationals, may well presume that the document I held up in question time, I think, two days ago with a photograph of the member for Wentworth in it is the only document underpinning the science as the basis for the decisions that are in front of us. Of course, the document that I held up was in relation to the scientific work that had been undertaken only on the south-west marine region. But similar volumes have been done, all of which are available publicly for the east marine region, the north marine region and the north-west marine region. We then had the additional drafts for consultation, which have been done across the north-west, north, south-west and temperate east regions. You cannot judge quality of science by the kilo, but it is a lot more than what the member for Wide Bay was wanting to claim in terms of scientific underpinnings.

At the core of the argument that the member for Wide Bay has put—and I think it is important for us to deal with this directly—is a presumption that this is a fisheries management decision. The member for Wide Bay knows full well and he would not have to talk to the member for Wentworth for very long to understand that this is not a fisheries management decision; it is not done for those purposes. The science underpinning it is not done that way—in the same way as the science you do when you determine where a national park will be is different from the science you do when you work out whether or not a state forest is being overharvested. It is the exact same principle. You have your overharvesting rates in a state forest, where you know how hard you can go to make it work sustainably. That is how our fisheries are managed, and our fisheries are managed under those methods very, very well.

If you do not have a policy belief that there is a value in having some areas of our land and of our oceans preserved as national parks then you would never support the sort of science on which this is based. But if you have a view, which most Australians do have, that there is actually value not in having the whole country as state forests but in having some areas reserved as national parks, in picking some areas that you reserve for nature—if you see value in that—then that is where you get the difference in the scientific underpinnings of this. You could run an argument that says, 'But the Royal National Park could be sustainably harvested,' and there would be a pace at which you could do it. But you would wreck something pristine and magnificent, and you would do something that Australians do not believe ought to happen. That is the principle. That is the basis of the decisions that have been made with respect to our oceans.

I do have to remind the Leader of the Nationals when he talks about how close in these areas are with respect to—

**Mr Ian Macfarlane interjecting—**

**Mr BURKE:** The desperation from the member for Groom really says it all. Please do not remind us how far out these areas are. If you are in Airlie Beach, to get to one of the new areas of protection you have to travel for 340 kilometres. If you are in Brisbane, you have to travel for 445 kilometres. If you are in Bundaberg, you have to travel for 492 kilometres before you get to a place where you cannot drop a line. I had a question yesterday from the member representing the area of Darwin, the member for Solomon, where the distance to get to the nearest spot where you cannot drop a line is 680 kilometres. We had photographs in the *West Australian*—which I am sure delighted members of the opposition—when the maps were put out which showed people casting a line from the beach, with a headline as to how people were going to be denied access to fishing. Now I know there are people who can cast a line a fair way, and I have checked: the world record goes just under 250 metres. But

if you went out as far as the longest cast can go and you kept going and you kept going and you kept going, after about 30 casts off the Western Australian coast, you may well get to an area where it is a problem to drop a line. On the Queensland coast, you are looking at a massively greater distance. So, please, do not pretend that for the ordinary recreational fisher they are somehow locked out of fishing. The Leader of the Nationals talked about a no-fishing sign up on our coastline—on our coastline! Unless he has some concept that when you stand on the coastline you are actually looking at something that far beyond the horizon then the argument is misleading in the extreme, and the Leader of the Nationals knows it.

There have been some issues raised. Some members of parliament who have game-fishing tourism operations in their electorates have questioned to what extent these could have an impact within the Coral Sea, because I have added a number of reefs—Osprey, Vema, Shark, Bougainville and Marion reefs—to what was originally in the draft maps. I would ask members to have a think about what sort of fish those game-boat operators go out to catch, because they do not go out travelling and powering out for more than a day in order to catch the reef fish that they could have caught in fishing zones in the Great Barrier Reef. If they are going all that way out, then they are going out for the big pelagic fish; that is what they are going out for—chasing the marlin and those sorts of tours. Have a look at the maps. With the exception of Bougainville Reef and the northernmost end of Osprey Reef, when you look at the rest of the maps you will see that the shape of the highly protected zone follows very close in, within the contours of the reef. And the recreational fishing organisations understand this. Some of the game-boat operators have been told things that are false, but if they go through the maps they will see that. Bougainville is different; Bougainville has been done in a square. But that is a much smaller reef than the others and not a particular spot where you have tourism operations. But if you actually have a look at how the maps have been drawn for those big pelagic game-fishing operations, they have not been drawn in a way that will cause any challenges for them in being able to have those fishing tours. They will not be able to go to the key dive sites where the areas are further out because, once you do get a few hundred metres away from the reef, at those points, you are much less likely to catch a big pelagic fish. But, as you get further south on Osprey and as you go through Shark, Vema and down to Marion, you do get close enough that those tours will still be able to run. There has been a lot of misinformation given to those individual businesses. But all I would say is: for the best evidence, go and have a look at the maps themselves.

I was asked in question time today, and it is relevant to now: 'What are the views of the different organisations?' I was asked for just one. I thought Peter Lindsay was not a bad one, as someone who was as representative as somebody could be within this parliament, but I accept the criticism that the Liberal-National Party is not a representative organisation. I fully accepted the point of order that was taken.

So let us look at some of the people who actually live in those electorates. Col McKenzie, the deputy director of the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators said:

I am sure there are some fishing charter operators who will be concerned ... but it will actually improve tourism generally from the fact it will increase Australia's profile overseas, particularly among high-end tourists who have high environmental awareness.

Chris Makepeace, Executive Officer of the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory said, 'Basically, there is virtually no impact for recreational fishermen in the Northern Territory, and that is good news.' Paul Anderson, Eurobodalla Shire Council General Manager, said the changes were not likely to have a big impact on recreational fishing in the area. Darren Kindleysides of the Australian Marine Conservation Society said: 'This is a landmark announcement for our seas and one of the most significant advances for environmental protection in Australia's history.' Daniel Gschwind, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council chief, said: 'Most concerns on better protection of reefs, dive sites and game boat access had been met and this was welcome.' Then there is Tony Lagana, manager of the Bermagui Fisherman's Co-op, and this is from the commercials. He said:

It is a good outcome for the far south coast (of NSW). We have had a lot of discussion with the government and Tony Burke has done a great job for Bermagui.

That is my favourite of the quotes!

We are dealing with an opposition that dearly wants to run a line that you can no longer go to the end of a jetty and drop a line. The problem is that in Australia we do not have jetties that long. In Australia we do not have jetties that go for the full length of a state border. We do not have jetties in Australia that reach these sorts of waters—and most wreck fishers never get out to these waters at all. The ones who do, if they are in a commercial

operation, are chasing the large pelagic fish that they will still be able to access everywhere other than at the principal dive sites.

No matter how many times the National Party try to dress this issue up as though it is something about minor parties in this parliament, make no mistake, environmental protection for more than three decades has been a cornerstone of what Labor does. We do not need to feel there is some sort of pressure from any other party in this place. The Greens, let us not forget, were critical of these proposals when they came out.

What we have here is something proudly in the Labor tradition of environmental reform. We do not need to feel that there is some sort of pressure out there. This is what Labor does—in the tradition of the party that saved the Franklin, in the tradition of the party that saved the Daintree and in the tradition of the party that protected Coronation Hill and made sure that we expanded Kakadu National Park. Every time we did one of those things, those opposite ridiculed it and those opposite opposed it—every single time. When we said we were going to protect the environment, those opposite said: 'It will be a disaster and you can't do it.'

They have done this every time, without exception. When it was the Franklin, they said no. When it was the Daintree, they said no. When it was Kakadu, they said no. We now talk about being the world leader on protection of the oceans, and what did they say? No. That is the only way they ever respond to environmental reform. Then they will come up with some sort of plan at election time where, in a few suburbs here and there, they will go around planting a whole lot of trees—and that apparently makes them good environmental warriors!

The public is onto the con. The public realises the environmental vandalism that lies at the heart of the arguments put by those opposite. The public understands that, effectively, the view of the oceans put by those opposite is that they should do less than what happened under the Howard government. The arguments they put forward mean the member for Wentworth would never have taken action in the south east at all. It would have been done on the basis of fisheries management, which effectively means the entirety of our oceans get run as though they are nothing more than a water version of a state forest.

This side of the parliament understands there is essential value in some parts of our planet being pristine. We have an understanding that Australians—as a nation of people who not exclusively but overwhelmingly live along our coastline—share a relationship with our oceans and they value them being protected. To establish a national parks estate in our oceans is something sufficiently good that Labor stands here and does it. It is something sufficiently right that Australia has no hesitation, under a Labor government, of being the world leader. It is something which those opposite know strikes a chord with Australians—sufficiently strongly that not one of them has said they have the guts to undo it. So they are playing the same old pattern.

Did they, when they got into government, try to undo the Franklin? They made all the noises about it but when it came to it they knew that we were on the right of history. Did they end up revisiting Joh Bjelke-Petersen's ideas to clear-fell parts of the Daintree rainforest to make it a major residential development? They railed against it for years. They are railing against it right now. Did they have the guts to write to the World Heritage Committee and ask for it to be delisted? Absolutely not. Did they then want to turn Coronation Hill back into a uranium mine and undo the work of Kakadu National Park? Not a chance.

Then we have the crocodile tears they cry right now—all backed up with a campaign trying to make people believe a lie, trying to make wreck fishers believe that there are impacts they know are not there, trying to run an argument that says there will be an impact on commercial fisheries way beyond one to two per cent of the gross value of production. They try to make up every single argument but, at the heart of it, if they believed a word, if they believed that they were on the right side of history with those sorts of mincing words, they would promise to undo it.

Listen to the next speakers. Ask why none of them have done it. Ask why, when it was so important for me to be here this week, not one frontbencher was willing to chance their own to ask a question about it. Why have they put it all off to the backbench and let them run their local stories but not one person from the frontbench put themselves forward? It is because they know the core question to them is: Would you undo it?