



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Management of Protected Species

SPEECH

Wednesday, 13 September 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 13 September 2017	Source Senate
Page 7218	Proof No
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Bernardi, Sen Cory	Question No.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (18:46): I have to say that it's a very recent interest of mine, dugongs and sea turtles, and it was driven principally by Colin Riddell through his torment of me on Twitter. He was continuing to tag me—or whatever they do—in tweets with pictures of dugongs, baby dugongs, adult dugongs and green sea turtles, and it piqued my interest. Eventually I responded and said: 'Enough is enough. You've got my interest, and I want to find out more about this.'

I haven't been to Cairns or to North Queensland to examine this issue like Senator Hinch has, so I don't know what I don't know, and I've learned a lot by listening to this debate today. But I have commissioned some research into this and the intention behind allowing native hunting and native title hunting. I have to state for the record that I'm not opposed to people hunting animals for food or even for recreation. I don't particularly like it myself, but I'm a realist in this sense. But I'm not a big fan of giving certain people special rights over others. However, interestingly, there was a contribution from the Law Society—I'm referring to some research here—with respect to native title hunting. It says that there may be some conflict between what the original inhabitants of Australia would like to do, or have been historically doing, and the interests of conservation here. I think we're wise to be mindful that, where competing rights in our community are at odds, we have to find a workable solution.

I do note that the workable solution, I understand, from 1987 to 2002, was a permit-based system. The permit-based system was designed to allow a sustainable harvest, which is wise and prudent, but also to monitor the hunting levels, so that accurate records could be kept. I'm disappointed, of course, that a lot of the people who chose to go out and hunt these turtles and dugongs chose not to participate in the permit system. Somehow they thought that it didn't apply to them and it wasn't necessary. So that was abandoned in favour of a zonal system in the Great Barrier Reef.

I remain unconvinced by either side of the argument. I know how people will embellish arguments to support their cause, but accurate hunting numbers are very, very difficult to ascertain. But what is not difficult to ascertain is how these species are considered by various governments. If we talk about the Queensland government for a moment, the green turtle is listed as vulnerable and is protected; the loggerhead turtle is endangered; the hawk's bill turtle is vulnerable; and the dugong is deemed to be vulnerable, too. These are all harvested using modern technology and modern conditions to preserve an ancient tribal right or cultural right that never included outboard motors or never included spear guns, modern ropes or things of that nature. This is one of the great conflicts there. If you want to preserve the traditional, historical rights of Aboriginal people to hunt as they always have, how can it be rational and reasonable to allow them to hunt slow-moving dugongs and turtles with outboard motors?

It is only going increase their take rather than the cultural heritage which it purports to represent.

There are a great many conflicts that we have to resolve in this. I support Senator Hinch's interest in this. I'm interested in it too, not from any particular perspective except that I want to find out what the truth is. Unfortunately, I have to say, I'm more aware of some of the issues that have arisen from this debate, but I still don't know quite where the truth lies. Governments, ministers and oppositions will tell you certain things based on their interpretation of facts, as Senator Hinch's hosts in Cairns will tell other facts or statements from their perspective. But I will put on the record that I do intend to get to Cairns. I do intend going to the turtle hospital and going out onto the reef and having a look and talking to people on both sides of the equation to ascertain for myself, as closely as I can, where the truth lies. I'm not opposed to hunting, but something here doesn't smell right, and I think that needs to be resolved.