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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON RECREATIONAL FISHING

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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At Nowra on 29 April 2010

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)

The Hon. A. Catanzariti

Mr I. Cohen

The Hon. R. H. Colless

The Hon. C. M. Robertson

The Hon. L. J. Voltz

CHAIR: Welcome to the third public hearing of the Select Committee on Recreational Fishing. This is the first of our six public hearings in regional locations. The Committee will be holding public hearings also at Port Stephens, Port Macquarie, Batemans Bay, Griffith and Grafton. Before we commence I shall make some comment about certain aspects of the hearing.

In accordance with the guidelines of the Legislative Council for broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members or witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what it publishes or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before this Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door. I remind everyone that any messages for Committee members or witnesses must be delivered through the chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks, who are seated at the side table.

I emphasise that although this is a public hearing, it is not an open forum for comment from the floor. Whilst today the Committee welcomes members of the public, the primary purpose of this hearing is to give individual witnesses an opportunity to give their evidence on oath before the Committee. Only questions from the Committee and the evidence of witnesses are recorded in the transcript. Uninvited interruptions are not recorded and will make it difficult for witnesses to fully express their views. Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections on others. The protection afforded to Committee witnesses under parliamentary privilege should not be abused during these hearings. Therefore, I request that witnesses avoid mentioning other individuals unless it is absolutely essential to address the terms of reference. I remind everyone to please turn off their mobile phones, as they interfere with the recording of the proceedings.

I welcome our first witnesses from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, and the Jervis Bay Marine Park Authority: Ms Diane Garrood and Mr Matt Carr.

JAMES SIMON ROBERT HARNWELL, Editor and Publisher, *Fishing World*, affirmed and examined

CHAIR: If you consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that to the Committee and we will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate if the responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which the questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee proceeds to questions would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr HARNWELL: I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee. I hope the information I give today is of some use to you.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In your submission you state that the execution of these parks has turned out to be something of a nightmare. Would you care to expand on that statement and tell us why you believe that to be the case?

Mr HARNWELL: The idea behind marine parks has a lot of support and interest from recreational anglers and the processes around the initial sites for marine parks and so forth was of interest, but the way the parks rolled out—I am not particularly talking about Jervis Bay Marine Park because I was involved in that—I understand there was some community disquiet, especially regarding the consultation period. Batemans Marine Park attracted quite a lot of negative publicity because locals were concerned that they put forward their ideas on where the park should be and that was not properly considered by the Government or the MPA. Obviously, because there was disquiet about the way the parks were rolled out shows that things could have been done a lot better.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about the management of the parks? I accept your point that the consultation as they were rolled out was not handled in the best way, but now that the parks are there and are being managed do you have any concerns about that?

Mr HARNWELL: I consider the people employed by the Marine Parks Authority to be completely professional in what they do. I would not have any comment on their jobs. There are some issues relating to the way the parks were set up. That could have been managed better. Also, there are some public concerns regarding the ferocity of some compliance officers in issuing fines. That is something that someone who has actually been fined would be better to comment on than me because I have not been fined—yet.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You say also that you would like to see a redesign and overhaul of the parks. What sort of model would be appropriate?

Mr HARNWELL: I guess this ties in to some ideas I have had about what marine parks do and what they possibly could do if they were redesigned. It gets back to an idea I and a lot of other people have that the marine parks in New South Wales do not really protect marine environment as efficiently as they possibly could. My idea or those I have thought about being involved with this marine parks thing for some time now is that blocking off little areas up and down the coast does not necessarily look at the big picture and might not necessarily provide a level of protection that we want for our marine environments. The idea behind marine parks was done in the best possible interest of the State and the environment, but maybe politics were involved—politics of convenience and politics of politics. I do not necessarily think the structure we have of what essentially are very small marine parks with little tiny areas closed off to fishing is perhaps the best way to look at protecting our environment. Maybe you need to look at the bigger picture where there is a whole range of different management techniques brought in rather than just this piecemeal thing. I can see that the Government had an obligation to bring in some sort of marine protection. I can see that marine parks probably were a relatively convenient and easy way to get around that obligation. I do not necessarily think the structure we have now is the best option for our marine environment.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you think a fish management procedure, if I can use that term, would be more workable than a park management? Do you understand what I mean by that? For example, should there be some adjustment to bag and size limits rather than just shutting an area off as a no-take zone?

Mr HARNWELL: There is an opportunity to look at those sorts of things. Obviously it has to go beyond just managing fish. There are other environmental concerns such as water quality, pollution,

development and those sorts of things that need to be looked at as well. I just feel that shutting off a couple of little areas up and down the coast creates community disquiet because, obviously, there are issues with people who might have fished in those areas and now cannot. What does it do, apart from maybe satisfy some people's ideas that that is what should be done? Is it really looking at the big picture? I do not think the science is there at the moment to say that our particular types of marine parks are the best option we have. There is a degree of scientific debate about the efficiency of our marine parks or marine parks in general. Some people who have given evidence to this Committee have a strong assertion that marine parks are the way to go. Other people might have a different idea. From my perspective as a journalist and someone who was involved with the Jervis Bay Marine Park Advisory Committee and who has had a strong interest in looking at this particular issue around Australia and internationally, the scientific debate about the efficiency of marine parks needs to be looked at more carefully by the decision-makers. We need to really look critically at our marine parks structure in the light of the debate over the whole issue and make some serious decisions as to whether the process we have now is the best. If it is, well and good; if it is not, let us change it and make it better.

Mr IAN COHEN: Does your magazine have an editorial position on marine parks?

Mr HARNWELL: Our stated editorial position is that we would support all sensible management techniques to provide a healthy and diverse marine and aquatic environment without disadvantaging recreational fishing.

Mr IAN COHEN: Therefore, priority is for recreational fishing opportunity and you want to design areas after that, is that what you are saying, given that you are representing, I suppose, or appealing to a sporting or recreational sector?

Mr HARNWELL: Not necessarily. It is a fishing magazine, so we are mainly about catching fish and so forth. Our policy is that we try to take a balanced approach on it and we look at the positives and negatives. We publish stories that demonstrate science supporting marine parks. We publish stories demonstrating science that does not support marine parks. I would suggest that that is a standard journalistic approach.

Mr IAN COHEN: You made quite a few criticisms of the piecemeal approach. I gained the impression that these are small, protected zones. Do you want bigger zones?

Mr HARNWELL: I make the point here that I am not a scientist, I am a journalist, but looking at the various scientific studies that have been done overseas, if a sanctuary zone is going to work, it has to be pretty big.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you suggest that these are not sufficiently big?

Mr HARNWELL: The ones in our model of marine parks and the New South Wales model of marine parks probably do not really work. I make the point that if we were going to institute some effective marine park system in New South Wales, then the whole of the coast would have to be closed off. Obviously, that is not going to happen. We need to break out of this idea of simply saying that sanctuary zones are the be-all and end-all of marine conservation.

Mr IAN COHEN: Are you looking at the opportunity to express recreational fishing zones or seasonal zones? Is that your preference?

Mr HARNWELL: There are opportunities to look at those sort of things. I would suggest that there certainly would be a case for sanctuary zones aimed at particular jobs, that is, protecting a particular type of habitat or a particular species. I do not think we can really look at the small system of zones that we have now as doing a good job of trying to protect biodiversity as a whole. There are other management techniques we could use for that.

Mr IAN COHEN: The Committee has received a fair bit of information at some public inquiries, particularly from scientists and those representing government agencies. Obviously their interest is in promoting the model. However, just looking at the marine park in this area that we went out into today, there has been quite a bit of discussion with government agencies about everything from anchorage, non-anchorage, seasonal activities and sanctuary zones. Is there anything in this park area that you can pinpoint and say, "Look, it's really not adequate, it doesn't do the job" or "It's a misplaced zoning"?

Mr HARNWELL: Sure. Can I have a copy of that map?

Mr IAN COHEN: Certainly.

Mr HARNWELL: For example, the Warrain Beach to Hammerhead Point Sanctuary Zone basically prohibits people from fishing along the beach on that particular area. As I understand it, there is no real scientific justification to ban someone standing on the beach casting a line out for whiting or bream. I can see that the reef area off there probably is worth protecting. What should have happened in this particular case—

Mr IAN COHEN: When you say "probably worth protecting" do you acknowledge that the sanctuary zone is there for that purpose even if you do not necessarily agree, would that be correct?

Mr HARNWELL: I am talking about the beach scenario,

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes, but how far offshore is that reef?

Mr HARNWELL: I am not sure. I have not been there for a while. I am talking about the beach scenario.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Whereabouts on this map are we referring to?

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We are right at the top.

Mr HARNWELL: That particular sanctuary zone caused a lot of angst in the local community, especially for people in Currarong, and, as I recall, when I was on the advisory committee there was a lot of debate about the merits of it. Stopping people from fishing on that beach is acknowledged as having no environmental benefit. I would argue that the marine parks people would have been better off putting a 100-metre exclusion zone and allowing people to fish off the beach, where they were not doing any habitat damage, were not catching fish that were residents of the area, and then having their offshore area to protect the reef if they wanted. That would have eased a lot of community angst. It is a fairly flexible thing to do and that is the sort of approach we need to take.

Mr IAN COHEN: Why do you say there is no reason for it? What are you drawing from this?

Mr HARNWELL: Because the park had to have a certain percentage of open beach declared a sanctuary zone even though there was no environmental reason for that.

Mr IAN COHEN: So you are saying this is meeting quota?

Mr HARNWELL: That was meeting quota, without a doubt.

Mr IAN COHEN: Any other issues that you specifically raise?

Mr HARNWELL: The Point Perpendicular, Crocodile Head Sanctuary Zone. My ideas for this sort of area, it was protecting the coastal, cliffy, rocky foreshore there. There are underwater caves and so on there that would have environmental significance and I can understand why we need to protect those. One of the problems with the marine park is that it is not flexible in regard to allowing a non-destructive fishing practice like trolling through there. If that was open so people could turn around the corner of Point Perpendicular, troll up through there, that would cause no habitat destruction. You are targeting pelagic fish, which move miles in one day. The only reason I could get from the marine parks people as to why it had to be a complete sanctuary zone was a management one. I am not sure that that goes down well with the recreational fishing community in that it is for the manager's ease of use as opposed to any environmental benefit.

You could easily troll through there or conduct other types of fishing that would have no impact on the eastern blue devil fish or grey nurse sharks or the habitat of that particular area and people would accept that but because of that draconian, fairly inflexible mindset—you cannot do that sort of stuff because it is a sanctuary zone. Because it is still hard for the managers to see if someone is trawling or bait fishing on the bottom, it was banned. That is the sort of thing that gets people's noses out of joint.

Mr IAN COHEN: It may well do but it is a grey nurse shark habitat and there is the debate about the trolling impact. You may have the confidence about that but you are saying there is no scientific basis for that area, the inshore area, to be declared a sanctuary zone?

Mr HARNWELL: I think you could achieve the environmental objectives and also allow people to undertake certain recreational fishing.

Mr IAN COHEN: That is always a possibility. It is like any rules and regulations, often they are put in for those who transgress, not those who are responsible, and that goes from traffic signs and rules to something like those. Are you not being a little adventurous in trusting the fishing community when there are a lot of issues that people do not understand very well?

Mr HARNWELL: You could go in there and fish now if you wanted to—illegally. What difference would it make?

Mr IAN COHEN: It makes a big difference. It is illegal fishing. You were very strong talking about officers being draconian and heavy-handed and suchlike, yet we have been given information, outside this Committee, just by officers, who said very clearly they issue a warning first and they go and see people and they are on the books and if they transgress again then there is a fine. That is hardly draconian.

Mr HARNWELL: Well, I know plenty of people who have been booked.

Mr IAN COHEN: First timers?

Mr HARNWELL: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: No warnings?

Mr HARNWELL: No warnings, in Jervis Bay Marine Park. The point I would like to make about this particular example is that I think you can achieve environmental objectives but you can also lessen the impact on the recreational fishers.

Mr IAN COHEN: You think you can, but there is science behind these zones, would you not agree?

Mr HARNWELL: I do not know. I do not particularly think there is science to put forward that. There is no science saying that trolling through that area is going to have any negative impact on these blue devil fish, for example.

Mr IAN COHEN: The issue of trolling through sanctuary zones has been seen to have an impact or a potential impact on many marine parks situated up and down the coast. It is an issue.

Mr HARNWELL: It does not affect the related species because they can be through that particular zone in a matter of minutes, and they are the species you are going to catch. It does not affect the habitat in any way, shape or form. So, I am not sure what you mean by that.

Mr IAN COHEN: I guess I am a bit concerned that you have highlighted the piecemeal nature of reserves. You basically want to give recreational fishers an open go. You seem to have a concern about the regulations per se. Am I correct about that? Regulating what is a pastime?

Mr HARNWELL: No, I think recreational fishing is extremely well managed. There are a lot of regulations that fishermen are very pleased to comply with.

Mr IAN COHEN: You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say it is draconian and then let people off.

Mr HARNWELL: I think you are twisting my words there a bit, with all due respect. There are management bag limits, management of seasonal fishers. There are few limits, and so on. They are the things that I think should be used to manage recreational fishing. I think there are some issues with the management of marine parks where if the management was more flexible it would get more encouragement, more ease of participation, more reaction from the recreational fishers because they would see it as being something they

could work with. But at the moment there are some that have no logical rationale behind them. I point again to the beach fishing scenario and not being able to troll through 150 feet of water catching fish that do not even live in that area. They are the things that I think have caused big problems.

Mr IAN COHEN: You agree, as part of the establishment of marine parks, with the reduction in commercial fishing area. The environment was in a pretty healthy state before the creation of this marine park?

Mr HARNWELL: In Jervis Bay Marine Park?

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes.

Mr HARNWELL: I would not say that. I would say the cessation of some commercial fishing activity has resulted in some baitfish species coming back in more numbers. There was quite an extensive fish netting industry in the bay. I would say the current system of sanctuary zones in Jervis Bay Marine Park has caused a significant displacement effort and I think that has added a notorious environmental effect on the bay as a whole.

Mr IAN COHEN: Displacement of recreational fishing, is it,

Mr HARNWELL: Recreational fishing, and probably commercial fishing. I am not a commercial fisher, I cannot comment on that. My experience from fishing in this area 30 years, I am seeing a lot more people being squished into smaller and smaller areas because areas that were previously open are no longer open. I think this is an issue that the Government and the marine parks people have not really looked at. I cannot see the point of having one area with no-one in and then everyone in the few areas that are left open. What is the environmental benefit of that? What does that do? Why flog one area to death and have one other area open? I cannot see any environmental benefit to that, and I made that point very clear when I was on the advisory committee. If we do this sort of thing we have to have some sort of avenue for people who want to fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you have any evidence of an area being flogged to death?

Mr HARNWELL: I can take you out this weekend to Longnose Point and you will see a lot of boats there that previously were not there because they now will not go around to Crocodile Head or Bowen Island.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are a journalist by trade?

Mr HARNWELL: That is correct.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We have had some submissions from fishers. One in particular that comes to mind described himself as a fair dinkum fisherman who did not seem to know the legal sizes or bag limits of fish. If you were a fair dinkum fisherman you would know there were bag limits and legal sizes. Does that surprise you?

Mr HARNWELL: Nothing surprises me.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If we had a system that was not a government regulated system and relied on recreational fishers, how can we be sure that information that is not exactly held by the KGB these fishermen will be abiding by?

Mr HARNWELL: I am not sure what you mean. Are you saying we should not have any management restrictions in place for recreational fishers?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, I am saying if you did management other than by Fisheries New South Wales in marine parks, in that it was self-regulating—

Mr HARNWELL: I would not suggest there was any need for self-regulation in fishing. I think the current situation with bag limits and size limits, seasonal closures and few restrictions, and so on, is the way to go. I suggest there is a lot more work, proactive work, that could be done to finetune these regulations and make them much more effective.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In the McGregor Tan research that was done of the Jervis Bay Marine Park community—How strongly do you support the sanctuary zones in Jervis Bay Marine Park—of those that fish, 76 per cent were in favour, 13 per cent were neutral and only 8 per cent were against the sanctuary zones. How does that relate to your submission that sanctuary zones in New South Wales were in part considered by many anglers to be ad hoc and based more on satisfying political requirements as opposed to any real conservation efforts?

Mr HARNWELL: That survey you referred to had 402 interviewees. Sixty-eight per cent of those people had never ever fished. Of the remaining 32 per cent of people who said they did fish, only 7 per cent of those could be considered keen fisherman in that they fished once or twice a month.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So, there is a small proportion of keen fishermen?

Mr HARNWELL: In that particular survey, yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Let us go to another point. In your submission you acknowledge that anglers are enjoying a public resource. When you say a public resource, what do you mean by that?

Mr HARNWELL: Well, it is owned by the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So, you have 402 people of whom overwhelmingly those who fish and do not fish were strongly in favour or in favour of sanctuary zones and of a public resource. You then have people who undertook boating, snorkelling, diving—basically a cross-section of the people of New South Wales?

Mr HARNWELL: I see what you are saying there. Again I say that 7 per cent of those people surveyed were keen fisherman and would probably be in a position where they could make some sort of informed comment on the sanctuary zones.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: They would be fair dinkum fishermen?

Mr HARNWELL: I would not say fair dinkum. That is a fairly old-fashioned word and I do not think it is used too much these days. The point I would make here is that recreational fishermen are the only user group of marine parks that are disadvantaged by being restricted from these sanctuary zones. All other users, surfers, divers, fishermen, commercial charter diving operations, whale watching tours, and so on, have free and unfettered access and obviously a lot of fishermen do those things as well. Commercial fishermen were compensated financially for being denied their fishing grounds but recreational fishermen did not get any compensation.

One of the points made in my submission and it is relevant to the points you raised then was that I think it is fair that maybe recreational fishermen would be compensated somehow for the loss of these grounds because there are fewer areas to go, but also to try to reduce the pressure on the areas that are left open. I suggest in my submission that artificial reefs could be one way of looking at this. That is a subject I am quite interested in. Artificial reef programs are being instigated by the New South Wales Government off the coast and I think they should be looked at in regard to marine parks to ease the problems of displaced effort and also cater to our growing population. There are some indications that it will be 30 million, 50 million, whatever. I do not think anybody concerned with fish, fishing and the marine environment wants to see areas possibly flogged to death when we could perhaps be a bit more proactive and a bit more creative and come up with things that would ease that effort.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You said earlier when you were answering questions from the Hon. Ian Cohen that in Batemans Bay the locals put forward their views and they were informed. What do you mean by that?

Mr HARNWELL: I cannot give any specific details. That particular park process was a few years ago. As I remember it, that park was being run by former Minister Bob Debus and there was another park, I think, being managed by Ian Macdonald. The Batemans Bay park went through astonishingly quickly compared to the Jervis Bay park, which took some years to process all the consultation and so forth. I am not exactly sure why. There might have been some political imperatives—elections, with perhaps Ministers moving to Federal seats and so forth. But there was a lot of community disquiet about the speed with which this thing went and the fact

that a lot of people made submissions saying they were unhappy with the way things were progressing but it just went through as it was.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It was not necessarily their views; it was the speed of the consultation.

Mr HARNWELL: I think it was a combination of both. Things did go very, very quickly. The Jervis Bay one took a long time—some years. There was continual toing and froing, with meetings and so forth. I thought that whole Jervis Bay process under the original park manager, Graham Byron, was very well handled and tried to give people as much opportunity as they could to comment on it. I do not think the Batemans Bay one was quite as efficient in doing that. I think as a result of that we have seen a lot of disquiet, anger and probably negative publicity for the whole marine parks idea in general.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The other point is that in your submission you state, "There's considerable dissent amongst marine scientists about the validity of the NSW system of small no-fishing zones". We have heard from one professor from Canberra. Which other universities are putting forward these dissenting views?

Mr HARNWELL: There is a fair degree of stuff coming through. Again, I make the point that I am not a scientist and I do not make a habit of keeping this sort of information on hand. A couple of days ago I received a quite interesting paper from the Department of Fisheries in Western Australia. I make the point that this paper was to do with Western Australia but it did make some general observations about marine parks, which I read with interest, considering the fact that I was going to be appearing before you guys today. The last paragraph of the executive summary of this paper, which I am happy to table to the Committee, reads:

Whilst simplistic solutions (e.g. all fisheries need sanctuary zones) and generic rules (x% of the coastline always needs to be closed to fishing) are often proposed, these are rarely found to be optimal or appropriate when dealing with the management of complex natural systems. Experiences in WA, and elsewhere, have shown that the only effective methods for the overall conservation and maintenance of harvested species (i.e. not their local densities) requires specific, directed and coordinated controls on the overall catch and effort across their entire range. While these controls often involve stock-specific spatial &/or temporal closure systems, complete closures or sanctuaries will generally make only a minor contribution to the management required.

I cite another quote here from the paper to support my assertions in my submission:

There is considerable debate worldwide about the relative value of marine protected areas and particularly marine reserves (or 'no-take' sanctuary areas) for use in the management of fish stocks and biodiversity ... Some groups state they are an essential part of any fishery management plan ... whilst others suggest that they are not necessary to enable sustainable fisheries management ...

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Western Australia has a significantly different sea terrain to New South Wales. In fact, a significant proportion of the fish imported into New South Wales comes from Western Australia due to the completely different fishing circumstances.

Mr HARNWELL: I did make the point that this paper was specifically dealing with the Western Australian waters. But I think you can see from that and the various other papers that I have seen and which are available, and which people like Bob Kearney would no doubt have much more credibility in talking about, that there is some debate about this. I am not saying that I would go either way. I am not a scientist; I cannot say whether one particular thing is better than the other. But what I would say is that there is debate and I think that debate needs to be looked at in a more critical sense before we make any real—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In fact, you do. You say that many anglers feel that the science used to justify marine parks is not all it is cracked up to be.

Mr HARNWELL: I am sure many anglers do feel that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But this is your submission; this is not the submission of someone else. It is your view.

Mr HARNWELL: I said many anglers feel that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: By "many", what do you mean—10 per cent, 20 per cent, 17 per cent, 105?

Mr HARNWELL: That is probably something we need to do some surveys on.

CHAIR: Is that paper available for tabling today, Mr Harnwell?

Mr HARNWELL: Yes. I can give you a copy.

Document tabled.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: The terms of reference of this inquiry include dealing with ecologically sustainable development issues related to improving recreational fisheries. Because of the specific item in the terms of reference relating to marine parks, there has been a lot of consultation on marine parks and the pros and cons of the sanctuary processes. What would you say—would you think it had worth—if there was a descriptor of the fishing environment, which included water quality, pollution and development? Would it be helpful to describe the whole program, which the Government delivers in one way or another albeit not under the control of Marine Parks or under the control of Fisheries, including the catchment programs, the river care programs, the water quality programs, the farming industry reforms, et cetera? If there was some magic way that the Government could describe the entirety of the fishing world's health, including of course the bag limits, the kinds of lines and whether commercial fishing is allowed, et cetera, would it be better if it was described in its entirety? Then would it be necessary to actually bag out marine parks, or are marine parks a component of that whole?

Mr HARNWELL: I would think that marine parks would have to be a component of the whole. I make the point that I am not against marine parks in any way, shape or form, but if we are going to have a marine park, let us make sure it is the best possible design. I think a whole management structure looking at all those other issues that affect the fish and marine life in general would definitely be a great way to go. Fish are not simply impacted upon by people catching them. I think we need to look at a holistic approach. Take for example the Jervis Bay Marine Park. We had some very strong westerly winds some time back that brought big dust clouds through New South Wales. They came from western New South Wales.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Yes, we all know.

Mr HARNWELL: They obviously deposited large amounts of dust into the area. There were probably fertilisers and other things in that dust. I think you might have read in the newspapers about a strange weed growth that has appeared on Hyams Beach in Jervis Bay that people cannot recall seeing before. It is possible that that was caused by fertiliser falling from the dust into the water and promoting an algal bloom. They are things that obviously have an impact on the environment. I am not sure that they have an impact on fish, but they have an impact on the environment and there are probably invertebrates on that beach that maybe died because the beach was clogged up with weed. Having a marine park or a sanctuary zone is not going to do anything to stop that, so we have to look outside this narrow view that sanctuary zones and stopping people from fishing is the be-all and end-all of marine science. That is my point.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I guess my question is that it is not my perception that that is actually happening, but it is the perception that we are getting through from this fishing inquiry because there is work happening on all those other areas. But, mentally, even we are not grouping together that work to complement fish health. Somebody came to us at the very first hearing complaining about the poisoning of the rivers and the fish in the Tweed from the cane farms.

CHAIR: The Richmond River.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We are getting an answer back from the department because I happen to know that the local farming community is working very closely to do something about the acid sulphate soil problem there. But these examples are not necessarily put together. The process is not necessarily put together to describe the health of fish. So it makes it easier or harder because people are using marine parks as an external example of the only thing that is happening about fish health.

Mr HARNWELL: I think I get what you are saying. There is a probably a perception, perhaps politically and even socially, that, yes, we have these great marine parks and everything is fine. I do not think that is the case. I think there are a lot of other things we need to look at. I think we need to not be complacent about having a few pink spots on a map and saying, "That's great. We can all relax now." In fact, I would

probably argue that marine parks have maybe even put back or degraded the public's idea of marine conservation. They might think that because we have marine parks, everything is fine.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So a descriptor of the entirety would be a healthier way to go?

Mr HARNWELL: I think we need to look at it as a holistic approach and not just focus on trying to solve all the problems by picking out certain areas.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I might say that this is not in any way from my perspective, bagging out marine parks, but I perceive that to be a component.

Mr HARNWELL: I think that is true.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Do you think your policy line on this issue is reflective of your readership or do you perceive yourself as a leader of this policy?

Mr HARNWELL: No, I think it would be pretty reflective of the way people think about things. I get a lot of letters to the editor and things like that talking about the marine parks issue and talking about fisheries management, and that sort of thing. I think anglers as a whole are concerned. You have to understand that all this stuff has only been in the angling community for the last 10 years. There have been a lot of changes with fishing in the last 10 years. It never used to be as regulated as it is now. I think that regulation is a good thing, but there was never the political issue of being locked out of areas. There were never issues about having to have licences and getting fines if you did not have licences. There has been a real shift in the way that fishermen have had to adapt. That is possibly quite hard for a lot of people because before they used to just go off and have a bit of a fish. Now you have to think have you got a licence, can you go fishing here, blah, blah, blah. It is a different sort of thing. What used to be a very, very relaxed and basic pastime is now relatively complex.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Do you think many of your readers realise what a small proportion of the coastline they are locked out of?

Mr HARNWELL: That is a moot point.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Or is the perception that it is all of it?

Mr HARNWELL: New South Wales obviously has a vast coastline and sanctuary zones are only a very, very small part of that. But it comes down to access. A lot of the coastline is completely inaccessible because it is miles away from anywhere either by boat, by car or by foot. Marine parks tend to be in areas that are relatively populated. While the marine park in Jervis Bay, for example, is only 20 per cent of the park, that is quite a lot of area where you would normally fish. Inside of Jervis Bay is basically flat sand, not much fish there. The fish are all along the rocky fringes of the park and a lot of those areas have been closed off. You get back to that displaced effort thing again. The few areas that are left over are getting more pressure because the areas that are closed, which were the areas where you could go fishing, are no longer there. The average punter who is not a fisherman would say, "Oh well, you guys have all those spots to go fishing in", but there are no fish there.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: We have received evidence that currently the representative system for recreational fishers is insufficient. As a recreational fisher, would you comment on that and suggest an alternative representative system?

Mr HARNWELL: This is an issue that has been quite a big part of things in the past few weeks. Our Federal peak body, RECFish, was denied funding by the Federal Government and basically that now makes it an unsustainable organisation. The issue with recreational fishing is that most of us are fairly unorganised and just want to go fishing. There is no real structure to recreational fishing. There are various groups that do things—Australian Land Based Anglers Association [ANSA], game fishing clubs and so on and so forth—but RECFish was the only group that was recognised as the peak body. But unfortunately the Federal Government no longer sees fit to fund it, so it is fundamentally gone. So there is no national body representing fishing.

In New South Wales there is ACoRF, of which I was a member for sometime, but that is not really a representative body either. It is a ministerial advisory thing. Some people tend to see ACoRF as a representative

body. My understanding is that it is not designed as that; it is designed to give information to the Fisheries Minister of the day. I think it is very important that there is some sort of representative body looking after fishermen, putting forward their points of view, like various green groups and the Nature Conservation Council, for example, which is very proactive in doing what it does. I understand that it gets significant funding from the Government to do its job. I would like to see some sort of funding provided by the Government to give recreational fishermen a voice—to people such as you, to the media in general—to professionally put forward our points of view. I think if other interest groups, green groups and other sporting groups can get government money to do that, I find it a bit unfair if recreational fishermen are not given the same largesse.

CHAIR: Thank you. We have run out of time. Mr Harnwell, thank you for coming in today and giving evidence. Along with any questions that you took on notice during your evidence, would you agree to receive additional written questions that members of the Committee may not have had the opportunity to ask you?

Mr HARNWELL: I would be more than happy to do so.

CHAIR: If so, could you respond within 21 days of receiving the questions?

Mr HARNWELL: Yes.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)