

1. You mentioned the recent Independent Review findings at the hearing. Are you aware that that Review team states 'that the way industry is provided with information, findings and decisions on restructuring will be critical'. How do you propose new managers and licensing staff with limited experience in NSW fisheries will be able to do a good job of providing this critical industry-specific information?

The most significant section of the quote made from the Independent Review is at the beginning...

'that **the way** [emphasis added] industry is provided with information,

My expectation is that 'the way' will be through existing decentralised fishery managers (Coffs Harbour, Clarence River, etc), port meetings to be held at many locations up and down the coast, the soon to be appointed Industry Liaison Officer and support team, an information phone line facility, the networks of the Professional Fisherman's Association, fisherman's coops, regular literature in the mail, on-line information sites, etc. There will be no shortage or deficiency in mechanisms to provide information.

So far as 'new managers' are concerned and their capacity; this is not a novel thing. Over many years there has been a consistent turnover of managers. What has also been consistent has been a strong core of long term managers with a broad range of knowledge across all commercial fisheries. That remains to this day. Like all newcomers the new managers will add to their experience and knowledge base from their managerial peers.

2. You have said that you are very supportive of the current industry reform, how do you see the disruption to the commercial fisheries management due to this closure being helpful in meeting the tight 3 year timeframe for this industry reform project?

To date, I have received no communication from anyone within the industry indicating any disruption to fisheries management. Nor have I experienced or have any knowledge of any disruption.

However, what I have seen is an inordinate amount of time being consumed by the demands being placed upon departmental personnel as a result of holding this parliamentary inquiry. This, more than anything, has not helped in progressing the industry reform/adjustment process.

Moreover, given the non-existent prospect of a reversal of the decision to decentralise Cronulla Fisheries – requiring a 'miracle' as stated by Hon Rev Nile – by a first term government, from a first term minister implementing a clearly enunciated pre election commitment to a 'decade of decentralisation' the inquiry itself has given false hope to many at Cronulla Fisheries seeking to keep the centre open.

A greater service would have been served to all concerned - clients and staff – had the decentralisation proceeded without unnecessary delay.

3. You mentioned that in the past you had queried obtaining money by other means through the sale of assets by the past government, would you not prefer that the money the government will spend on the relocation of Cronulla staff and facilities be spent on the Industry reform program?

My preference would have been for the \$20 million spent on relocating eastern Creek Raceway to the Olympic Stadium allocated to fishing industry adjustment. Or the \$500 million wasted on an aborted inner city metro system still being in Treasury coffers and a portion of that allocated to a struggling fishing industry.

From my understanding the cost benefit analysis identifies a positive outcome for the State in the long term as a result of decentralising Cronulla Fisheries. Indeed, and again as I understand it, this does not take into account a number of factors but significantly any realising of the opportunity cost of an income positive use of the Cronulla Fisheries site.

Moreover, the fact that the new government has guaranteed fishing industry pool of adjustment funding of \$16 million (\$14 million of public funding) in such a challenging fiscal environment, the granting of these monies minor miracle in itself. This is a most welcome policy initiative and very much a first in the history of the fishing industry of NSW.

4. The Industry Review team mention the inappropriate lobbying by industry to the Ministers office in the past. Do you believe this has been the case? Do you also think this has exasperated the 'culture' you referred to the hearing and the frustration of fishers going directly to the Minister rather than the fisheries managers?

In my view the poor departmental 'culture' has existed with Cronulla Fisheries for a considerable period of time. While in no way universal throughout all departmental personnel, there has been at its core an anti commercial fishing ethos held by key individuals. This has manifested itself in many ways over the years. Very often rather than negotiating and consulting a way through to the resolution to an issue, the department's solution would be to introduce commercial fishing closures – close off a commercial fishing activity, part of an activity or an area of fishing ground partly or completely almost exclusively never to be reopened.

This departmental default position was/is myopic, simplistic and very often appealed to base perception rather than dealing with reality. When relative to inter-industry matters, this has had the effect of pitting one sector of the commercial industry against the other (e.g. ocean prawners lobbying for the closure of estuary prawning so more prawns may be recruited to the ocean at greater yield, as the argument goes or, ocean haulers investing in modern equipment being lobbied against by those fishers stuck in the past and not prepared to invest).

Did this type of 'divide and conquer' management result in inappropriate lobbying of the minister of the day by industry members? Absolutely. Was this situation born out of the lack of a common or agreed departmental position? Yes. Did industry begin 'cherry-picking' the department in search of the person supporting their view and then go to the minister? Without doubt. And has this resulted in an ongoing air of mistrust and antipathy between the commercial industry and the department? Most certainly.

More significantly however was this departmental 'culture' morphing into outright politicisation against commercial fishing in the early 2000's.

In 1999 Minister Obeid called a summit meeting for all commercial industry leaders held at Mascot. In his address he stated that there was going to be a 'new era' in relations between commercial fishers, recreational fishers and the department. There would be he said be 'no more us and them' and that as minister he would have an 'open door' policy. However this was all turned on its head by Minister Obeid himself within a very short period of time.

Approximately 12 months later Minister Obeid put out a public paper called 'Sustaining Our Fisheries'. Inside the cover was a picture of the minister and a signed letter. This letter effectively made the case for the closing vast areas of NSW waterways to commercial fishing. Minister Obeid made one salient statement in his letter with words to the effect

'.....we know that our lakes and rivers once teeming with fish can be emptied...'

Firstly, the minister was appealing to base perception through a completely false statement and in doing so he blamed the commercial fishery for that supposed result. Secondly, the minister insulted and totally denigrated the research and reputation of managers and scientists who through decades of good work have ensured the 'emptied' claim of Minister Obeid was not true.

However what was equally as disturbing was the fact that not one researcher, one manager, one person of any standing in the department stood up in defence of that good work to say 'what the minister has told the public is false'. This was consistent with long held attitudes and actions of certain departmental people. One manifestation of this attitude was a poster on the wall at Cronulla Fisheries depicting a commercial fisher. Across the bottom of the poster someone had written 'Hooray, the last Botany Bay commercial fisher'.

Furthermore, there was no departmental movement against the then minister's words and actions by way of starting petitions, set up fighting funds, establish web sites, call rallies, send letters to the minister, or indeed calling for a parliamentary inquiry into this travesty. Departmental people were prepared to 'cop that on the chin' as the end result of this process saw more than 300 commercial fishers lose their jobs, an additional 30 waterways closed to commercial fishing and more than 1 million kilos of fresh NSW seafood lost to the supply system.

Adding insult to this injury was certain events and actions of some departmental people following the closure of Botany Bay to commercial fishing. With that fishery closed the local commercial fishers began selling their assets, essentially their boats, small prawn trawlers that for years plied the waters of Botany Bay. It came to the attention of industry some time later that at least one senior departmental person had 'scooped up a bargain' and purchased one of these prawn trawlers and refitted it as a party boat so as to be able to leisurely cruise and fish the commercial fishing free waters of Botany Bay.

In the mind of those in the fishing industry, the trail of deceit was complete. Not only was the departmental silence deafening when it came to the minister's false statements about fishing sustainability politically legitimising the closure of Botany Bay and a host of other commercial fisheries, at the end of it all some departmental people were prepared to 'pick over the carcass' of the industry they had just help kill off for their own pleasure.

5. How do you believe it is fair to exclude south coast and Sydney basin fishers from adequate access to management, considering as you mentioned that the north coast is already a base for a significant number of management staff and has a relatively well represented industry body?

It is not true to say any commercial fisher is being excluded from access to management. Very few if any commercial fishers just 'pop' into Cronulla Fisheries for a 'chat' with managers. Indeed how an argument can be made that a commercial fisher from Nowra, Bermagui, Ulladulla, or Eden is not currently excluded from access to managers located in Cronulla is beyond comprehension.

Telephone or organized meetings at the local level have been and will remain the principle ways of industry issues being discussed with managers.

Furthermore, and as a thorough reading of the Independent Review report will show, it is envisaged a 'peak industry body' will be established for the commercial sector covering all commercial fishers in the state. It is further envisaged that for the first time a specialist team (again through the peak industry body initiative) will be solely dedicated to south coast fishers for consultation purposes and engaging with the department. This is largely in recognition of the now lack of numbers of commercial fishers on the south coast as a result of fishing closures through marine parks and recreational fishing havens processes.