

Submission  
No 47

**INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF THE CRONULLA  
FISHERIES RESEARCH CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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## **Submission to the inquiry into the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence**

I am currently employed by NSW DPI, based at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence.

### **a) the basis for the decision including the documents and other records that were considered by the Minister, including any economic or financial analysis,**

The Minister's reasons for closing the site and relocating staff and resources to regional sites included constrained access and lack of modernisation and expansion capacity. Cronulla Fisheries Centre is serviced by rail and is also easily accessible by bus and car transport. The claimed reason of "constrained access" is confusing as this is clearly not the case. The comment of "lack of modernisation and expansion capacity" defies logic as the site is large with many opportunities to expand. Additionally, the Labour Government spent \$1.5 million on modernising the research lab; a waste of tax payers money if the site is subsequently closed and in stark contradiction to the "lack of modernisation" claims. Furthermore, the Minister did not even visit the site, or have a tour of the site with the site Director to observe the facilities and see that the reasons stated for closure are in fact based on misinformation provided to her.

Based on documents obtained from Freedom of Information Act it was revealed that no business case or costing of the relocation was completed. It is reprehensible that a government can support such a large-scale relocation without a business case.

### **b) what consultation was undertaken prior to the decision with stakeholders, including commercial and recreational fishing groups, environmental groups and staff,**

Zero consultation with both staff and major stakeholders was undertaken prior to the decision. Consultation is imperative when making decisions that will use a vast amount of tax payer's money and may have dire consequences on the sustainability of the NSW fishing industry.

### **c) the costs and benefits of the decision to close the Centre and relocate its functions to other locations,**

As no business case was developed to ascertain the potential costs of the relocation it is difficult to determine what the costs may be. But it is obvious that fragmenting the research centre across the state will result in duplication of resources and facilities. Is a \$1.5 million lab going to be built at Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour and SIMS? These are the locations that research staff will be based. It was been stated numerous times by the Minister and the Director General of Primary Industries that resources and facilities will be duplicated and be of the same standard at the new locations as they currently exist at Cronulla.

To date I am still unaware as to what the benefits of the relocation are. The notion of creating regional jobs is one I support but this will not be the case in regards to the Cronulla Fisheries closure. Many staff have already left the department and yet many of these positions are not being replaced. These positions that were to go to regional

locations will therefore not be filled and will therefore not be creating new jobs for regional centres.

**d) the extent to which the decision satisfies the Minister's responsibilities under the Fisheries Management Act 1994,**

One of the objectives of the FMA (1994) is "to conserve fish stocks". The decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre will result in this objective not being met. There is an excellent fish stock assessment process based at Cronulla that is the result of hard work and collaboration between fisheries scientists and management. With many staff leaving and the fragmentation of Fisheries across the state this collaboration will not operate at the same level as it does now. This has serious implications for the conservation of NSW fish stocks, an important objective of the act which the Minister should be seriously concerned about.

**e) any advice received by the Minister on the ability to replicate the Cronulla facilities at other locations, including potential problems and other implications of the other locations,**

Almost one year after the decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre research facilities have still not been completed or even determined at Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens or SIMS. How are staff expected to make a decision of moving to another location, away from family and friends, when facilities are yet to be finalised?

**f) the loss of the scientific expertise held by the staff who cannot relocate from Cronulla and the implications for sustainable fisheries management,**

The loss of scientific expertise will be huge if the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is closed down. Numerous scientific staff that have worked at the Department for over 30 years are being forced into early retirement and have been forced at such a rapid rate that transfer of knowledge is not possible. This is also the case for the younger generation of research scientists who have invested a lot of time and passion into their professional development and who may ultimately leave the profession. Many of the younger staff are also unable to move due to family commitments. The resulting outcome is a huge exodus of research staff both young and old and the sustainability of NSW fisheries is at serious risk.

**g) the impacts of the decision on service delivery to stakeholders,**

Fragmenting the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre across the state will severely impact on service delivery to stakeholders. How can the Fisheries department be expected to perform efficiently and effectively deliver to stakeholders with staff scattered across the state? Not only this, but the majority of staff have expressed their intentions not to move so there will be a huge loss of expertise in recreational and commercial management, licensing and research. That loss of knowledge is specialised and developed over many years of faithful service to the Department and not something that can be replicated easily. A lot of that knowledge and expertise has already been lost by the Department with many staff having already resigned. This will impact on service delivery to stakeholders.

**h) the impact on staff and their families of the closure and the relocation, and**

The stress this closure has caused on workers and their families is palpable. There has been so much uncertainty in regards to the decision and the subsequent management of the relocation. Staff were put into the position of having to choose between family commitments (such as removing their children from schools) and their professions. It will be difficult for many staff to obtain new jobs in their professions as they are highly specialised.

A lot of staff on site are of temporary employee status. To undertake such a major move away from friends and families based on temporary employment is not feasible.

As mentioned previously many of the sites have not even been worked out so it is stressful to try and decide whether to move if a lab facility or an office block has not even been finalised let alone built.

**i) the impact on the heritage values of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre.**

Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre has been around for over 100 years. It is the oldest fisheries research facility in the southern hemisphere. The site has strong significance to the local Aboriginal community. These two points alone should warrant the immediate reversal of the decision.

In summary the fact that there was no consultation with staff or stakeholders and no business case outlining the costs of the relocation raises serious concerns on the handling of the closure by the Minister and the Director General of NSW DPI. There appears to be a complete disregard of the impact the decision has had on staff and their families and the huge loss of knowledge and expertise which puts the sustainability of NSW fish stocks at serious risk.

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