

Submission  
No 42

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially Confidential

30 July 2012

The Director,  
Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries,  
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Sydney NSW 2000

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I wish to submit the following comments in respect of the NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries inquiry into the closure of 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 for Primary Industries and the Deputy Premier released a media release in September 2011 professing a significant boost to regional coastal NSW. They made many blatantly false and misleading statements in regard to "decentralising" the services and facilities of the Cronulla Fisheries Research centre.

The Deputy Premier stated that "NSW Liberals & Nationals have a proven track record in decentralisation" in regard to NSW Agriculture relocating to Orange. What is ignored is that at the time of the relocation, NSW Fisheries was part of NSW Agriculture.

The relocation of facets of NSW Fisheries to Orange with the separation of administration, management and research, completely and dismally failed. Stakeholders and in particular commercial fishers were outraged with what they knew would happen happened - the loss of expertise, the disruption to their fishing activities and their abilities to make an income.

The mistake was made, and since, after many years, the whole organisation has been restructured to provide efficient and relevant services to fisheries stakeholders.

The proponents for the closure are obviously unaware or are ignoring the fact that NSW Fisheries is now one of the most decentralised NSW Government organisations providing relevant

and appropriate services to local communities throughout regional New South Wales. This is one of the reasons the decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Centre "to take services to the regions where they are needed" and "focused on regionalising Fisheries NSW" is nonsensical.

It is recognized by most people in NSW that the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Centre will come at great financial, environmental and social expense to the State. Especially adversely affected are those persons supposedly the relocation will support.

The NSW National Party's "decade of decentralisation" was a policy put out to advocate improved essential services to regional areas of the State. Services like schools, hospitals, police and better roads and other infrastructure. All residents of NSW want to see those improvements! In this regard the proponents are largely ignoring the Governments own priority to provide these essential services!

The Minister for Primary Industries stated that the "Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is an "old facility". She states that one of the downsides of the site is that it has limited access and constrained modernisation and expansion capacity. How false is this! The description presented by this statement is more a description of the Port Stephens Aquaculture Research Centre rather than the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre

The Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is located on a site that has historically been used as a research facility for many years and has been upgraded periodically in those years and has been upgraded at great cost recently. The facility is "old" but not outdated. At least one building has the ability for a second story to be built on it. The site has easy access by major road network and a main two lane street to the "front door". It has deep water access via a wharf. All this comes with little cost to NSW taxpayers.

It is also obvious that the Minister was not aware where fishers are located. With only 1% of the States fishers being in the Nowra area She obviously does not where Nowra is. Nowra is as coastal as Parramatta is.

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

From advice I have received from Commercial fishers, there has been no consultation with the Industry. The sole person that has been consulted and supports the closure is the executive officer of the Clarence River Professional Fishermen Association. By advice I have received, this person has acted independently with his own

vendetta in mind, and without consulting the membership of the association, but there has been much political usage of this support.

All calls by any other stakeholders or stakeholder groups for the Centre to remain are ignored or dismissed.

Staff have been left by the wayside in any consultation or decision making. All arguments against the decision or any suggestion to make relocation work with the least amount of disruption or the complete discontinuing of services have also been ignored.

There is an over zealotness to close the Centre at any cost from the Directors and Minister. No concern has been given to what stakeholders want or to provide continued effective services being provided.

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

Is there any cost benefit when rents for numerous new accommodation being paid for by NSW taxpayers! Apart from destroying the workable, cost effective and efficient structure of NSW Fisheries, the closure of Cronulla Fisheries Centre will take away employment opportunities from the local community. The closure will have a huge impact on Sutherland Shire. Employment prospects in this part of the state have diminished in recent years, and continues to do so. Recently, there have been closures of large employers such as Abbott Pharmaceuticals, Players Biscuits, Johnson & Johnson and Australian Lubricating Refinery. And now Caltex Refineries, Kurnell is now starting to shut down its production activities. What will the flow on affects be with the massive loss of local employment?

Isn't taking away employment opportunities from one area of the State and trying to prop up another self defeating? There will be an employment void left on the outskirts of Sydney in which the NSW Government has added to. Maybe, Ms Hodgkinson is not able, or not willing, to discern the difference between employment opportunities in the Sydney CBD and outer suburbs of Sydney.

If the Government considers increased employment opportunities in regional NSW to be the main purpose for this closure, I would strongly contend that the tens of millions of dollars proposed to be spent on relocating a relatively small number of jobs would be better spent on the actual creation of new jobs or giving incentives for industry to be started up in regional areas. I question the cost effectiveness of this closure. Where is the value to all taxpayers?

The amount of public servants salaries to be injected into the regional areas is so small and negligible in the overall economies of the regions. It is hard to substantiate that it will have any affect (only 20 or so positions in each of the three regional locations?).

*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.*

The Minister must be aware, or should be aware that since the failed move to Orange in the 1990's NSW Fisheries has undergone reorganisations to best suit and facilitate its activities for the benefit of stakeholders. The current plans are to widely disseminate staff and working units throughout the state. Managers will be distant from their staff, liaising between groups and staff will be difficult if not impossible. Working with stakeholders will be difficult. Where now there is "one stop shop", stakeholders may have to go from one end of the state to the other.

The office space found in Nowra apparently will have little or no storage facilities and storage of equipment and records will be in another distant location. How will this compare to what is available in Cronulla. Again, there has been an over zealousness in securing any type of office space instead of securing appropriate and suitable site for a regional office.

Staff have not been involved in anyway as to what should be included in either the office layout or the necessary equipment to be included in any Office. This appears to be have been guess work.

There would appear to be no research into the availability of persons or companies able to urgently repair specialized equipment in the regional centres. Any delay in repairs severely impedes stakeholder abilities to continue to make a livelihood.

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

The area I work in, Fisheries Business Services, provides frontline services to commercial fishers, charter fishing boat operators and indigenous fishers. The unit has 11 officers. Of those officers only 1 may relocate. The loss of specialized knowledge and skills will be have a detrimental impact on the ability of the stake holder groups to continue to fish legally and to earn a livelihood. No all encompassing instruction manual can be produced so as such specialized knowledge and skills can be imparted on any new recruits. Stakeholders will be frustrated, severely inconvenienced and disadvantaged. Going by the failed Orange relocation and the loss of staff then, it may take over a decade before any improvement in services and stakeholder trust.

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

I do work at the site and have been employed there for a number of years. My previous job required me to travel more than 4 hours a day. A long time to be away from my wife and four children.

My work is now only 20 minutes away and I have been able to enjoy being with my family for longer.

I have been notified that my position is allocated to Nowra.

Should I be unable to secure a job elsewhere, I may have to follow my work to Nowra so that I might retain some income (I am earning less than the average wage)

A principle guiding the "decentralising" program was that there are suitable and accessible regional health and education. It is obvious to me, in my case, that this principle has not been met.

With the closure of many industries and businesses in Sutherland Shire, of course if I want ongoing employment, I will have to live and work in Nowra "Monday to Friday" and come home on the weekends. My ability to provide for my family will be reduced as I will have to pay a considerable portion of my salary as rent.

I consider that not only is this decision to close the Centre is a waste of taxpayers funds and reduction in local employment opportunities, it shows disgraceful lack of concern given to families by the NSW Government and in particular the Minister for Primary industries. It is disgraceful that Public Servants and there lives are being used as pawn in some political game.

Should the Committee require any clarification of the points made by myself please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely