

**Submission
No 69**

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

Organisation: Australian National Sportfishing Association Ltd (ANSA)
Date received: 30/07/2012



Australian National Sportfishing Association Ltd
ACN 063 293 514

COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION AND INTEGRITY IN SPORTFISHING SINCE
1967

“Proposed Closure Of The Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre Of Excellence”

On behalf of the members of ANSA and recreational fishers generally we offer the following comments regarding the proposed closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence and the relocation of staff.

By way of background ANSA has maintained a longstanding professional working relationship with staff and other resources located at the Cronulla Centre. ANSA currently has representatives on the Licence Expenditure Committees and ACORF and a number of scientific and resource management steering committees which currently function out of Cronulla. Many of our members are also Fishcare Volunteers.

ANSA and its membership is very concerned by the impending closure of the Cronulla Centre and the dire impacts the loss of expertise associated with the relocation of staff and closure of the research facilities will have on the management of our vital state fisheries. Over 60 % of recreational fishers in NSW live in the Sydney region and the majority of the State’s commercial fishing activity is undertaken between Wollongong and Newcastle and it makes good commercial and business sense that the central hub for NSW Fisheries should remain located in Sydney (Cronulla) in close proximity to its major stakeholders.

It is our understanding that of the 150 staff on location at Cronulla, at the time of the announcement of the closure, the majority are not prepared or willing to relocate to decentralised locations due to family or other commitments and may have no choice other than to leave the service of Fisheries. The loss of such a large number of people and their combined expertise and talent will have dramatic implications for the management of our state fisheries and the vast number of research projects also being undertaken at Cronulla. These people cannot be replaced quickly and will set back NSW Fisheries to the sad situation that prevailed in the eighties when there was a major exodus of staff and expertise as a consequence of a prior decentralisation exercise which failed miserably.

In addition to a likely loss of and relocation of human resources from Cronulla, one has to speculate what impacts this relocation exercise will have on volunteer groups such as the Fishcare Volunteers (most of whom are located in Metropolitan Sydney) and the many education programmes that are hosted out of Cronulla and in the Port Hacking estuary. It is concerning how these volunteers will react to the notion of having to deal with their Fisheries counterparts now to be located in places such as Nowra, Port Stephens and Coffs Harbour or to successfully run education programmes at distant locations. The potential loss of Fishcare Volunteers and the wind back of the education projects, particular for junior anglers, due to loss of volunteer support or unwillingness of participants to travel to distant locations will have disastrous implications for future generations of recreational fishers.

Similarly there are many committed recreational fishers that freely give up their time to sit upon Fisheries management and research steering committees on a volunteer basis without payment or travel reimbursement. It is doubtful that these volunteers will be willing to freely give up their time to travel to distant locations once the centrality of Cronulla is lost. A number of universities which have close partnership links with NSW Fisheries will also be disadvantaged as it may no longer be practical or possible for students and undergraduates to benefit from work and project experience currently provided by the Cronulla Centre. These are substantive downsides from closure of the Cronulla Centre.

There is also the issue of cost to the NSW taxpayer associated with the Cronulla Centre closure and relocation of staff. It has been suggested that the cost of staff relocation will be in the order of \$9 million and perhaps double or triple this amount once redundancy payments are factored in. There is also the issue of costs associated with the creation of new research laboratory facilities at Port Stephens and whether this is in fact an ideal location for the new laboratory given its low lying geographical location and questionable water quality for salt water species stock holding etc. Compounding this is the fact that over \$1 million in taxpayer funds was expended on the Cronulla laboratory only 6 years to bring it up to world class standard and this expenditure and the laboratory facility itself will be wasted.

Question marks exist as to what the NSW Government's intentions are in respect of the Cronulla site. The property has historical and heritage significance in that it is the birthplace of fisheries science in Australia and many of its buildings and facilities such as its aquarium facilities have heritage status. The site also has significant aboriginal heritage links with several aboriginal sites and middens on site. It is acknowledged that the site has enormous value as a potential residential development site and it is sincerely hoped that this is not a prime motivation for closure of the site. It would be a very wasteful and concerning outcome if the property was to remain unoccupied and be subject to vandalism if no other suitable use could be found. There are already examples of such poor planning outcomes and Strickland House and Callan Park are just two that come to mind.

Another factor to be considered is the socio economic impact of the Cronulla closure for the Sutherland Shire. NSW Fisheries is one of the major employer organisations within the shire and its closure will have severe socio economic impacts for the local community. These impacts will now be exacerbated by the pending closure of the Kurnell oil refinery and the loss of 300 – 600 jobs over the next 3 years. Rather than taking jobs out of the Shire the NSW Government's priority should be the preservation and creation of employment opportunities within the Shire.

Conclusion

It is disappointing that the level of public consultation in respect of the planned closure of the Cronulla Centre has been so minimal. The rationale for closure has not been clearly explained to the general public nor has there been a business case made that would support the closure. It is of some comfort to know that this issue is now the subject of a Select Committee review and that hopefully a more politically and socially acceptable outcome will be forthcoming as a consequence of the review.

John Burgess
Executive Officer/ Director. ANSA Ltd.
Vice President. ANSA NSW Inc.
30 July 2012