

**Submission  
No 94**

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

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**A Submission to the Upper House ( NSW Parliament) Inquiry into the proposed closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence**

**Sydney  
Tuesday  
31st of July 2012**

Dear Honourable Sirs and Mesdames,

re: the future of Cronulla Fisheries

Having been fervently opposed to the proposed closure of Cronulla Fisheries from the very moment I learned of the unilateral and uninformed decision taken last year by the Minister for Primary Industry and seeing neither then nor now any merit in that decision and outraged whatsmore by the Minister's intransigence as much as her lack of reasoning and failure to present a business case or other meritorious arguments for her decision and pleased now to see the establishment of an Upper House Inquiry into this unseemly saga, I now respectfully write to you, Honourable Members, in reply to your call for submissions on the future of Cronulla Fisheries.

Herefollowing is my Submission:

In the conduct of the the matter of the proposed closure of Cronulla Fisheries ( the CFRC), scant regard has been shown by the Minister for the nature and conduct of the valuable work carried out at this long-established place of research excellence. There has been no financial case cited. In the exercise of this decision by the Minister last year ( June 2011), no business plan was seen and there was no evidence produced by the Minster of economic or financial analysis.

There was no consultation whatsoever with stakeholders, and no discussion with local commercial or recreational fishing groups. Environmental groups were not consulted and staff were completely excluded from whatever passed for process before this decision. In the months following the announcement of the announcement whatsmore staff protests were ignored and staff appeals for meetings with the Minister were likewise disregarded. Consultation was, in short, non -existent.

No cost-case was presented and no economic arguments were put forward by the Minister. No case for cost saving was made and no cost-analysis, in terms of the loss of vital infrastructure along with the dispersal of the established pool of professional knowledge that would come with the closure of Cronulla Fisheries, was made. There was, furthermore, no case presented to explain how relocation of staff and infrastructure would save money or conserve the body of professional and academic expertise established at Cronulla Fisheries. Neither was detail of the costs of relocation given.

As to the extent to which the decision satisfies the Minister's responsibilities under the Fisheries Management Act 1994, in as much as the Minister has sought in this matter to destroy a centre of fisheries research excellence, the work of which has been attested in the last 12 months by countless academics writing in defence of this great fisheries asset which is rightly famed throughout the world, the Minister has plainly in this attack upon a centre of excellence not fulfilled her responsibility to conserve one of this country's most distinguished fisheries research assets.

The Minister has not made known any advice she may have received on the ability to replicate the Cronulla Fisheries facilities at other locations. The Minister has not been forthcoming in answering concerns raised by experts, both Australian and international, regarding potential problems or other implications such as loss of expertise which would arise by removal to other locations.

As to the professional knowledge base that is established at Cronulla Fisheries, the damage to the incorporated body of scientific expertise that the closure of Cronulla Fisheries would cause is well -attested in the protests of Cronulla Fisheries staff and in the letters written by countless experts in defence of their colleagues of the Cronulla Fisheries in the last 12 months. The dispersal of staff from the congregating base of research excellence at Cronulla Fisheries would have detrimental effects for the sustenance of the fisheries research knowledge pool and for fisheries management. The fact that many staff are unwilling to move to proposed alternative establishments only serves to underline the negative consequences noted above.

Service delivery to stakeholders -commercial fishers, environmental groups, student groups, visiting scholars etc - would be compromised by the closure of Cronulla Fisheries. Whatsmore, the families of staff affected would suffer likewise in an upheaval that they neither envisaged nor wished for and for which *there has never been any accepted basis in science or economy* in the whole course of this disappointing saga. A final point is that Cronulla Fisheries is not only a great and distinguished fisheries research asset but also a great heritage asset which boasts in its annals and indeed within its enclosed fenced compound and grounds extraordinary fisheries history without peer or parallel in this country. Cronulla Fisheries has been, whatismore, a part of the character and heritage of Cronulla for more than a century. Added to this, Cronulla Fisheries is the oldest fisheries research centre in the southern hemisphere.

Whatever has driven the Minister in this matter from the time of the Minister's first announcements in June 2011 has been unrelated to the work of Cronulla Fisheries.

In the face of all the above facts, no reasonable person could be persuaded of a case to close Cronulla Fisheries.

The Minister for Primary Industries has, in her actions in this matter, shown no regard for the facts.

No regard has been shown for the views of those scores of professionals and others working at the CFRC who have rightly damned this shocking decision. No regard either has been shown for the heritage value of Cronulla Fisheries which has been a place of research and

scholarship for 106 years. No regard has been shown either for the ready accessibility of Cronulla Fisheries to a great array of students, scholars, environmentalists, fishers, and other concerned parties. Reasonable requests for reconsideration of the matter by the Minister have been completely shunned, this despite the litany of facts and sound argument that cry out in defence of Cronulla Fisheries.

There is, in closing, no good reason to close Cronulla Fisheries. Unpersuaded of any argument I have yet heard from the Minister for Primary Industries, I submit that the only proper course is a reversal of the ill-conceived and unjustified decision for the proposed closure of the Cronulla Fisheries and I further submit that the only proper course is the continued use of the CFRC as a centre of fisheries research excellence.

Here, Honourable Sirs and Mesdames, sending forward this Submission to you and trusting that Cronulla Fisheries shall pass this difficult time and endure another century and more, I am

Yours sincerely,

Michael Hickey