

**Submission
No 104**

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

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

I'm not aware of what economic or financial analysis preceded the Minister's decision. However, I suggest that there would be obvious savings in maintenance costs by closing Cronulla, and that leasing facilities offers considerable advantages to governments over ownership, particularly with older facilities. I think that there would also be savings in back-office costs by collocating operations with other existing NSW Fisheries facilities such as at Port Stephens. [See (h) below regarding my experience with the rationalisation of Telecom facilities]. I also think that, subject to any existing heritage or cultural considerations, the area adjacent the entrance and abutting the residential area would have the potential for development, but that's way out of my area of expertise.

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

There appeared to be extensive consultation following the Minister's announcement of her plan to close Cronulla. It's not unusual for ministers and government departments to seek comments after intentions are expressed; particularly if such intentions form part of a previously released policy, such as I understand the closure of Cronulla to be part of the Government's decentralisation policy.

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

See my comment at (a) above.

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

I can't see how this has any impact on the Minister's responsibility. See (e) below.

(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 Cronulla facilities are not so unique that they can't be replicated at other existing establishments. For example, laboratories in which to undertake biological research are similar to those at Port Stephens, at other establishments in the state, and for that matter, at other establishments interstate. It is not unusual for research establishments around Australia to outsource research to centres of excellence in specific fields. Some of these may be private research providers. Moreover, the Commonwealth Government's current initiative to develop a National Fishing and Aquaculture RD&E Strategy seeks to rationalise the delivery of RD&E across Australia. NSW Fisheries is playing a part in the development of the Strategy. Over the past few years there have been significant relocations of fisheries research facilities in other states, eg, Queenscliff Vic, Perth, and CSIRO in Brisbane without adverse impact on operations.

Notwithstanding the above argument, sustainable fisheries management these days is less dependent on fundamental biology as it is more about whole ecosystems, economics and markets, and social science. Consequently, it is less dependent on fixed facilities and more dependent on multi-disciplined researchers, managers and field staff having access to fishing activities and fishers. For example, the implementation of the recommendations of the recently released review of NSW commercial fisheries management is going to depend on industry and government leadership, political will and face-to-face negotiations.

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

There would be some loss of expertise but this often occurs through resignations and redundancies albeit the number in this case would be greater. However, I would think that in the medium term, positions would be filled by scientist from other institutions and by graduates. Further, as stated at (e) above, expertise can be sourced externally if necessary in the short term.

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

I can't see why there would be an adverse impact on service delivery. There is likely to be short-term interruptions as new systems are established but successful relocations in other states demonstrate it can be done. See my comment at (e) above.

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

This is obviously the main argument against the closure and it is significant.

However, it's not something new for NSW Fisheries. Some time back many staff were relocated from the Sydney Fish Market and settled elsewhere. Further, it is not unique to NSW Fisheries. In a former career I was responsible for closing a number of Telecom business centres and line depots throughout southern NSW. It was not an easy task, but I found that over time people were generally happy with the choices they made, and where such choices involved relocation, they settled quickly into their new life styles. Again, arguments were mounted against the closures on the basis of losses in service delivery. The opposite proved to be the case with increases in efficiency.

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

I can't comment on this.