

Submission  
No 22

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 27/07/2012

---

Partially Confidential

See attached submission. If this submission is to be made public please withhold my name.

Partially Confidential

The Director  
Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St

Dear Committee,

I am currently an employee at Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence (CFRC), and have worked for the Department for a number of years. The work that we do here is about the sustainable management of a public resource, for which we are all very passionate about maintaining its integrity. This submission has been prepared with points under each Terms of Reference (TOR).

*TOR a) Basis and analysis prior to making the decisions*

It is difficult to accept a decision that seems to have been made without any analysis. This has time and time again been cemented, when staff have asked the Minister directly for information, questioned when she had visited the site, whether Treasury was aware of this and had approved this proposal and if so what are the budgetary allowances.

Documents obtained through a Sydney Morning Herald FOI process late last year shows that this decision was discussed in one brief by the department with no analysis in that document, nor did any analysis documents surface in that FOI process, which would assume that there isn't any.

Our local member, Mr Mark Speakman, a Liberal, has publicly come out to say that he was only told of the decision a day before the announcement and hasn't been provided a briefing to this day as to the justification of the decision.

*TOR b) Consultation prior to making the decision*

I speak to commercial fishers on a daily basis none of whom were consulted on the decision to close the CFRC. Many of these are members of the Professional Fishermans Association (PFA), for which the Minister has advised through media reports she consulted with, knew nothing of the decision. It is important to note that on best estimate the PFA probably represents <25% of commercial fishers and most of these are located on the far north coast.

There has been no evidence that this decision was discussed with any of the 1 million recreational stakeholders or any non PFA members.

*TOR c) Costs and benefits of the decision*

NSW Fisheries is already one of the most decentralised public service agencies, with 67% of its staff based outside of Sydney. Staff are already regionally located where it makes sense to do so.

Although there has been no costings for this relocation made public, we can estimate that staff relocation costs, plus moving costs and provision of facilities at new sites will be in excess of \$20 million. Money that if the intention was to create more jobs in regional

locations, would be better spent on creating jobs that that regions locals require and are skilled to do.

This is a great waste of tax payers money. Currently the Cronulla site costs little to run. There is no rent and maintenance costs are modest.

The costs to this Government, who have shown in the recent budget that money is tight, far outweighs the minimal amount of jobs that maybe created in these locations.

Sydney is a transport hub and currently assessable from all regions of the state in one flight. This is very important when coordinating meetings etc. There will be significant on-going costs of managing stakeholders and projects from sites less central and more difficult to access.

#### TOR d) Responsibilities under the Fisheries Management Act 1994

The Minister has an obligation under the *Fisheries Management Act* to ensure and manage the risk to the sustainability of NSW fisheries resources. Good fisheries management cannot be undertaken without good scientists and experienced managers. The loss of so much specialised fisheries scientific and management expertise can mean only one thing for the fisheries resources of NSW – greater uncertainty and therefore greater risk of overfishing.

#### TOR e) Problems with relocating the current facilities / work from Cronulla

The Minister has been advised on a number of occasions through the staff submission, and through appropriate channels within the department, the difficulty in replicating the facilities currently available at Cronulla. The Minister has also publicly advised that she intends to replicate all facilities at Cronulla, but this is simply not possible.

The facilities at Cronulla are amongst the most modern and effective for fisheries research in Australia. These facilities cannot be replicated at any of the other proposed sites due to the nature of the water quality at Cronulla.

The facilities are state-of-the-art and have had over \$1 million recently spent on upgrading and modernising the laboratory facilities. The aquarium facility cannot be replicated in an alternate location, due to the water requirements for the species housed there.

The NSW fisheries are some of the best managed fisheries in the world, due to the relationships that are in existence at the CFRC. Maintaining a large base of diverse expertise at the Cronulla site aids stakeholder service by the ability for constant communication and updates on a variety of research and management-based programs. It provides for constant integration of ideas from all sectors which are based on stakeholder input. The ability for programs and services to be delivered in a timely manner will be diminished by the loss of staff and the fragmentation of groups.

#### TOR f) Loss of expertise

The staff at CFRC are specialists. Recreational & commercial management and associated licensing sections have over 300 years in fisheries management experience and 25 science degrees. While the scientific staff at Cronulla, combined, have in excess

of 500 years experience in fisheries research, more than 50 science degrees (including 19 PhDs and 1 DSc).

It is estimated that more than 90% of staff will not be able to move to the proposed new locations and therefore specialised skills and experience will be lost from Fisheries.

CFRC has a world class reputation. Such a massive loss of expertise will have a negative impact on our ability to ensure sustainability of fish stocks and the information base underpinning fisheries management decisions, at a time when there are great challenges to the effective management of our resources. This Government has supported, in general the recommendations from the *Independent Review of Commercial Fishing*. For this commitment to be delivered and delivered in a timely manner, highly experienced staff from research, licensing and management will be required... This can be achieved if CFRC is left to continue functioning as is.

#### TOR g) Impact on service delivery

Over 60% of recreational fishers in NSW live in the Sydney Region. In terms of commercial catch 56% comes from areas north of Sydney and 44% comes from Sydney and south. Most of the fish are sold through Sydney Fish Market, which provides Cronulla's Scientists with the majority of their samples for ageing and stock-assessment work.

Commercial fishing on the south coast has already been significantly impacted by the establishment of 20 Recreational Fishing Havens south of Sydney and the Jervis Bay & Batemans Marine Parks. To further disenfranchise those stakeholders by relocating management and research services away from Sydney and the south coast, and breaking them into smaller groups, will greatly disadvantage commercial fishers in those areas.

South coast fishers have already informally expressed their concern that the decision to relocate commercial management staff to Coffs Harbour displays favouritism to north coast fishers at their expense and fear that future decisions will also be based on this apparent favouritism. If the argument is that it is difficult for commercial fishers to access researchers and managers under current arrangements, the proposed arrangements will be infinitely worse for the 70% of commercial fishers who do not live in or around the Coffs Harbour Region.

Maintaining a large base of diverse expertise at the Cronulla site aids stakeholder service by the ability for constant communication and updates on a variety of research and management-based programs. It provides for constant integration of ideas from all sectors which are based on stakeholder input. The ability for programs and services to be delivered in a timely manner will be diminished by the loss of staff and the fragmentation of groups.

#### TOR h) Impact on staff and community members

CFRC is the largest single employer in Cronulla with around 150 employees and with an annual budget of about \$17 million a significant purchaser of local goods and services.

Moving these jobs and our business elsewhere will have a significant impact on the local community.

The local community on countless occasions have shown their support for keeping the CFRC in its current capacity, as seen by a 19,000 + signed petition.

TOR i) Impact on heritage values

The CFRC is an iconic feature with 110 years of history. Cronulla is seen as the 'birthplace of fisheries science in Australia' a label that is not freely thrown around and because of this has become a locally, nationally and internationally recognised 'brand' associated with leading –edge fisheries research. This 'brand' will be lost if the site is too close. It cannot be relocated!

My grandmother, who is 90 years young, grew up in the local area and remembers the site as a little girl, as well as coming back to visit the site on its previous 'Open Days'.

The Cronulla fisheries site is a unique and iconic institution in terms of its scientific and fisheries management credentials, its heritage and cultural value, and is highly regarded by the national and international scientific communities as a research centre of excellence.

The CFRC is heritage listed, with several buildings and aquarium facilities having separate listings. These buildings cannot be destroyed nor their facades amended.

It is clear that this is a very poor and ill informed decision. On numerous occasions the Minister has been asked to formally visit the site and be shown exactly what facilities the site has and why it cannot be replicated anywhere else. This announcement was made by a Minister who has not visited the staff at the Cronulla site and had virtually no consultation with the major stakeholders. There has been no support from environmental groups, the scientific community or the general public – evidenced by the 19,000+ petition signatures against the decision to relocate the site.

Yours sincerely