

**Submission  
No 17**

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

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I would like to make a submission regarding the closure on the Cronulla Fisheries Research center and address several key points.

#### Key points

The Cronulla Fisheries Centre of Excellence has a world class reputation and its closure has already provoked a storm of protest from recreational fishing bodies in Australia and from eminent fisheries experts and organisations from around the world including Brazil, USA, Canada, Berlin, Dublin. Many Australian universities have objected including our very own Prof. Bob Kearney from Canberra.

#### Cost to taxpayers

Currently the Cronulla site costs little to run. There is no rent and maintenance costs are modest – especially because, in recent years, significant funding has been spent to modernise the site. It is estimated that staff relocation costs will be in the order of \$60,000 per person (x 152 staff) = \$9.1 million. If 90 per cent of staff decline to move, as a recent survey indicated, the redundancy costs could be double that amount.

Offices will need to be built, rented and/or refurbished at Coffs Harbour and Nowra at significant up-front and continuing expense. The actual moving of equipment, offices, files, the library, etc. is estimated to be in the order of \$1 million.

#### Waste of recreational fishing licence money

The costs of either bringing Fisheries staff from Nowra or other regional locations to Sydney for consultative meetings, seminars or briefings or paying the travelling costs of participants to get to Nowra is simply wasteful. Poor consultation makes for poorer policy and a worse deal for rec fishers.

#### Cost local jobs and loss of valuable waterfront site

As well as losing jobs and expertise, the site at Cronulla is the subject of sensitive planning discussions which could raise uncertainty over the future of an important waterfront site.

The local community has advised the government that they would like the Cronulla site to remain as a fisheries research facility.

Move fisheries services away from Sydney - the most recreationally fished waterways in NSW (and the whole of Australia)

Over 60 per cent of anglers in NSW live in the Sydney area compared to less than 2 per cent at Nowra.

Moving the hub of recreational fisheries away from the Sydney area will reduce the ability of Fisheries to interact with the majority of NSW's anglers and fishing clubs (as well as other key stakeholders) and will make it significantly more challenging to recognise and address key issues for recreational fishers.

Waste millions on rebuilding specialised research facilities

A new laboratory and research facilities will have to be built at Port Stephens – the new laboratory at Cronulla cost \$1 million 6 years ago which will now be money wasted. The upgrades to the seawater system at Port Stephens will cost many millions of dollars as the water there is brackish and not marine.

New facilities for the research staff based in the new Sydney site will also have to be created at significant cost.

Impact to the fisheries of NSW

Good fisheries management cannot be undertaken without good scientists and experienced managers.

NSW currently has some fantastic, diverse fishing on offer despite its ever increasing population size. The NSW fish stocks need to be more carefully managed than most of the other states due to the overwhelming number of users of the resource competing for access.

Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is the home of the majority of wild fisheries expertise in NSW. The loss of specialised fisheries scientific and management expertise can mean only one thing for the fisheries resources of NSW – greater uncertainty of stock health and an increased risk of depleted stocks and overfishing – bad news for us rec fishers.

Lose hundreds of years of fisheries research & management expertise

Closing Cronulla will mean a huge loss of corporate, scientific and technical knowledge and expertise. Cronulla has also been a major site for the training of fisheries professionals in Australia – many of the senior fisheries people in Australia began their careers here.

Not too late to revise the closure plans

A number of good staff members have left Fisheries already, although the majority of staff are still currently present at Cronulla. If the relocation could be swiftly overturned, the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre and its staff could still be saved without an overwhelming loss of expertise.

As at 11 July 2012, of the 149 people originally at Cronulla:

- 118 are still at Cronulla;
- 18 have resigned, four of these positions have been backfilled;
- Seven have relocated to regional NSW and 5 to other sites in Sydney;
- And one staff member has passed away.

No boats, cars or any infrastructure has currently been re-located.  
The library is the only facility that is currently being moved.

Partial decentralisation is an option

Moving the licensing function of commercial and recreational fisheries to Nowra is not particularly problematic to either the government or our recreational fisheries as this is largely a desk function and could happen anywhere in NSW. Also, I guess, much of the commercial function can be undertaken at Coffs Harbour if that's what's needed without causing too many issues (and I'm sure it will make the key north coast commercial fishing organisation that supported the closure very happy).

However, the world standard and recently refurbished research facilities, the scientists and the recreational fisheries function must stay at Cronulla if a massive loss of both expertise, licence and taxpayers money is to be avoided. At this point in time, if Cronulla Fisheries Centre was saved;

- the modern research facilities already in place could continue to be utilised.

- the recreational management team could stay in Sydney, at a location close to the majority of their stakeholders.

- the huge cost of moving all staff and facilities to other locations could be prevented.

- increased capacity for expansion at Cronulla would be available (an early concern of the Minister)

- the staff that have already moved will have helped to achieve a limited de-centralisation programme - more jobs in region will have been delivered in line with National Party policy.