

**Submission  
No 102**

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

**Name:** Mr David Barker

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28 September, 2011.

**SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CRONULLA  
FISHERIES RESEARCH CENTRE CLOSURE**

Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC  
Committee Chairman  
Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre Closure  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House Macquarie St  
Sydney

Dear Sir,

I am a staff member at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre (CFRC) and I manage the heritage marine Aquaria. You may recall I had the pleasure of meeting you and members of the Sutherland Shire Council several months ago and was given the opportunity to show you the facility and some of the research being done here. It is very difficult for me to express in writing my disappointment and concern regarding the present government's decision to close this historic research centre.

You may consider my opinion to be bias as this closure directly affects me and my family however, I believe that regardless of my personal situation and the personal impact this decision has on me, I have a great understanding and appreciation for this research establishment and my opinion would be unchanged regardless of my circumstance.

I have worked in a variety of positions here at the CFRC over a period of 27 years and I have seen many great improvements and changes take place over this time. I have also been involved with and witnessed many important and successful research projects be done at this location that would have

unlikely been achieved at any other location. As you are probably aware, this site at Cronulla was chosen as an ideal location for marine research in the early 1900's and it has a proven track record and internationally renowned reputation for high quality marine research. Since announcement of the closure I have had lengthy discussions with our department's executive regarding the concept that the Aquaria and laboratory facilities at Cronulla will be replicated at The departments Port Stephens Research Centre and that the marine water supply system offered at Port Stephens will simulate what is presently available at the Cronulla facilities. I have a thorough understanding of both Cronulla and Port Stephens research centres and I can personally assure you and your committee that it is impossible to replicate the Aquaria Facilities that exist at Cronulla particularly with regards to quality and volume of natural seawater that is presently used to supply the research Aquaria at Cronulla. I believe this is a major issue that has been quashed by the executive and I am certain that your committee will be told otherwise.

It is not only a reckless decision to close the CFRC but an ill informed and politically motivated decision that was made without any consideration of the value of the site to a huge number of stakeholders including scientific researchers and students, secondary and tertiary students, staff, anglers and the community of the Sutherland Shire. In particular I would like to highlight points within the terms of reference that I consider I have an informed opinion.

*b) What consultation was undertaken prior to the decision with stakeholders including commercial and recreational groups, environmental groups and staff and*

*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,*

As manager of the CFRC Aquarium I was extremely disappointed that I was not consulted regarding the decision and more importantly asked if it would be possible to replicate the CFRC Aquaria, what projects would be impacted or jeopardized and what the requirements of a new facility would be at another location. This complete neglect of consultation with staff has been followed up with poor communication and very little consultation regarding the relocation of facilities. The lack of consultation with commercial and recreational groups and environmental groups and other important community members has been highlighted by the huge backlash that resulted immediately after the decision was made public where over 19000 signatures were gathered resulting in a political debate on the closure. It has now been made clear that the decision of closure was made only two weeks prior to the announcement of the closure and that absolutely no consultation was made with any of the groups identified above, nor were there any economic or financial analyses done to support the decision, as noted in part "a" of the terms of reference

Initially the Deputy Director General and the new executive told staff that working groups would be established to examine possible sites for relocation of facilities and requirements for these identified. I immediately volunteered for the Aquaria facility working group and I provided information regarding possible locations for the relocation of the CFRC Aquaria. However, I received no formal response whatsoever regarding my working groups' recommendations and I was later told by the relocation officer that the executive himself had said that Port Stephens Research Centre was the only option available for relocation. As mentioned above I have grave concerns regarding the ability to replicate the CFRC Aquaria at this location.

More recently I was asked to assist with the design of and provide specifications for the new Aquaria to be built at Port Stephens'. Although I appreciate that the new Aquaria will be useful and suitable for many wild fisheries based research, it is also obvious to me that the facilities available at Cronulla will not be replicated, as promised by the minister and that the new

facilities will not be suitable for many research projects such as age validation research where typically natural conditions are required. It should also be noted that many university students will be disadvantaged by the relocation to Port Stephens' as university students from UNSW, Macquarie, UTS, Wollongong, Western Sydney and Sydney Universities will not be able to use the Aquaria for research projects or visit the facility due to logistical constraints as the new location is so far from the Sydney region. I expect our department's executive will suggest that such students may alternatively use the facilities at Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS). With all due respect for the facilities at SIMS, it is in fact a small Aquaria facility that is limited with regards to animal enclosure size and access rendering it unsuitable for many aquatic experiments where larger animals need to be housed.

*c) The costs and benefits of the decision to close the centre and relocate its functions to other locations*

I would like the committee to be made aware that the facilities at Cronulla are not outdated or limited in access or in any regard as indicated by the minister. The Cronulla Aquaria, ageing laboratory, boat storage, shark processing and storage areas have all been recently refurbished and upgraded at the cost of taxpayers and the closure of the centre is of no financial benefit whatsoever.

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

The loss of scientific expertise held by the staff at Cronulla is a consequence that has been acknowledged by the executive Dr Geoff Allan who told staff that this was one of his greatest concerns. At the same time he had no real answer as to how the department would overcome this issue, nor did he suggest how the department would mitigate the implications for sustainable fisheries management. It seemed quite obvious and transparent that the minister had made the decision to close the centre without consideration for consequences of being unable to provide sustainable fisheries management.

*h) the impact on staff and their families of the closure and the relocation, and  
i) the impact on the heritage values of the Cronulla Fisheries Research  
Centre.*

It is unfortunate that the minister has shown complete disregard for the impact this decision has made on staff and their families and has no understanding or appreciation for the heritage values of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre.

Many of the scientific staff at Cronulla have dedicated their careers to serving the department in fisheries research and the majority of these staff are unable to relocate to the proposed relocation destinations. This field of research is fairly specific and it will be very difficult for many staff to find similar vocation within the Sydney region. From a personal perspective, I have a family who each have jobs and studies at University here in Sydney and they cannot simply quit what they are doing to relocate to Port Stephens. I, like the majority of staff, cannot relocate to a regional centre without leaving my family behind which is a grim option.

I consider the heritage & cultural value of the Cronulla Fisheries Centre to be of utmost importance and something that should be given much consideration. The Cronulla site is one of four locations around the world that was chosen in the early 1990's as an ideal place for marine research facilities. Each of these establishments has continued for over 100 years as research centres and has gained international recognition and reputation for contribution to scientific research. The decision to close the CFRC was made without regard for this heritage value and if it goes ahead will be the first of these four centres to be closed. It should also be noted that this crown land was granted for this particular use and although there is significant indigenous landmarks on the site itself the elders of local indigenous community have visited the centre on at least two occasions that I recall and have given their endorsement for the use of this land for scientific research to ensure sustainable fisheries in NSW.

The Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre has also become an iconic part of the Sutherland Shire. Over the past months since the closure was announced I have spoken to hundreds of concerned residents and I have not met one person that supports the closure. It is no surprise that staff gathered over 19000 signatures opposing the decision in only two weeks.

In closing I would like to thank your committee for the time they have spent examining aspects of the decision and considering submissions such as mine. I truly hope that the committee is not convinced by the bureaucratic influences of the people that made this ridiculous decision that services will be maintained without disruption, staff & facilities relocated with minimal cost, as this is far from the truth. The closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre will be a catastrophic decision that will result in a great loss of staff and expertise, heritage and cultural value and destroy the department's ability to provide sustainable management of fisheries, all at the cost of taxpayers.

Yours Sincerely

David Barker