

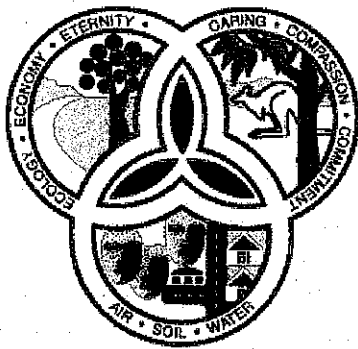
**Submission  
No 10**

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

**Organisation:** North Coast Environment Council Inc

**Date received:** 23/07/2012

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Honorary Secretary  
John Jeayes

### Closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence

The Director  
Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Fax: (02) 9230 2981

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Media Release on 29 June, 2012 indicated the terms of reference to include:

“The Inquiry will thoroughly consider the decision to relocate the Cronulla Centre including the impact the decision will have on the research being carried out there, as well as its effect on the staff and their families who cannot move to other areas of New South Wales”, Revd. the Hon Fred Nile, Committee Chairman, explained.

The Committee will also review the costs and benefits of the decision and the potential loss of scientific expertise held by staff who are unable to relocate, and the implications for sustainable fisheries management. “

#### **The Impact on Research.**

The Key research of Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence shows that currently there are 49 projects underway as of the 6.02.12. The summaries on the website indicate a wide range of fish population dynamics research in both freshwater and marine environments.

These include issues such as :

- Estimating and maximising the survival of key species released by recreational fishers in NSW –
- Reducing the environmental impacts and improving the profitability of prawn trawling through a structured framework of anterior gear modifications
- Monitoring of Gamefish and Australian bass fisheries in NSW via competition-based angling

- Evaluating the recreational fisheries of Recreational Fishing Havens and other key recreationally-fished estuaries in NSW
- Fish Aggregation Device (FAD) Monitoring Program

These are just five of the studies which are not only key to the survival of healthy fish populations but show clearly the relationships to the needs of recreational and professional fishermen.

It is believed the Government's reaction in announcing a plan to decentralise the Research Centre Excellence came from a call by recreational fishermen for better communication with the Fisheries department and to more easily get across their issues.

If this is the case then it is obvious that better lines of communication can be more easily established through genuine attempts by regional offices to liaise with recreational and commercial fishermen in the regional centres through public forums, the roadshow process which was taken with the Protection of Grey Nurse Shark recently and in the field education.

Posting on the Greens blog on the issue Dr David Tranter, D.Sc., OAM identifies clearly the deleterious impact on research projects closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence would have:

"I worked at the Cronulla Lab for 30 years as a senior research scientist and understand the need to maintain a core professional group at the one place to address the complex issues of fisheries research which include not only fish biology but their oceanographic constraints such as water chemistry, plankton biology and ocean currents. It is difficult if not impossible to manage fisheries sustainably without day to day contact between specialists. To attempt to manage fisheries at field stations is virtually impossible. There needs to be a strong core of specialists at the one place as at the Cronulla Laboratory. There are two components to modern fisheries management: population dynamics and mariculture. State Fisheries has an excellent mariculture laboratory at Port Stephens which is sufficient for the whole State. The Cronulla Laboratory provides the Population Dynamics component. Its dismemberment and relocation would severely compromise NSW Fisheries Management."

#### **Effect on the staff and their families**

Reportedly there are 147 families in limbo here while they await a decision which may come many months down the track which will severely disrupt their lives. Families dependent upon two partners working will have to make the horrible decision of one partner staying while the other heads off to a regional centre or else taking a huge cut in family income, disruption of school children's lives and education for no apparent reason.

According to one report 90% of staff have indicated they will resign rather take the forced transfer. It just does not make sense to penalise these people in this way.

A report in a Cronulla based newspaper "The Leader" claimed there was great animosity in the area and within Council regarding the disruption the announcement of closure had made.

"... more than half of the centre's 150 staff were unable or unwilling to relocate from Sydney, largely for family reasons, such as being carers for elderly parents or not wanting to separate children and grandparents.

"There is a human tragedy story here that is not coming out," one said.

He also said union members involved in discussions with the department made it clear they did not endorse the relocation.

It is understood friction had developed between staff members, with some concerned continued opposition might jeopardise their chance of Sydney placements.

"The place is being ripped apart," one said."

### **The costs and benefits of the decision**

The Government apparently made this decision without costing out the expense of translocating staff and in building new research facilities wherever scientists and staff were to be sent.

The Sydney Morning Herald suggested

.... the cost of the move to Port Stephens and upgrades to facilities was initially estimated at \$2.9 million, a cost bureaucrats feared Treasury would not approve because no business case or economic appraisal had been prepared for the decision. A Department of Primary Industries spokesman said the cost of that project had since been revised below \$1 million. SMH February 27, 2012

St George and Sutherland Shire Leader outlines not only the monetary costs of the decision to close the Centre of Excellence but also the senseless loss of expertise from such a move which they claim was derived from a paper presented to the Government.

CLOSING the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre would lead to a "massive" loss of expertise and cost many millions of dollars, the state government was told.

Between the scientific staff at the centre, there were more than 50 science degrees, including 19 PhDs and one Doctor of Sciences.

The document said a survey revealed 96 per cent of the 152 staff could not relocate because of personal and family reasons and that replacement staff was not available in the proposed relocation sites.

"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," it said.

The submission said the Cronulla site cost little to run as no rent was paid and maintenance costs were modest.

It was estimated the cost of relocating staff, at \$60,000 a person, would be \$9.1 million.

If 90 per cent of staff declined to move and had to be paid out, the cost would probably be double or triple that figure.

The submission said a new laboratory would need to be built at Port Stephens at a cost of well over \$1 million, while upgrading the seawater system at that location would cost many millions of dollars more.

Offices would need to be built, rented and/or refurbished at Coffs Harbour and Nowra, while office removalist costs were estimated at \$1 million.

### **The potential loss of scientific expertise**

The massive loss of expertise must impact negatively upon the Department's ability to manage fish stocks sustainably in a time where there are considerable challenges already without factoring in the

increased demand with population growth, world food shortages predicted ,and at this stage unknown effects from global warming, migration of marine species with warmer seas and acidification of sea water.

It is hard to see how splitting up expertise and moving those who elect to stay with the Department to regional areas will accomplish anything positive from a scientific point of view. Surely the whole point of a Centre of Excellence is to concentrate the brightest and most productive researchers in the one area where they can simply walk down the corridor to access further informed opinion.

### **Conclusion**

The only reason given for this decision is a vague, unexplained one of decentralisation.

There are no costings in a time when the government is sacking workers to save money and cost cutting everywhere it can. It is likely that the taxpayers will be millions of dollars out of pocket.

There is no explanation of efficiencies to be gained through destroying a Centre of Excellence in Fisheries Research.

There is no plan to indicate how the 49 projects currently underway will be completed with a greatly reduced number of scientists.

There is no guarantee of sustainable fisheries in the future without the projects underway.

There is no plan to retain enough marine scientists to meet the challenges ahead in a changing world.

Yours faithfully,  
John Jeayes for the NCEC  
23.07.12