

Submission  
No 100

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

30 July 2012

Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear members of the Committee and chairman, Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC,

**RE: Inquiry into the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Centre of Excellence**

Thank you for this opportunity allowing me to submit to this inquiry my objection to the Government's decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Centre of Excellence.

The Cronulla Fisheries Centre of Excellence is exactly that, A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE with a team of dedicated, experienced scientific specialists in a recently upgraded and modernised, state-of-the-art facility in an ideal location that is cost effective. It is of international, national and local importance scientifically to the fisheries field. It has been largely responsible for a huge number of scientific publications and reports that have helped improve fisheries management and understanding of fisheries related issues. It is ideally located in the middle of the NSW east coast and is easily accessible with good transport services from land, air and sea. <http://www.savecronullafisheries.net/>

My husband and I visited this site twelve months ago and felt so proud of this Australian Centre, it's facilities and it's achievements in 100 years with it's added cultural and heritage significance.

We can accept good decisions based on sound research with full and open consultations that provides supportive evidence that the outcome will greatly benefit and warrant the added cost. It is not acceptable to allow the destruction of this significant asset, causing the loss of its valuable scientific knowledge and ability. It is not acceptable when the Minister

for Primary Industries Ms Katrina Hodgkinson continues to mislead the House with her statements on non existent limitations of the Centre.

On 8 September 2011 when Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services Andrew Stoner and Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson announced the NSW Liberals and Nationals Government regionalisation of the key services and facilities of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre will take place as part of its Decade of Decentralisation election policy initiative, it sent shock waves through every community. This process is being paralleled by the government with the relocation of the Department of Agriculture to Orange in 1991, an "unparalleled success", but not when you live in my farming community and speak with those involved in Agriculture and look at the huge job losses since; only 20 of the original 500 jobs are still current. Our people in this farming community see and feel the results. They hurt on many levels. The government is taking from our farming and local communities.

My husband and I

hold a Recreational Fishing Licence; family, friends and many other people in rural communities enjoy the freshwater fishing here as well as marine fishing on holidays. Our parents taught us to be responsible, to care for our country, community, and environment; its water, flora and fauna. My husband and I passed that knowledge on to our children and grandchildren.

There will be impacts on other budding young scientists in the middle of their studies, dependent on the services of this specialised, excellent Centre with it's wealth of knowledge and mentoring services, to complete their studies at this world renowned centre.

The Minister's statement to staff, "they are nice places to live" is irrelevant when we all know there are many beautiful places in Australia to live; the staff have chosen Cronulla, a beautiful place to live and work. The Minister's continued dismissive statements and trivial comments show her failure to sincerely understand and show compassion towards the concerns of staff. The choice is not the Ministers to tell staff where to work and live, it is the staff's decision and majority have decided they cannot move for various reasons.

We do not expect our own government to keep pushing people out of their chosen lifestyle to regional and rural areas if they wish to keep their job.

Yet we see a Minister who misled the House, has not been held accountable; she refused to listen to valued opinions. There is reckless waste of our money, total disregard to the value of this facility and the specialised dedicated staff, with its significant contribution to the scientific community, to universities and schools. This Centre facilitates education and mentoring of the next generation of scientists, managers, commercial and recreational fishers. We cannot afford such a loss at any time.

This decision by the Minister to close Cronulla, thankfully, is now finally being fully investigated by this Upper House Inquiry. The full facts will reveal the false evidence base used for this decision and that the Minister did not carry out the government's own policy for decentralisation. Without a full visit to the site she cannot gain any insight into this Centre (a cursory boat trip around the site does not constitute a visit). She was quick to bask in the glory at the Coffs Harbour National Marine Centre with the benefits it would bring to it's National seat and to the Port Stephens Liberal seat. Nowra interestingly is also a Liberal seat.

Unfortunately, the Liberal member for Cronulla, Mark Speakman, had no idea what his own government had decided to do in his electorate of Cronulla. The Sutherland Shire had no idea, yet they were the ones to suffer significantly with the loss of their biggest employee; their proud asset and icon, that draws not only local and national visitors but worldwide. There was not full consultation with ALL stakeholders (only one minority group), nor any of

the key people who have a full understanding of what the Cronulla Fisheries is all about; FOI by SMH revealed there was *"no business case, no costings, no cabinet submission and virtually no analysis of the likely impact on staff"*.

Documents provided by The NSW Greens MP Cate Faehrmann showed bureaucrats working on the relocation of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre to Port Stephens, later pushed to reclassify it from a "major project" to a series of "minor works" to convince Treasury to fund it and avoid having to present a business case. It appears the Director General of the DPI Richard Sheldrake has open slather to make sure this relocation is achieved at any cost. How can we now believe the estimates they will now provide, when they have given us such false details before, misleading parliament?

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/department-told-to-get-fisheries-plan-under-radar-20120219-1th79.html#ixzz21sLbxUtg>

It reflects extremely poorly on our government when decisions like this are made under such a cloud and allowed to progress with the determined "not negotiable" attitude as stated by the Minister for Primary Industries from the very beginning. Her treatment of the genuine concerns of the staff was unconscionable.

Just recently (25 July 2012) the Minister, Ms Katrina Hodgkinson said a *"business case was now being finalised and the final cost of the decision depended on a range of factors"*.

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/local-member-lashes-out-over-closure-of-cronulla-fisheries-centre-20120725-22r25.html>

It is nine months since the closure orders were given and only now this is being done! This is not responsible management, it is not the way to run any viable business; all costings and a business case are needed before implementation and needs approval by more than this Minister and the Leader of the Nationals, Mr Stoner. It is blatantly obvious they have very little knowledge of this facility; they have never visited it, yet made this destructive relocation decision.

This month, this Minister refused to put "on hold" the relocation process until the parliamentary committee completes it's inquiry. This shows this government's stance on

going ahead regardless, with decisions that suit them rather than seek the best result in the interests of the fisheries, science, it's loyal employees, local community and the tax payer.

WHY? In the business world such costly decisions would result in sacking.

It leads us to have no trust in this government's judgement or ability. The Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence is an internationally recognised "brand" associated with leading-edge research; considered as the "Heart of Fisheries" by management, research, compliance, and many recreational and commercial stakeholders in NSW. It is an Australian Centre of Excellence and belongs to all of Australia, not just to NSW. This Minister and the leader of The Nationals have no right to continue with this closure in light of all the evidence against such a decision.

The government is responsible to maintain our wild fisheries resource on our behalf. Fisheries are a public resource and should not be treated as a state government asset. This NSW government is continuing to show it's lack of ability and understanding in the management of this vital resource. It shows management needs to be taken out of the State hands of these destructive managers and into the hands of a responsible selected National Management committee.

It's not the Minister's personal business, it is the business of the people of NSW and ultimately Australia, and the government needs to be held accountable to the Australian people. The Minister of Primary Industries continued "non negotiable" action and the determination of the Director of Primary Industries, Mr Sheldrake, to close this centre using blatantly false information to carry out "decentralisation", reflects not only mismanagement but bullying tactics; unacceptable traits, the very traits we seek to abolish.

Last week we see a published informal report by Robert J. Williams, retired Senior Research Scientist, who raises questions about the long-term viability of the Port Stephens Fisheries Institute. In it Mr Williams wrote that based on NSW Government forecasts for sea-level rises and access to the site and its existing infrastructure would be affected by increasing tides. This does not indicate Taylor Beach at Port Stephens was fully investigated as a suitable long term site. Relocation to this Shire listed "flood prone" area is disastrous.

<http://www.savecronullafisheries.net/inundationreport.html>)

No responsible family, well run business or company, makes decisions in such haste without full consultation, complete investigation and intensive research. The price is too high, the consequences irreversible, it is totally destructive. Experience and knowledge at such a high level takes decades to build, but a moment to destroy. Once it is gone, our sustainable fisheries will suffer far too significantly, our recreational and commercial management will faultier, and the research strength will shatter. These specialised staff are the mentors of our next generation; their value in education, research and management is enormous and irreplaceable. This is a loss that is immeasurable, but a loss that has shown to be unnecessary and hopefully can be stopped by the outcome of this enquiry. It is amongst the most modern and effective fisheries research facilities in Australia with a recent significant upgrade of over \$1 million bringing it up to state-of-the-art facility. Commonsense needs to prevail. <http://www.savecronullafisheries.net/what-we-do.html>

All too often we see restructure after restructure, loss after loss and the cost goes up; despite the promises by government to adhere to full consultation and research, we end up with financial waste, lost expertise, increasing distress to the employees who loose jobs, with careers shattered and increased personal, financial and family burdens.

We enjoy eating the fish from our oceans because we know our scientists are there looking after our fish environment, managing fish sustainability and carrying out vital monitoring of our suppliers. We rely heavily on their expertise to ensure we have the best possible healthy fish, free from contamination and our fish stocks are maintained, not depleted through greed.

Ecotoxicology of Sydney harbour and Botany Bay, regular Sydney Fish Market monitoring, shark meshing and movements around Sydney, local artificial reefs, mentoring of young scientists from the Universities, dreaming of working in such a high class facility, engagement with local schools, are but a few of the major areas of essential, specific work at this centre in the Sydney area to benefit all Australians with international flow on.

<http://www.savecronullafisheries.net/facilities.html>

A Centre of Excellence does not happen overnight and will be too costly to attempt to relocate both financially and with the lost of expert personnel. It has taken over a century of dedicated work and high achievements by many very eminent scientists and management expertise together with their support team that resulted in Australia having such a national and international highly renowned facility. I am proud of this Australian Centre of Excellence, it needs to retain its standing and that can only happen if it remains where it is in Cronulla.

We all support good decisions for decentralisation which do benefit our rural and regional areas, but the reasons given by Minister Hodgkinson to close Cronulla Fisheries Centre of Excellence have proven to be wrong with an unacceptable level of consultation. The NSW Government has always declared it retains a strong commitment to consultation, but here blatantly and defiantly failed to do so. The failure of full open consultation with highly valued opinions initially shows poor management, but to continue the path when facts contradict the decisions, shows disastrous management and total disregard for it's people and the achievements of this facility. It reeks of a hidden agenda.

Sydney was the front runner for the next (7th) World Fisheries Congress in 2016 which would supposedly bring in about \$3 million to NSW. The department was forced to pull out its bid because of the government's sudden decision to close the Cronulla Centre. Korea will now reap the rewards. Another costly loss.

The government misled the House about the state of the research facilities at Cronulla to continue this decision to close the Centre under the guise of decentralisation; it is disastrous for present and future generations. This government, it's Ministers responsible and the Department heads that are forcing this decision to continue despite overwhelming objections from eminent, national and worldwide reputable scientists, and including almost 20,000 signatures on the petition presented to Parliament against the closure, need to be held accountable to the people.



I wish you every success with this inquiry and trust you will determine the continuation of this Centre into the future with protection against such further destructive decisions.

Yours faithfully,