

**Submission
No 79**

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

Name: Ms Laura Seymour

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Submission

Inquiry into the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence

To: The select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries

I refer to the terms of reference in particular :-

(h), the impact on staff and their families of the closure and the relocation.

I write this submission as a concerned State Government employee and current team member of the Fisheries Business Services (FBS) department at Cronulla. FBS is the administration front line of Commercial Licensing servicing the 1200 commercial fishers of NSW.

The impact on the staff in FBS has been enormous.

Since the September 8 announcement to close the Cronulla facility and relocate its services to regional NSW, our section has had to deal with two location changes. In the Minister's initial plan, FBS was targeted to move to Coffs Harbour. It was soon realised that the Minister was unaware that commercial licensing was different to recreational licensing. That in itself is a major concern as you would think that the Fisheries Minister would at least have a grasp and full understanding of all sections and services of fisheries that she had decided to dismember.

Once our new location, Nowra was relayed to us, we were pretty much left to our own devices to consider our own personal positions as little or no support was coming forward from senior managers to discuss our options.

We were initially promised a bus trip to visit the new location and surrounds as a group by Mr Richard Sheldrake, that never eventuated.

Before too long, five months had passed and we were delivered our first letter from the department to consider again our options.

Option 1. Keep your job and Relocate to Nowra

Option 2. Loose your job to somebody else who either lives in Nowra or is willing to go there.

I chose to keep my job but I couldn't relocate to Nowra. My life is in Sydney, my husband's job as a NSW Firefighter is in Sydney, and my children and family support are in Sydney. This was not accepted and my finishing date at Cronulla is 28 January 2013.

FBS comprises of 11 staff members of which only 1 is taking the option to relocate to Nowra. This officer has worked at Cronulla for little over a year. The remaining 10 staff cannot relocate to Nowra for personal and family reasons.

The 10 officers that cannot relocate to Nowra have collectively 109 years experience and knowledge in commercial licensing. What a waste of talent and existing resources. It appears that no thought has been given to maintaining the vital FBS service given that 90% of staff could never move. You would think that the department would consider this a risk !

With this in mind, consider the impact that my fellow workmates and myself have had to endure. We have all individually considered the relocation but we also must consider our partners, their work commitments, our children, their schooling, friends and extended family.

I love my job, I'm great at my job and I know and respect our customers. This has been an extremely difficult year. My family have had to put up with my moods, my anger and constant discussion about fisheries. This proposed decentralisation has completely dominated our lives since September 2011.

To date, the proposed 3 sites (Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens and Nowra) have grown somewhat. We now have 12 sites. 35 people are staying in various sites throughout Sydney which is great for them. But it does question the term "decentralisation".

This is not decentralisation; it's a mass disruption and disbursement of services to our commercial fishers and on our staff.

I do not want to give up my position that I earned through merit selection. A job, that I have put my all into and care about deeply. I worry about our commercial fishers as I fear that their needs have not been considered.

I feel personally betrayed by the Minister and her government and will never, never forget this callous and calculated disregard to myself and my colleagues. They have intentionally manipulated a policy to payback a political debt at the cost of honest workers of this state.

I use to be proud to be a public servant but sadly the government have failed to deliver on their 4 core values; Integrity, Trust, Service and Accountability.

I respectfully make the following recommendations for action:-

1. Please consider what I have to say and I ask that you investigate the closure of Cronulla Fisheries using the **4 core values – Integrity, Trust, Service and Accountability.**
2. **Interview as many commercial fishers** as you can to gain an insight into their needs regarding the administration of their fishing livelihoods.
3. **Interview as many staff members from Cronulla** to gain a personal point of view as to how this proposed closure will affect them.
4. **Review the costs of this proposed closure.** We already know that the annual rent alone at Nowra for the Berry Street address is \$108,000. Find out what the annual rent will be for the South Nowra property where the boats, FADs and research equipment will be housed. Then, tally the rents from SIMS, Newington, Wollongong, Ourimbah & Coffs Harbour. Then once you have the rental costs, calculate the maintenance costs of all of these sites and compare them to Cronulla. This alone should be a crucial reason why this proposed closure should continue or not.
5. **Assess the loss of historical knowledge.** This knowledge is unable to be replaced at such short notice and there is great concerns regarding past history that will no longer be available for reference purposes.
6. **Assess the loss of trust** and professional working relationships between senior management and staff.
7. **Assess the loss of service delivery.** This is the core function of the commercial licensing role and the overwhelming loss of the majority of the staff (except one staff member) will impact on the quality and timeliness of required work.

Finally, thank you for the chance to be heard and following a much needed democratic process that sadly seems to have been deliberately missing.

Thank you.

Laura Seymour