

Submission
No 22

INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr George Ross Miller

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Partially
Confidential

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The director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW
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Dear Sirs,

As requested by Robert Brown MLC, I would like to enter my opinions.

As a professional fisherman since 1955 for neigh on 60 years, I have seen quite a few changes; I started fishing in Botany Bay in 1955. Beach hauling at LaPerouse with George Rodgers and Billy Mcknight, the latter becoming my deckhand in 1968 when I first owned my big trawler, 56 feet Kirrawa, with which I used to prawn in Botany, one of 3 boats at that time using ridiculously a 6 fathom net. However, we did quite well for the 6 months open season; the balance of the year was spent in what is now termed the South East Trawl. In the years up to 1970 we ventured to the 200 fathom line and caught immense quantities of Gem Fish. The date slips my mind, but the Kapala NSW Fisheries Research Boat suddenly found Gem Fish 3 years after we had been supplying the Sydney Fish Market. At first there were 3 boats, The Italia Star, San Francisco and Kirrawa (my boat). The numbers increased to become nine boats working out of Sydney. In the seventy's, 4 out of Wollongong, 10 out of Ulladulla, 5 out at Bermagui, 15 out of Eden, 4 out of Newcastle, and then the fisheries made it illegal to catch quantities of Gem Fish, and if you did catch you had to release. Coming from the deep water to the surface they were blown and you had to release them, which floated away to feed the seagulls whilst the people did without. The establishment of the South East Trawl I the year equates to 4/5 boats in Sydney, 2 out of the Shoal Haven, 2 in Ulladulla, 1 out of Bermagui and 4 out of Eden. 14 Trawlers left on the East Coast out of approximately 47-50 working, a loss of 32 boats – use your own judgement.

In Botany Bay heyday, there were 70 odd 10 meter trawlers over a 6 month opening, majority tying up in Cooks River. It is a suggested a little old lady couldn't sleep one night and complained about the putt putts. Hence a buy back (a great loss to the fish markets depriving the public of prawns). Then came Lake Macquarie closure, similar situation almost brought the Newcastle fish cooperative to its knees. Then we come to Sydney Harbour, another very good prawn catching area; closed purportedly over contamination in the Parramatta River. There are 12 licenses outstanding for Sydney Harbour who refuses to take the buyout. During this year (early), a prawn trawler was asked to do a survey of Parramatta River up to the Clyde refinery to survey for King Prawn, results not many but one shot for 10 minutes off Abbotsford Point filled the boat with product. The largest snapper, bream, whiting and school prawns worth thousands had to be swept over the side while people are starving. Parramatta River should be reopened to existing license holders.

While I first applied for a license, I had to go to Caltex House in Kent Street, Sydney. I always recall how there was 15 people all sitting at the desks (no computers). My personal license was 2 pounds, the boat licences were 5 pounds inshore and 20 pound offshore, my license today is \$460 and my boat license is \$2500.

At one time a few years ago we had a man appointed to close down Fishermans licences who were not earning the major part of their income from fishing and related, his name was Steve

Dunn otherwise known as _____ who took licenses away from beach work catchers, pippy gatherers alike, who also attempted to take away prawn license, and if you objected you went to a kangaroo court at Bellingen comprising a retired judge of some sort and two professional fishermen.

License recovery costs are astronomical today. Before he forced these people out of business, I believe there were 4200 licensed fishermen, today I believe there are only 750 and if this new share increase happens, there may be a further fall in license holders who will have to pay coast recovery fees until there are no fishermen but a big fisheries department to pay the costs.

This new overhaul of licensing stinks, the buying back of your own business by shares is added to the whopping mistakes made by trade and investment DPI Fisheries or any name you wish to call them, try doing the same to the taxi industry. It appears to the average person to be crucifying the fishing industry come tide or high water for no apparent reason. Take a look at the closed canneries Eden and South Australia due to government quotas being insufficient to operate; is this because of vote catching to the greens? If they want a nothing in this world, put them out on the Nullarbor with nothing and a fence around them and then they can have what they want, nothing.

The marine national parks are a joke, look up Webster's dictionary and it says a national park is a knoll and where couples gather and recreate. A boat owner today has many hangers on a surveyor, an insurer, a master, an engineer, a coop, a fuel company, a health inspector, a fish inspector and a boat to run. Once upon a time, Evans Head, Ballina, Iluka, Yamba, Coffs Harbour housed about 60 boats, today lucky to be 25. I don't think that the fishing industry needs a work over, it is a proven sustainable, but I do think that the controlling body is top heavy and non sustainable and would revamp the whole bureaucratic system, too many blunders could be run privately at very little costs.

It has been proven that the fish catch, as it stands at the moment, is more than sustainable. A reputable long term tuna man, Hagen Steyr in South Australia stated that in the years since the cannery closure that the passing tuna are 3 times their size and 4 times more prolific; now allowing other countries to reap the benefits while we import the greater portion of consumed product e.g. New Zealand, Solomon's were _____ was run out of town on a rail. Botany Bay, Sydney harbour and Lake Macquarie should be reopened under license to existing or pre operators under license. Looking back on a number of commercial boats and fishermen over the years that in 20 years there won't be any left. Who will invest in an industry where there is no security in operation where the goal posts are continually moved? Today a 60ft trawler to be built can easily cost 1.5 million and as a going concern, with a possible 17% return (DPI figures 1960). There is talk of quota and working nights, if this is instigated, it would close the industry down and would be impossible to police.

I hope this has been of interest of you and have submitted this for your perusal.

Yours sincerely

Ross Miller