

Submission
No 19

**INQUIRY INTO COMMENCEMENT OF THE FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2009**

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Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional New South Wales, Water and Agriculture inquiry into the failure to proclaim the commencement of Schedule 1 of the Fisheries Management Amendment Act 2009 concerning Aboriginal cultural fishing

Submission dated 22 February 2022

From: Douglas Seymour, Nowra

Thank you for the opportunity to make an individual submission as a South Coast Aboriginal person to the Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional New South Wales, Water and Agriculture inquiry into the failure to proclaim the commencement of Schedule 1 of the Fisheries Management Amendment Act 2009 concerning Aboriginal cultural fishing.

My name is Douglas Seymour. I am 44, going on 45. I have three children, four grandchildren, and four stepchildren.

I am proud Yuin nation fella, born in Moruya. Spent the early days down in Narooma then moved up the South Coast to Nowra. From there, Pop Parsons was the leading hand/guidance for all of us young fellas. He taught us all to dive, taught us all to work, he taught us how to hunt and gather and provide for our family.

The way we was taught to dive was every Christmas, Easters, we spent with grandparents down at Kianga and we would all go hunt and get it together to help supplement family food and it was always fun. So, it was all about spending time together, providing for the family and learning.

Pop was a diver, he was a sawmill worker, he was a picker, he was a tent boxer. Out of all that, he passed all them things onto all the sons and grandsons. Most of us ended up as sawmill workers just through Pop. And that there is about the base of what pop passed on. That was all how we made a living. From that there, I ended up having my own little family, worked in the sawmill for 16 years, dived and provided for the kids and moved on to other jobs and whatever. It [my livelihood] was slowly away from the ocean because we was pushed away.

How many were we fishing for? Well, I'll put it this way, my Nan and Pop Parsons from Kianga/Narooma, they had 9 kids. Out of that I think there was something like 50 or 60 grandkids. And then you got the great-grand kids as well. When we all got together, there is like a 100 of us. And when you got 100 of us and you've got, say, 7 uncles or 10 uncles diving to feed all the kids and the women, there's a decent feed there. Looking at feeding numbers there, gee wizz do the maths, you're looking at 200-250 abalone to feed everyone. Then people pull a calculator out and go nah you're taking this much from the ocean. Who gives you the right to put the docket on that?

Interactions with fisheries

I wouldn't say Fisheries were constant harassment, but they were always around, and we always knew about them.

I've been charged, done twice or three times by them.

I reckon it would have been about 2009 or 2010, I was painted on Today Tonight as a millionaire fraudster, which is far from the truth. I was actually picking in Swan Hill when that deal was aired, right? You know, how am I a millionaire when you are picking fruit to get presents for Christmas? The charge where they put me on Today Tonight, there was only a couple lobsters and abalone. I think between me and another bloke there was 36 abalone. Between two families, that's not a heap of food, if you know what I mean. And then we will pass it [the feed] on to mum or dad or someone like that. I got fined something like five or six grand (\$5-6000). I can't remember exactly what the price was, but it was between five and six grand which well outweighs what we had for a start. And I had all me gear gone as well: three-piece wetsuit, flippers, goggles, snorkel, screwdriver, bag.

There was one more in about 2012. There was about four or five of us diving that day. And that was actually after a family function, it was after I got married last time. So the day after, a few of us all went for a dive and was all coming back home to feed together, and there was a family gathering as well. I can't think of how much we had exactly, but I think it was about the same amount, I only had around 26 abalone. I don't know what the other boys had, but yeah we was pulled over. Gear taken again, all the abs [abalone] taken. All of us got our gear taken that time. There was me, another lad named _____ and there was somebody else with us but he got away in the bush. He's pretty fast fella my brother.

Me and _____ ended up going to court down at Ulladulla. With the other mate, I'm not sure where he ended up going to court, or what happened, I'm not sure. We were charged with having more than the limit.

So I lost all my gear twice. A whole set of diving gear is probably a grand (\$1,000). When you look at that I dive in a three piece wetsuit all the time 'cause I'm only a skinny fella and gotta stay warm. Belt, flippers, goggles, hoods. It all adds up pretty quick. A wet suit is probably about \$500-\$600 bucks. Yeah, so about a grand. I was twice fined. One of them was around the two grand mark and one of them was between five and six grand. And when you work the minimum wage, it hits you in the pocket pretty hard.

There wasn't any violence [from Fisheries], just a lot of trying to get more people there to sort of intimidate you. That's the only way I could put it – they'd try intimidation. Whether you take it or you don't, but they didn't actually try getting physical, not with me. There were threats that 'we can take the car' and this and that. Just to sort of put the wind up us.

Interactions with the Justice System

There was two court matters since 2009. It was with Legal Aid both times. One was Nowra and the other one was at Ulladulla. And if you don't go you, you're in more trouble, so there you go. I'm pretty sure the one down in Ulladulla got adjourned twice. I think there was another one back in 2006 or 2005 or somewhere there, but we'll just focus on the ones since 2009 for this.

Impacts

The impact of those prosecutions there is that it's deprived my kids. And me as a man, I need to pass on traditional things that I've been taught.

There's so much lost in the young blackfellas today, because they've all moved away from the ocean because the generation I'm in, we've all been pushed away and told not to do it [cultural fishing]. So, why would you pass it on to the next generation to get them into trouble?

The impacts for me personally, well how can I say, pretty disheartening. I mean, we all used to go hunting together, we was taught to, it was the way for all the family to connect and we all come together do that on occasions. It brings uncles, aunties all the cousins together. Now, and this is just one angle of it, we don't gather like that anymore.

30 years ago, you'd have gatherings like that three-four times a year like that where we'd all get together, all the kids would run around and have great fun and you'd learn a lot from your parents and your grandparents without even knowing. And then when it comes to your time with your kids - we can't do that anymore. It's a lifestyle, not a hobby, or recreation - a lifestyle. And that's there has been taken from my kids and my grandkids. I can't teach them that.

Drugs are another big impact. I speak to young blackfellas, and heaps of them have turned down the road of drugs and crime. And that's affected the next generation after me immensely. And my generation, or me as a proud blackfella, I've gotta sit here and watch these young fellas make a mess of themselves and I can't do nothing. I don't get emotional, but some things just pull your heartstrings.

There's not an answer because the young blackfellas have a right to learn this [diving/fishing], but if we're not teaching them then they're all on ice and getting into trouble. I am far from that stuff, but I see it happening, and what can I do? Not much, not much. It is sad.

Wanna look at health impacts, just look at mental stability for most of us. That's [diving/fishing] a retreat, that's a getaway. Being deprived of that [culture], it's not good for us. It affects your mental health for sure. Yep, a lotta the young fellas, they don't know no different than what's going on these days, if they had culture to go to I don't think that they'd have half the problems they've got these days.