

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE
UNCORRECTED PROOF
SELECT COMMITTEE ON RECREATIONAL FISHING

Inquiry into Recreational Fishing

At Griffith on Thursday 27 May 2010

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)

The Hon. A. Catanzariti

Mr I. Cohen

The Hon. R. H. Colless

The Hon. C. M. Robertson

The Hon. L. J. Voltz

CHAIR: Welcome to the seventh public hearing of the Select Committee on Recreational Fishing. This is the fifth of our six public hearings at regional locations. The Committee will be holding a further public hearing at Grafton. Before we commence I shall make some comments about certain aspects of the hearing.

In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of the Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table to my right. I remind everyone that any messages for Committee members or witnesses must be delivered through secretariat staff.

I emphasise that, although this is a public hearing, it is not an open forum for comment from the floor. Whilst today the Committee welcomes members of the public, the primary purpose of the hearing is to give individual witnesses an opportunity to give their evidence on oath before the Committee. Only questions from the Committee and evidence of witnesses are recorded in the transcript. Uninvited interruptions are not recorded and would make it difficult for witnesses to express their views.

Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others. The protection afforded to Committee witnesses under parliamentary privilege should not be abused during these hearings. Therefore, I request that witnesses avoid the mention of other individuals by name unless it is absolutely essential to address the terms of reference. I remind everyone to please turn off their mobile phones.

PETER GRANT, Secretary, Yenda Hotel Fishing Club,

COLLIN ROBERT WOOD, Member, Yenda Hotel Fishing Club, and

ANTHONY THOMAS KELLY, Member, Yenda Hotel Fishing Club,
examined:

sworn and

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would one or all of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr GRANT: Yes, I would.

CHAIR: Please go ahead.

Mr GRANT: Firstly, thanks for the opportunity to comment on this inquiry. I would like to comment about the rules applying to set lines in freshwater fishing. This is the first time that fishos from the bush have been given a chance to have a say. The comments I wish to make, we believe, are for a better future for recreational fishing in country New South Wales. As we all know, recreational fishing is one of the highest participation sports in Australia, therefore contributing heavily to the economy. This is why, when a major change is made within our sport, we all should have the right to have our say on the matter. This was not the case in 2007 when the proposal was tabled to make a change to the number of set lines used in recreational freshwater fishing from four to zero. The first that we in the country heard of the change was to read it in the *Sunday Telegraph*, and this was after it had been passed.

We started with 10 set lines and that reduced to four, but to go from four to none without a chance to have our say was a turn for the worse for fishing in the Riverina and country areas. This was passed without appropriate public consultation. Out of a registered 500,000 fishos, only 3,300 voted on the change yet it still was passed. If you do your maths, that is only 0.7 per cent—not even 1 per cent. How could this law have been changed with such a minority vote? The reason the law was changed was to provide fish for future generations. Rubbish! The current fishing regulations for bag and size limits are more than enough to sustain a healthy supply of fish for future generations. It is a rare occasion when someone bags out on freshwater fish. We have been fishing of a weekend with set lines and not caught a fish.

Freshwater fishing is not like saltwater fishing, where you can go fishing for a few minutes and get a feed. Sometimes we have fished for days and caught nothing. This past change of set line laws was obviously made by people who have not fished in freshwater and used set lines. If you do a survey of the towns surrounding the Darling River they will tell you about a downturn in trade since the change in set line rules. We used to have an annual trip to the Darling River for a week. Not any more. No-one is going to drive for a day and spend hundreds of dollars on supplies and only be allowed to fish with only two rods.

All I am asking you is to have this set line rule reviewed but this time make sure that the fishos around the Riverina get to have a say in the matter. After all, we are the ones that use them. At the end of the day, all we want is to be able to enjoy our fishing with our families and our mates, which includes doing what fishos have done for decades, put in a few set lines to increase our chances of getting a feed of fish for the family. That is all. We should be promoting this great family leisure activity, not detracting from it. Fishing is a sport that anyone can participate in. We need to promote this by advertising and getting more families and kids involved. The family that goes fishing and camping together has a special bond, and the kids will pass this on to future generations. If we can get our kids hooked on fishing, it will be a step in the right direction for us all. A good way to start would be to get the set lines back in freshwater fishing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Grant. Mr Wood or Mr Kelly, would either of you like to make a brief statement?

Mr WOOD: No, thank you.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Gentlemen, going back to this number of set lines. The rules as they stand now—correct me if I am wrong—say you can have only two lines, must be rod and reel or hand lines?

Mr GRANT: Two rods.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So you are not allowed to use hand lines at all, is that what you are saying?

Mr GRANT: If you have them in your hand, yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But you cannot put them down?

Mr GRANT: You cannot put them down. Otherwise, you are allowed to have them in your sight. How far away is it?

Mr KELLY: Fifty metres.

Mr GRANT: Fifty metres, yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: As you say in your submission, in the past you used to be able to have 10 and then they reduced it to four, did they not?

Mr GRANT: Yes, they did.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: And when it was four you had to have them tagged?

Mr GRANT: Tagged with your name, phone number and address.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If they went back to the four set lines tagged as the rules were then, would that satisfy you people?

Mr GRANT: For sure, yes.

Mr KELLY: It would be an improvement on the situation as it is now.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So, when you talk about the economic impact it has had on the towns along the river, what are the impacts you have noticed in the towns you go to?

Mr GRANT: When we used to go fishing up the Darling, we used to go to Tilpa and stay at a pub there sometimes. We do not go any more. I do not know how much we used to spend there, probably a couple of hundred bucks each, easy. We are not going up there any more, so that is not happening. They are not getting the money in. It is not just us. There are other crews around who used to go up there.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So there are a lot fewer fishermen on the river?

Mr GRANT: Yes, for sure.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you think that might be an agenda that the environmental movement has, to get people off the river?

Mr GRANT: No, I do not think so.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What do you think their agenda was in reducing it to the way it is now?

Mr GRANT: As I said, they took away the set lines so fish could breed and everything, so we could have more fish in the water. But that is already covered by the size limits and the bag limits, so I do not know why they even changed it. If something is not broke, you don't fix it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: One of the arguments was that the lines would not be checked for hours and hours, and there would be dead fish on the line and those sorts of things. When you could put 10 lines in, how often would you check them?

Mr GRANT: Every hour, on the hour. I never found dead fish on the line. I have been fishing 40 years, and I have never seen a dead fish on a line yet. They say that with a set line the fish used to get stressed. I think the fish get stressed more from the fluctuations in the water levels in the river, rather than from being hooked on a line for 5 or 10 minutes. So I could not see the reasoning in taking these set lines away from us. We are already doing the right thing, putting our four lines in. If we catch a fish that is too small, we let him go. That is why it is pretty hard to take.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: When you go fishing in the river, what species do you target?

Mr GRANT: Yellow belly or cod mainly—edible fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: I am keen to see how we fish sustainably, in general circumstances. You said that the Government came in banning the set lines, with the idea of building up the stock. Are you saying that now the stock has built up, or not, because you do not have set lines anymore?

Mr GRANT: I do not know, because I have not been fishing for a couple of years now.

Mr KELLY: I think there is a good quality of fish out there, but the size limits were extended to give cod more time to breed. Since the changes with the set lines, I have used more lures and trolling methods.

Mr IAN COHEN: Are you doing this instead of set lines now?

Mr KELLY: Yes. You have to; you have no choice. If you want to go out and spend the day fishing, it is either that or sitting beside two rods on the riverbank.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is that not more of a sport, though—getting out and trolling and actually using your skill to catch the fish?

Mr GRANT: You can do both, though.

Mr IAN COHEN: The set lines have gone from 10 to 4, and then stopped. I can understand your concern about that. But you yourself say you are trolling, you are actively fishing. So there is more skill to that, is there not?

Mr GRANT: There is, but there is only a certain percentage of people who were fishing in the past who have taken that up. But there are a lot of older people who have been fishing for 20 or 30 years who do not want to sit in a boat all day and go out trolling. So there is a loss of people there. What I have found with trolling is that you might go out all day and get nothing, or you might go out and catch a native fish. But I have never, ever caught a European carp on a trolling line.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are specifically hunting for them on the set lines, are you?

Mr GRANT: In the past when we had set lines, on a weekend trip the majority of your fishing catch would be carp, and they would end up on the bank and they would not be back in the system. Whereas now, without the set lines, the carp are breeding up and they are not taken out of the system like they were before.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are saying that because you are changing from the set lines to having to be actively fishing and targeting specific species more, it is contributing to a build-up of carp in the system?

Mr GRANT: It is, because I have found that carp generally do not take lures; they are more of a bottom-feeding, scavenger fish and they do not take an active lure.

Mr IAN COHEN: Mr Grant, you said that when you are working with set lines you check them every hour.

Mr GRANT: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Say a fish, other than carp, gets caught on a set line, and it could be there for 40 or 50 minutes. That would be pretty damaging, in terms of going about fishing and doing things that are going to allow you to put the fish back in the water if it is the wrong breed, for example?

Mr GRANT: None have died on us yet.

Mr IAN COHEN: You do not know, do you? You let them go, and you hope?

Mr GRANT: You see them going down the river; they float. I have never seen a floating fish yet. We have lines up the river and down the river, so when you go up and down if one is going to die you are going to see them going along on the top.

Mr IAN COHEN: Would you not agree that 40 or 50 minutes is a long time to leave a fish on a line? You say that they are more stressed by the height of the river or the water flows in the river, which is another issue altogether, but that there is a high level of stress for a fish on a hook, for up to 40 or 50 minutes. I note that you did say you generally check your set lines much more frequently.

Mr GRANT: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: What is the reason for that?

Mr GRANT: That is just what we do. We go back to camp, have a bit of a feed or a bit of a talk, and then we will go out in the boat again, or do a bit of trolling, like Tony said. We do not just go out with lines every five minutes or so.

Mr IAN COHEN: You do not rely solely on the set lines at all?

Mr GRANT: No.

Mr IAN COHEN: So you still get a fishing experience, without the set lines?

Mr GRANT: Exactly.

Mr IAN COHEN: And you are still catching a reasonable amount of fish because of your skill?

Mr GRANT: No.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are not?

Mr GRANT: We are catching less fish now because set lines were a better way to get them. Lures are okay, but you do not get them all the time on lures.

Mr IAN COHEN: Other than carp, what do the set lines generally attract?

Mr GRANT: Yellow belly, cod, and bream, which get released. That is about it.

Mr IAN COHEN: I do not quite understand how, if the set lines are stopped, we do not see a greater number of fish, and therefore more successful fishing by other methods. Can you see the point I am trying to make there? If the set lines are taken out of the equation, we are going to have more successful fishing by other methods, are we not?

Mr GRANT: No.

Mr WOOD: Wouldn't you think that if you had more lines in the river, you have got more chance of catching a feed?

Mr IAN COHEN: But there are more stocks there because there is less mining of the stock in the first place because you do not have set lines.

Mr WOOD: I do not agree with that.

Mr IAN COHEN: Why not?

Mr WOOD: As I say, you have only got two rods in there. There might be 100 fish, but only one might take the hook. But if you have 10 rods in there and there are 100 fish, you have got more chance of getting one out of 100 with a set line.

Mr IAN COHEN: I take your point in relation to the carp; that is a solid point. But I am talking about native fish.

Mr WOOD: You cannot catch any carp on two rods. With the set lines, you could.

Mr IAN COHEN: Why can you not catch carp on two rods?

Mr WOOD: As I just said, usually there are millions of carp in the river. But if you cannot catch enough carp to pull them out to kill them, they are eating the native fish. So you have not got a build-up of extra species, native fish, because the carp are eating them before they grow long enough to be catchable. You are not catching any carp either. Before, with your 10 lines, you might catch 20 carp over the weekend. But they all go on the bank, dead, so they are not in the system. But now, when you have not got 10 set lines, those 20 carp are still going to be running around the river.

Mr IAN COHEN: I understand that the Department of Industry and Investment increased the number of attended lines to two. As the Hon. Rick Colless said, you then had 50 metres as a practical measure. Surely as a compromise, that is a fair call—50 metres from two lines rather than one line. Is that not a compromise that has occurred in this particular circumstance?

Mr GRANT: Before we had four or five rods and we had four or five lines in as well, but now we are only allowed two rods, so we are going to catch less fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: Has anyone done an assessment of the rivers where you have been fishing? Has anyone from your clubs, or any scientists that you know of, done an assessment so they can actually say how the ecosystem is coping, whether it is going down from the carp or whether the native fish are breeding up? Has anyone done any proper scientific assessments of the state of your particular region?

Mr GRANT: Going back to earlier this year, there was a carp review. I got an email at work about a carp review, how the carp are getting more and more in the rivers, building up in the rivers, and they were doing a survey on that, but I do not know what the outcome was.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: How many members do you have in your particular club?

Mr GRANT: Now only 10.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What did you have before the restrictions?

Mr GRANT: Before, we had 25.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Do you have any idea how many recreational fishers would be in the Griffith district?

Mr GRANT: I do not know. The Yoogali Catholic Club has about 80 members, or they did have—that is going back a few years ago—but the other clubs, I do not know.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: You believe the big downturn has been because of the restriction?

Mr GRANT: I reckon—I know so.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: You also know that there were 3,300 people who voted to restrict the lines?

Mr GRANT: Yes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Do you know how that vote was taken?

Mr GRANT: Yes, it was in 2007. The increase in the cod size limit and the banning of set lines was put out as proposals in the bag and size limit review and they got 3,300 respondents. That email was from the senior fisheries manager at Albury.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Do you think that would have been from the Riverina—3,300?

Mr GRANT: I do not know who had the vote. We never got to vote up here. The first we heard about it was in the *Telegraph*, the first we heard of the change.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: So you do not know how that vote was taken?

Mr GRANT: No, only what I have got here, the bag and size limit review, which we never saw up this way.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Did you put a complaint in to anybody at the time?

Mr GRANT: We did not know where to go, we were stunned, so no, nothing. We just stopped going fishing.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: We have received evidence that it is difficult for recreational fishers to keep up to date with changes to their sport's rules and regulations. Do you find this to be the case in your area?

Mr GRANT: Not really. I think we are up with it. As a club we have a meeting now and then and talk about what the changes have been, like the size limit and bag limit, and what we are not allowed to do and what we are allowed to do.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: How do you get information about changes?

Mr GRANT: From the members in town.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Do you get anything from the Department of Fisheries or anybody like that?

Mr GRANT: Not as such, no.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Nothing comes in?

Mr GRANT: Nothing much out here in the bush, because we are sort of out of the way in the bush.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Is there any information where you go to buy your fishing licence?

Mr GRANT: Yes, we get the fishing books. When you buy the licence you get a book and there are some stickers there, but that is about all. All the rules and regulations are in that book, so if you read the book you get to know them.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: That is your only source of information?

Mr GRANT: Yes.

CHAIR: How many of your members do you think would have access to the Internet, or would use it—all of them or very few of them?

Mr KELLY: There would not be too many. We have a few older model members.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: We are trying to work out whether there is some way of getting information to you and whether emails would be of any assistance, if an email were sent to you whenever there were some changes?

Mr GRANT: We could do that and pass it on.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I am also one of those guys, by the way, who is not real good at it. What do you consider to be the major threats to the marine environment and fish stocks in New South Wales in inland rivers?

Mr GRANT: Fish stocks? What do you mean?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: The stocking of any fish in the rivers?

Mr GRANT: I think for a start when they do the stock they put them in too small and birds get a lot of them. I think they should keep them a little bit longer.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: To build up the numbers of fish, do you have any idea what is the best way to go?

Mr GRANT: Flood the rivers like it was years ago. But we haven't got water around, so we can't do that any more. The backwaters were all full and the cod used to breed up in the backwaters. We had a lot more fish years ago. Now I do not know.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: If it were to go back to four lines, do you think people would take up fishing again?

Mr GRANT: Definitely.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: In relation to information, with the vote or survey that was done on fishermen that you did not hear anything about, do you have any ideas on some way that information could be collected on people who fish—not just people who belong to clubs, because the majority of people who fish do not belong to clubs? Do you have any ideas on direct access to information and how to find out how people will respond to decisions like fixed lines?

Mr GRANT: If you have an Internet site that we can all check out, I suppose.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: That is a problem because most fisher persons are not really keen on computers.

Mr GRANT: I suppose, but some do, and they can pass it on to the others I suppose. I have access and I tell Colin and Tony what is going on and they will tell other members, and when we have a meeting it gets around that way. Apart from that, I do not know how to get it around.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Going back to the fixed line question, if you go to Tilpa and stay at the pub, would you normally fix your lines for the night and leave? Is that the problem with the 50 metres? Fifty metres is a fair distance, but is it too short for a camp?

Mr GRANT: When you have your line over here, you cannot go over there and go to the toilet, you have to pull it out and then go to the toilet. It is too short, for sure. When we had lines in the water, there were three or four bends and we had one line there and on the next bend another line, so we did not have them in our sight years ago, but now that we have the rods we have to have them in our sight, yes.

CHAIR: When you were using set lines, were you leaving the lines set overnight?

Mr GRANT: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Does your club ever have any discussion or interaction with the catchment management authority with regard to water quality?

Mr GRANT: No.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We heard interesting evidence last night from a witness from the catchment management authority for the Snowy River who was actually doing a lot of work with fishermen, particularly in terms of accumulating data in relation to fish stock, so I was wondering if you had had any contact?

Mr GRANT: No, nothing at all.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Would you know which catchment management authority you are in?

Mr KELLY: No.

Mr GRANT: Out in the bush we don't get told much.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Nearly all of us are from the bush.

Mr GRANT: Do you get told where it is?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: It is the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority and I think Lee O'Brien is the chairman.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I understand that they are looking at fish stocks and research into how to improve them, so I just wondered if any interaction was going on.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Grant, following on from the issue of fish stocks and breeding, you mentioned that cod breed in the lagoons. What do you think has more impact on fish numbers—too many set lines or low water or drought conditions?

Mr GRANT: Drought conditions, definitely.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Given that, do you see that when the water conditions are good and the cod are breeding you would take all the fish out of the river by having 10 set lines per fisherman?

Mr GRANT: Definitely not take them all. It is very rare that we bag out on fish when we go fishing. Going back to the days when we used to put 10 lines in we were lucky to catch two fish to bring home.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the bag limit for cod?

Mr GRANT: Two, I think.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: And for yellowbelly?

Mr GRANT: Four.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That is per fisherman?

Mr GRANT: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So, even though you could have 10 lines in, you would generally catch two cod?

Mr GRANT: Yes. It doesn't happen; the fish just aren't there.

Mr KELLY: And that is not just one person with 10 lines, it might be a camp of half a dozen guys and with 10 lines each—50 lines—they would be lucky to get one fish between the lot of them to take home. That is pretty much the case now even with two rods.

Mr GRANT: I have never bagged out on freshwater fish ever, since I have been fishing.

Mr IAN COHEN: I hear what you are saying about water levels in relation to drought and other uses. There is a huge debate, of which you would be aware, on priorities in terms of water use in most, if not all, inland areas. If there were an increase in water flow in terms of a water flow regime, could you see that creating a better environment for fishing so that set lines would become a non-issue if we got to a point where there were sufficient environmental flows to build up the stock and create a healthier fishing environment?

Mr GRANT: If we were catching more fish, yes, of course.

Mr IAN COHEN: So you see that as a way out of it?

Mr GRANT: That is what we want to do—catch more fish. That is what we are here for, to get enough to get a feed, to try to catch more fish when we go fishing.

Mr IAN COHEN: Currently, set lines or not, the poor environmental conditions are creating a situation where the fish are not there in the way you described in the backwaters when conditions were healthier, there was a greater degree of breeding stock and there was more success in the whole system?

Mr KELLY: I think that is the problem now, that native stock in the river is not reproducing itself. The majority of fish that you catch in the river now are from stocking programs from fishing clubs in certain areas along the river, whereas fish, particularly like the golden perch, rely on flood situations to get out and spawn, but with no flooding situation they are not spawning like they were.

Mr IAN COHEN: A lot of these issues could be resolved if we had a more equitable river water regime that gave proper acknowledgement to various environmental and other use conditions.

Mr KELLY: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Good environment, good fish and happy fishers, one might say. Would you agree with that?

Mr KELLY: I agree with that.

Mr GRANT: Somebody would go down to the river fishing one weekend, going back years ago when we used to go fishing, and it would be chock-a-block full, and then you go down the following weekend and it is empty.

Mr IAN COHEN: The water level?

Mr GRANT: The water level.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Where did it go?

Mr KELLY: Down the river.

Mr GRANT: Farmers use it; the pumps start up.

Mr IAN COHEN: So industrial water extraction is the main problem really, and there are certain things that have to be done, but there is a clash between agricultural water use and other town and domestic use.

Mr GRANT: The water is just not there like it was years ago, that is all I think.

Mr KELLY: Everyone knows it has been a dry six or seven years—longer. I think the local people here that have fished along the Murrumbidgee will tell you there has been times when there has been no flow at all and you could walk across it, apart from the odd hole.

Mr IAN COHEN: So what is the current situation? How is it looking right now?

Mr KELLY: It can change from day to day in this local area because of the weir pools, the fluctuation of flow from the weir pools. Within two or three days the river can go from nothing to being a metre or two higher than it was.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is regulated flow, not natural flow in this case?

Mr KELLY: Yes.

CHAIR: Is your club a member of any association?

Mr GRANT: New South Wales Fishing Clubs Association. I get mail from Robert Smith all the time.

CHAIR: Do you get to talk much to other fishing clubs in the area? Are there any formal occasions on which you would meet?

Mr GRANT: Not really, no. We have not in the past.

CHAIR: Say, perhaps, to discuss this issue we are discussing today—water quality, water flow, set lines, et cetera—would you be happy if you were put together with other clubs in this area to talk a bit about some of these issues?

Mr GRANT: Certainly, yes. Anything to get a fish, to get a feed.

CHAIR: Would you agree to receive additional questions if any Committee members wish to ask a written question that they were not able to ask you during the hearing? Could they send those to you? Would you answer them and could we get the answers back within 21 days?

Mr GRANT: Certainly.

(The witnesses withdrew)

GRAEME DONALD HURST, Secretary, Northside Leagues Club Fishing Club, , and

JEFFERY PAGETT, Committee member, Northside Leagues Club Fishing Club, , sworn and examined:

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would either or both of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr HURST: I would. On review of the submissions on line over the last two days I have changed my attitude to the way I think about what the Committee is on about. Our fishing club has been formed since 1998-99. The club initially started with 50 to 60 financial members. Over the past 10 years and since the loss of the four set lines our club capacity has dropped back to around 20—lucky to have a dozen at the annual general meeting—and our age, where we had members in the 60 area, juniors under 12 and the average age of 15 to 30 with our older members, now our age base is 45 plus with two juniors.

Since the initiation of the set line rule, that is our biggest notice of fall off. I know there are a lot of other circumstances, and reading from the submissions I have found a diverse collection of views and recommendations covering different regions, especially, and areas of recreational fishing in New South Wales. It seems to come to a general consensus that a lot of the same arguments are being put forward in many areas west of the great divide and then you have your sections east of the great divide. The ones that come up most, what I have reviewed on the letters and submissions, were lack of communication between the public and the fisher persons, fishing clubs and government bodies; the cost to the community of the loss of fishing; the closure of fishing sites; species and habitat depletion; concerns about rural youth; revenue concerns and law and regulation changes and bag limits and methods of catching fish.

In short, on the whole our concerns are similar in areas with variables in certain regions of New South Wales. Hopefully, such Committees as these can give us greater insight and make adequate change for a better future for our chosen activity. A lot of people seem to think the loss of the four set lines is not actually forcing but inclining people to illegally fish regardless of the laws. They go down and want a feed of fish. They are not going to muck around, they will chance it and play the game. If you bring back the four set lines everyone will be quite happy to go down and get a nice feed of fish on the odd occasion and it makes it worthwhile. You can take your family and, as the Yenda boys commented, it has split the community in a lot of ways. A lot of our older people and patrons who used to come just do not turn up because they cannot be bothered with two rods.

On the 50 metres thing, anyone who goes down to a river—the Darling, the Lachlan or the Murrumbidgee—there are not many places where you can see 50 yards in a straight line, if you put a line in the top you are not just going to put two rods on the beach in front of you. You go there to fish. It is not just a sport. As one gentleman over there said about lures, it is more of a sporting thing. A lot of people take it on their own bat to go there and they are hunter-gatherers. The adrenaline rush you get from pulling something decent out of the water, in my idea, is phenomenal. That is all I have to rely on. So, in short, I hope this Committee can bring some great ideas and get some more adequate decision-making out of it.

CHAIR: Mr Pagett, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr PAGETT: I would. I will try to keep mine as brief as possible. My background can probably give you a reasonably good bit of information a bit different to others. My father was one of the founding members of the Griffith Rescue Aqualung Squad. When I was a young teenager I got to dive with them in the local rivers back in the early to mid-1960s, which was an absolutely great time in my life as a young teenager, to be able to go out and dive in the middle of the night with spotlights and really see what goes on under the water. This was pre-carp era. The waters would clear up to 15 or 16 feet visibility in the daytime when the sunlight is directly above, and at night it is a little bit like driving through a fog with a high beam on. The reflection tends to come at you but you could still see seven, eight or nine feet when the river is cleared really well—especially in the mid-1960s. You got to see things like catfish nests, little groups of redfin, which were the greatest invaders of

our river system of any time. I believe they were the exact reason why cod breeding programs through the 1950s and 1960s were nearly null and void. The majority of time I was diving I never seen the juvenile cod. But you could go out at night when you have these lights shining on the yellow bellies and they would just sit there like in a trance and you could rub them on the belly. It was absolutely amazing. All the other creatures swimming around, turtles and that sort of thing and, as I said, the catfish in the nests.

If I remember, the first time I ever saw that, we were diving at the Lachlan River. There was me, my father was next to me, Barry Pauling had a big spotlight—one of the local fishermen in the fishing squad for a long time—and Terry Josling. There were four of us. They were both very experienced; I was fairly young. Dad was moving this ribbon weed that had grown from the bottom. It would depend on the ribbon weed how clear the river was and the amount of sunlight that could go down to it. That was over time, and as the river got clearer the reed started going further and further into the deeper positions. It was a bit like that movie *Avatar*, you go in there and there were all these trees horizontal rather than vertical and all these weeds like vines hanging down and in amongst it you can see all these little eyes watching. For a 12-year-old kid it was just mind blowing. That was the Lachlan River, which was fairly amazing.

As I said, I think the redfin were the things that knocked the numbers of the cod about, stopping them breeding through that time. As soon as the carp era came—around 1969 was the last time the river was cleaned well and the carp started getting into it—it destroyed over three or four years, and I did not hear of another person catching a catfish or a redfin in the system. During that carp era the cod started to get a bit of a grip back on things and I believe by the early 1990s they were breeding quite well because in the mid to late 1990s we were having fishing competitions and we would go down on the Murrumbidgee in particular, and the majority of fish caught were juvenile cod. Back then it was only 500 millimetres long, or 50 centimetres, and they were all around 50 or 51 centimetres. Most of them got turfed back sort of thing. I think because of that the cod had started breeding again.

About five years ago Graeme and I were down the Lachlan at Walantry. We were there for the weekend. We arrived Friday afternoon and fished until Sunday morning. We used four set lines each, so we had eight. We used four set lines all day with a couple of rods. We would work them and then sit down for a while and have an angle for half an hour and come back and work them. We got over 50 cod that one weekend—48 of them were juveniles under 500—and three yellow bellies. So we ended up with five fish. We were stoked. Fifty cod is just unheard-of. Back in the 1960s I could go out with my parents and a couple of other families, so there would probably be seven, eight or 10 people fishing and they would have quite a bit of trouble catching a cod. Maybe on your second or third visit to the river you would get a decent sized cod, and none of them were very small. Most of them were eight or 10 and most times you would catch a cod on a two pound yellow belly that you caught on a yabbie. The yellow belly was on the line and the cod would get to him before you got that yellow belly off. A lot of big cod were caught like that.

One of the things that may interest you very much was a dive we did probably in 1966 or 1967 down at Bringagee State Forest. A professional fisherman had been down there. This was the aqualung squad that did the dive. It was an exercise day and night, so we dived in the day and at night. We had a few new pupils, putting them through their course and that sort of stuff, with aqualung practice. Barry and I and dad went out again that night, and after this professional had gone—it was about three days later that we did this dive—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Is this a commercial or a professional?

Mr PAGETT: A professional, a commercial professional fisherman.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Someone selling fish?

Mr PAGETT: We understood that he took over 20 tonne of native fish out of that river, and that was probably within a mile either way of where the Bringagee reserve is, where he was camped. It was like a desert. It was scary. There was no life except for anything that could fit through the size of his nets of his wing drum nets. He just cleaned everything out. That was depressing. Even the turtles, there was nothing there, it was like a desert. We went back three months later and had another dive there at night and you would not have believed it was the same place. You have to realise that over three months these places do change, because the water comes up and it will wash a few logs around. So it does get a little bit hard to recognise everything exactly how it was, and your mind tends to forget a little bit as well. But it had been replenished; it was pretty much like what the rest of the river was like after that three-month period had passed.

He was down there during the cod close season, so I assumed, if my memory is right, it was around November. It was probably the end of February or March that the squad got back there and conducted these dives. It was pretty much back to normal. The river had replenished itself: big hollow logs, where you expected decent size cod to be, were there; the yellow belly were amongst all the branches, just sitting there looking at you. The redfin were there; the turtles were swimming around. They all seemed to be there; everything was back again.

Believe you me, I am not going to say that this is sustainable having professional fishermen, who are usually out fishing the rivers. But how quickly it recovered was quite scary; I was pretty amazed. I guess it has a bit to do with the high water coming down, and all the rest of the things that create these situations. But that is probably where I have got my experience. If you want to ask me any questions around those avenues, I can answer them. As I said, there are three states to the river over the last probably 60 years. The first one was a pristine river, then the carp era. That was 25 years of dirty water. You could not dive; you did not know what was going on down there. Now, over the last 15 years the water is starting to clear, the weed is starting to come back; it is becoming more natural, like it has been for the last 20,000 or 100,000 years, or whatever, for a long time. That is probably where I can answer your questions, if you would like to go down that avenue.

CHAIR: Is there still a group of people who are able to dive in these rivers?

Mr PAGETT: No. My father—who has passed on since—and I continued to do service on river pumps and different stuff. But from 1969 on it was virtually zero visibility; it was a very dangerous situation. If you can imagine getting caught under a log with an Aqualung on and everything like that, you cannot see a quarter of an inch in front of your mask. So it was all touchy-feely stuff, and we were very careful about how we went around. But there is no way that you could get around. In extreme cases, we actually had to dive for deceased people who had drowned, and stuff like that.

CHAIR: These days, particularly with the marine parks and on the coast, the fishing authorities are using baited camera stations and things like that. So the technology is there. Do you believe it would be a good idea now to try to get another reference as to what some of these areas were like, perhaps doing it in the areas where you dived in the 1960s and into the 1990s? If the authorities were to go back and look at those areas now—I know the river has changed—it might give you a comparison with what it is like now?

Mr PAGETT: I totally agree. I think that possibly over the last five or six years the rivers are clearing, and the weed is coming back, which becomes its own natural filter. You can get over a metre's visibility this season. But they will go dirty again. And whenever they go dirty, obviously it is not going to be a viable option. But when they are clear, you will see within that metre that the activity is there.

CHAIR: I take it you heard some previous evidence that was leading to the conclusion that, given the reductions in set lines, the number of carp being killed was dropping, and therefore the number of carp surviving was increasing. What is your view on that?

Mr PAGETT: I would like to say that I agree with it, but I totally disagree with it. I think the numbers are actually dropping right off. We would go out and catch 20 or 30 carp. We are lucky if we get one in a visit to the river now. It is just a natural progression. I think it has been low water for such a long time, none of the lagoons are full. Carp will not breed where there is current, so they have no breeding grounds. Possibly in the past we have seen them in sicknesses, where their scales are falling off. I think it is just a natural progression. Whether they are going to come back to their numbers, we do not know. Everything else will blend in and it will be sustainable, and we are going to have to live with that for the rest of time.

Perhaps when we get really high waters again, and the lagoons fill up, they may breed up and infest the river again, and it will all start again. But that is the cycle. You tell me anything that is permanent and does not work in a cycle. They will go round and round.

CHAIR: Carp do require the lagoons to breed, do they?

Mr PAGETT: No. I know that Fisheries have done extensive studies, and they will be able to tell you about their agenda; I am not really sure. My experience is that since the mid-1990s they have bred extremely well. I think that is due to low water, better water quality, and no redfin. So they are surviving, and their numbers are far greater now than they ever have been. They are on a boom. They are probably like the carp or

the redfin: when they come in, they just boom out of all perspective, and then they come back to a natural number.

CHAIR: Which river systems are you talking about?

Mr PAGETT: The Murrumbidgee and the Lachlan mainly. We go to the Darling occasionally, and down to the Murray. I know the Murray has had a very good run on small cod as well, so they are coming through the same thing. And obviously the Murray has been reasonably low for the last 10 to 15 years too. You get your little bits of high water, but the majority of it is fairly low. It is also clearing; the quality is improving, until you get right down towards Lake Alexandrina, in South Australia. But cod have a reasonably high tolerance to salt as well. So I do not exactly know what they are saying, whether it is the salt content or the water quality that is knocking the cod about down there.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Mr Hurst, I think earlier you said that your club numbers have dropped. I think you said they have dropped to about 50 per cent, is that right?

Mr HURST: Probably more.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: With regard to the members you have now, what activities do they engage in?

Mr HURST: Originally we used to have a competition nominated every month, that is 12 competitions a year. Now we are back to four competitions a year. We have one river trip, we try to get the club to chip in and go to the coast, and then we go to a dam. We have a social event with our families. Our major concern is our youth. We had kids from 15 through to 30 having a ball, and it was not uncommon to get 20 to 25 people at a weekend competition down the river. You had four set lines each, and everyone was quite happy. Half the blokes did not even come down and fish with four set lines; they were quite happy to sit in the boats with the ones that were not fishing. But the younger ones would go and put in their four lines, then come back and have a beer, light a campfire, socialise, and then go around and check their lines. There was a continuous supply of all the stuff. I personally tried for five years to find out where they had done the research, and who had done the research, on stressing native species and their endangerment. I got a brick wall at every turn and I could not keep up with all the paperwork.

As far as the fishing club went, the decline seemed to come in that era when it went from 10 to 4. The four-line rule seemed to work really well. But now, with our older members, we cannot be bothered either. It is not like the good old days: you cannot go down and fish. In my situation, I cannot sit in a boat for more than three hours because I have a neck problem. As far as angling or dragging lures, I have had success a lot of times. But as far as the fishing club goes we are losing members. It is not just us; it is the local community, and charities and stuff that the fishing club does. It has been phenomenal.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What about the other clubs?

Mr HURST: We have an inter-competition with Yoogali Catholic Club and with Southside Leagues Club.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Is that still happening?

Mr HURST: It does. The last two times we have gone up to the dams. Two years ago Jeffery and some other boys from our club went out in the pouring rain—they were mad to do it—and got 10 nice yellow belly. The Catholic club and Southside conceded defeat. That is the only time we have really gotten together. The only real contact with Southside, the Catholic club and the Yenda club is through these inter-competitions, and they have dwindled off. Darlington Point used to be involved, and the Kaya used to be involved, but now it has fallen back to Yoogali Catholic Club, Southside and us. No-one wants to go to the river anymore, because, as I said, they are not going to go down there with two rods for a weekend and try to fish for a competition. The numbers are dwindling off anyway. The young ones just do not come anymore.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: You would say that the numbers overall have dropped about 50 per cent?

Mr HURST: Easily 50 per cent.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Did you have any discussions with the catchment management authority?

Mr HURST: Not at a club level. I did on a personal level, but not at club level. And we have never been approached by any of that side. I have written to nearly every authority I can get hold of.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: About the lines?

Mr HURST: No, not just the lines; about the habitat. In the last 10 years we have been fishing the Lachlan very regularly and we have seen some unreal turnarounds. Native catfish have come back up there in the thousands. Even when the river dropped at Christmas time, we thought, "The weed is going to go and we are going to lose them." The river has come back up, we have got the good rain that has brought it up 8 to 12 feet, and the catfish are still there. Where they survived, I do not know. In my 40 years experience of fishing, the cycles will come and they will go. It is phenomenal how nature works. We see it on a daily basis when we are up there.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I will ask you the same question we asked the Yenda fellows. If the regulations were to go back to four set lines, do you think that that would get you people back—?

Mr HURST: I can nearly guarantee it.

Mr PAGETT: Absolutely. That is really all we require. Just moving away from that for a moment. You spoke about lure fishing before, and you asked whether that supplements our ability to catch fish. It does, to a degree. The answers were fairly vague, I thought. Lure fishing is very seasonal. It depends on water temperature, and on the clarity of the water. Our river systems just do not supply it. There are probably only three or four weekends of the year when you are going to be reasonably guaranteed of getting fish—not a lot of fish. You will never get a lot of fish, but you might get a feed or a couple of feeds. That is usually around summer time, just after the cod breeding season. I would say that somewhere between 1 December and the end of February you have a reasonable chance. For the rest of the year, you are absolutely wasting your time. Or if it is dirty, you are also wasting your time. But with bait, it is a totally different kettle of fish. Even when you cannot see two millimetres into the water, you will still catch fish; they go on the vibration and everything else.

Mr HURST: Especially with cod and the bigger predatory fish, the legal size that we are chasing are more prevalent to hunt at night or early in the morning, when they come out from their logs. You can go all day with a lure. You might stir one up. When you get three or four blokes banging a lure, eventually he will come out and have a look. Whereas, with a set line, it is swinging there all the time, and when he finds it he will hit it. Ninety per cent of the time it is at night—not while you are sitting in a boat bobbing worms and shrimps. It would be very rare to catch it. But the predatory fish hunt at night and they move at night. It is not hearsay; it is a fact. Jeffery and I have been in a position to do it fairly subsistently.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Can you tell me what years they changed from 10 set lines to four, and when they changed from four set lines to two?

Mr PAGETT: Probably the early 1990s. I think it went to five, and then to four—or it was five, then 10, then back to four, or something to that effect.

Mr HURST: It was the mid-1990s.

Mr PAGETT: But it is not two set lines now.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is two set lines if you are 50 metres away—

Mr PAGETT: No, it is not two set lines.

Mr PAGETT: You might have your family out and you have two boys fishing around teatime. Dad goes up to camp to cook dinner. The two boys are there, they have got their rods in the right holes, and they are sitting there. Dad yells out to the two boys, "Dinner's ready!" They walk up, and bang—your are breaking the law.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Because you are more than 50 metres away?

Mr PAGETT: The kids have left the lines in the water. How the hell are you supposed to know about it? I mean that is just an ordinary day, isn't it? But you are illegal, you are a crim, you are fishing wrong, and you will get busted. If he is there, you're gone—it is as simple as that. Is that really fair? Is that reality? Is that what you do with your children? Come on, this is Australia, for God's sake.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I was just asking you what year it was brought in; I do not know that I was actually challenging you.

Mr PAGETT: No, sorry.

Mr HURST: He is very passionate.

Mr PAGETT: I was just making it clear.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Is the lure used more in high-country freshwater fishing because of the clearer water?

Mr PAGETT: Trout and that sort of thing you mean? It is probably used more down there because of the clearer water, and even in the oceans. They are using soft plastics and all sorts of stuff in the oceans because most of it is clear all the time, but, as I say, you are very restricted with the time that you can use it. You do not need a lot of visibility, but probably that much you need, and quite often the rivers you only have that much and you are wasting your time, they will not come up—and especially in the cooler months, they are not interested at all, they are very placid and they stay under a log or something and only come out if they can find a yabby.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We have heard quite a bit of evidence about fish kill and slow and fast water, but a lot of what you are talking about is how the stock naturally picks up and drops off anyway?

Mr PAGETT: And the control of water levels, which are governed by our resources and that sort of stuff, I think determines a lot more than what any anglers would take out of the river, especially in breeding seasons. As the Yenda boys said, yellowbelly will breed far better on a very high river where the water is over the edge. Cod are the opposite; they breed in low water. So obviously, over the years, before all the artificial dams and that were put in there, the rivers were doing that and that is where you were getting your breeding cycle from, so they determined it more.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Fisheries say that their aim was not to say that fishermen were depleting all the fish; they were more concerned about the lines often not being checked for many hours and research showing undersized or threatened fish hooked therefore have a much lower chance of survival. They were talking about the side catch problem and being left too long to be unhooked rather than attacking fishers.

Mr PAGETT: Yes, and the agenda of that question?

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You are saying that Fisheries said you people take too much out of the river with your fixed lines.

Mr PAGETT: Well, they have not really said anything, they just took the lines away—that is as far as I see it. As Graeme said, he has banged his head against a wall for a long time trying to find out the reasons why they did it all, and there are no reasons.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: The reason that we have been given by Fisheries is—

Mr PAGETT: Cruelty?

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Because these lines are often not checked for many hours and research has shown that any undersized or threatened fish hooked therefore has a much lower chance of survival. You know how you are so careful now about maintaining the lives of fish that are not to be caught, those sorts of issues—

Mr PAGETT: Yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: This apparently caused a problem with that process.

Mr PAGETT: Well, I guess to a degree that would be true with some people, but everything has got its drawbacks.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You do not sound like you leave lines anyway, but others do.

Mr PAGETT: Well, we are out there, but we do leave lines in overnight. We might work them until late, so there could be a four or five hour period, or even a little bit more, that the lines are in there completely unattended, but our lines are fairly short and if you go under and have a look at what a fish is doing, after the first couple of minutes he will usually go down and lay on the bottom or lay next to a log or something and sulk, and he won't move until he hears some disturbance in the water, and then he will start jerking on the line again, but basically he will lay still for hour after hour after hour, as he does when he is not hooked, so he really would not even know that he was hooked except when he goes to swim away and it gives him a bit of a jerk, that is about it. They all have their own opinion, but if you go down and study or watch it that is exactly what happens.

Mr HURST: Over the last five years I think, with Fisheries and that, I cannot seem to find an answer with who did the research, where they did it and what stresses a fish. Like Jeffery said, a fish that comes out and hits a lure usually turns back and heads back for cover next to a log. You cannot tell me from personal knowledge that that is as stressful as winding it and chasing it all over the river to try to get it into a boat on a lure without losing it, having three or four foot of set line and pulling gently on there so you don't get him out of the log, you don't hurt the fish, and if he is not legal size you tip him on his side, drop the hook out and he's gone, finished, over and done with. On a lure, you are going to be pulling, playing and everything, all over the shop. The fish has got to be going berko, it is praying for its life. No-one can tell me that that is less stressful. Like Jeffery said, a fish will get caught on a set line and 90 per cent of the time he will lay—play doggo, as we call it—and you cannot tell me that stressing him on a hand line or rod or pulling him straight up—if you get a young kid with a rod, they just wind it like that, there is no pump and grind, it is just wind it and get him in the boat, and they bust the swim bladder and tear the sides off, so where is the status quo?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There are no predators? If they are caught on a line, are there things that are going to stress them?

Mr HURST: Not a cod and a yellowbelly, even catfish.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: They are native fish.

Mr HURST: The odd water rat, which is very rare.

Mr PAGETT: Not these days, they are all gone.

Mr HURST: There used to be. Birdlife—

Mr PAGETT: The other thing against line fishing, you get game fishermen who get out with big rods, the marlin comes out of the water and they have driven the hook right into him and are sitting right back on him, and it is just a war.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but it is not about the stress, what they are saying from their research is that it is about the risk to them in terms of their survival.

Mr PAGETT: Yes, I agree with that, but most of the marlin are released after the battle has been on as well, and the majority of the time they are fine. If they actually do swallow the hook, we have cut the hook on the line, let them go and within three weeks you catch them again, the hook has just about rusted out and they are fine, it is not a problem and they continue on.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You have spoken about membership of clubs. Are you of the view that fishing is a sport or a leisure activity?

Mr PAGETT: Leisure activity more so, but I guess it is a sport as well.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There has been a lot of discussion about whether it is classified as a sport and where it should fit within the Government in terms of portfolios. One thing that has fascinated me during this inquiry, and perhaps you might have a view on this, is in terms of membership. At no point during this inquiry has any woman come forward representing recreational fishermen. I get lots of responses that there are plenty of wives who come along to the clubs, but we are seeing this 40 years after the women's movement.

Mr PAGETT: My wife actually loves fishing, she comes with me all the time, but she just has not participated in this particular part, she has left it to us to write the submission and come and defend our leisurely pastime.

CHAIR: In relation to Ms Voltz's last question about how you would describe what you do, in your opening statement you pretty well described what you do. You almost called it a cultural pursuit.

Mr PAGETT: Yes.

Mr HURST: Exactly—a passion, natural instinct.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Certain people have questioned whether Fisheries should be looking after this or whether with marine parks it should sit under the department of the environment. A lot of fishing people have said it is actually a sport and, like most sports, they are not sitting under the sport and recreation portfolio where a lot of sports are funded. I guess the problem with the definition is when we are looking at organisations and peak bodies. Because fishing seems to sit in the primary industries environment, it is not being represented in the same way as other cultural and leisure pursuits.

Mr PAGETT: You would nearly call it a religion. That is exactly right.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I did grow up with fishing myself, and you do not want to start me on some of the other sports that I think are religions, but I do not think I have ever heard that fishing is the game they play in heaven.

CHAIR: Have you read your Bible?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That was only about feeding the masses.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the distribution and relative numbers of carp and redfin in the system now?

Mr PAGETT: Except for the coldwater dams like Burrinjuck, I think Wyangala still has some—that is a bit north—but going further south, Tantangara, Eucumbene, those sort of dams, especially Hume Weir, the redfin are alive and well there, but they do not seem to grow to a large size any more. In the river systems around here redfin are virtually non-existent now. Up until two years ago there were some in Lake Cargelligo. When it hit the deck just recently, completely dried out, they would have all been killed off, so I would say there is probably none in the Lachlan system now or the Murrumbidgee or any of that down there. There are probably still a few in the lake, although that cannot be right because there are still a few in the main canal system that comes through here and that is coming down the Murrumbidgee, but I do not know if there is any back there. We have not caught any and have not seen any since the mid 1970s or early 1970s. It was only a couple of years.

The carp have dropped off in a huge amount of numbers. As I said, you could go out and catch 100 carp and these guys, especially with the set lines you use with yabbies, you would just haul them off, killing them, throwing them up the bank one after another—it is quite a boring effort—but me and Graeme have been going out, and this is around the Willanthry area on the Lachlan River where we have been fishing the last few years, and there are very little. They are no longer pests, they have sort of reached their equilibrium and it is not going to cause a problem any more—they are not causing us any problems anyhow.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You made the point that redfin were predating young cod.

Mr PAGETT: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Does the reverse apply—does cod eat the redfin?

Mr PAGETT: They probably would, but the redfin are in big schools whereas cod don't knock around in schools, they are sort of under the logs and live solitary lives. I think the young would be assaulted fairly badly, the cod, but not so much the redfin. Even if they did, they would not be putting much of a dint in it, back in those years anyhow in the river system.

Mr HURST: The carp seem to build up in catchment areas when the water is low and then you might get the odd rush when the river comes up, they will come back, get back into the system, but not as prolific as they were.

Mr PAGETT: In the 1970s and 1980s.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Carp feed on anything, do they not?

Mr PAGETT: Pretty much.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Vegetable and animal?

Mr PAGETT: Pretty much.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: They will eat anything.

Mr PAGETT: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So they would predate on young native species.

Mr PAGETT: And they undermine the banks of the river.

Mr HURST: And wreck the habitat. That is why in certain sections of the Lachlan River the catfish have come back because the carp are not as prolific. You might get the odd big carp, but not like the little ones that were around in hundreds.

Mr PAGETT: The weeds are starting to grow back, so the catfish can make their nests and actually breed, whereas that was not possible 10 years ago or 15 years ago.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I was interested to hear your comments on how the river rehabilitated itself following the commercial takeout of that one event. Does that indicate to you that the river system has a great capacity to reinstate itself once conditions improve?

Mr PAGETT: Absolutely. I mean how long has it been going before the weirs? This is the first time I can remember, for a long time anyhow, the Lachlan River stopped actually flowing. I know it was only about 26 years ago or something, Peter told us, but if the weir was not there it would be stopped every second year, continually, and that's hundreds of thousands of years that it has been going. I mean it used to feed Lake Mungo and it has been dry for 20,000 years or something, hasn't it? So it goes back a long, long time, and it had to happen, so it is very diverse I think, the ability of the river to come back.

Mr HURST: We have only been here 200 years, so our fingerprint is minor I think.

Mr IAN COHEN: Talking about the water quality, we have carp muddying up the water because of its tactics, and you mentioned before the clarity of the water or visibility.

Mr PAGETT: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Can you give any other reasons why the massively fluctuating visibility, and therefore water quality, is occurring other than the carp impact?

Mr PAGETT: It is that plus the rising and falling of the water. As you can imagine, as it is rising it is taking the dry dirt off the banks and the logs that are submerged and mixing that in with it. So the visibility

drops down. Then it makes it worse because as the light cannot get down to the bottom to make the weed grow the filters fall out of the system, the weed dies, and that makes it worse and worse.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is a compounding influence?

Mr PAGETT: Yes, it is compounding effect.

Mr IAN COHEN: So, animals, cattle, in the water, that type of thing? Is there a need for buffer zones on the side of the rivers?

Mr PAGETT: I do not believe it has any impact on the rivers around here. No doubt in some of the swamps in the Northern Territory it does because you have a lot of low-lying stuff and perhaps even in some of the swamps down on the Murray, the southern end of the Murray, and the south-western end of the Murray could very well be the same. I do not know, but here I do not believe it is a problem. We have quite a few lagoons, and that sort of stuff. The only danger in the lagoons is they get locked off, they become depleted or the leaf falls in and they become depleted of oxygen and then they release it back into the river system. If it comes in in a big belt, it will come in and have a fish kill because there is no oxygen in the water. Also, it only goes down for a little while and within a very short time the fish come back. They are replenished after a very short time and it is all sustained.

Mr HURST: In the Lachlan, the tannin on the bottom of the river just from the gum leaves alone turns the water black within a matter of days. Once the water got low enough and the sunlight was not going to penetrate, the tannin came out badly again, and the silt moves and the water was like the back of these chairs. Then within a matter of the flush going through it went back to a nice coffee colour and now is starting to clear again and the weeds are coming back. It is a fairly rejuvenating cycle. We do a bit of research with an owner of a property up there who wrote books and everything and collects seeds from the weed itself, from the resource at the bottom, and the stamen comes up and fertilises in the river weed and all that and what they call the pencil, we have taken out for them, and they have done research on that. It has shown to be one of the most strong cycles without much diversity.

Mr IAN COHEN: You have proven the point on regeneration and, Mr Pagett, you have made some pretty clear points about the regulation of the river and it has certainly knocked things around. In terms of the success of the redfin you were saying they have come back in recent times?

Mr HURST: No, the cod, yellow belly and catfish.

Mr PAGETT: And they are all native.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is it the red tip?

Mr PAGETT: They are an English perch and they were introduced, and they are basically gone.

Mr IAN COHEN: You sort of explained why the cod are down and out at this time but you are saying that could change—I'm sorry, not the cod, the redfin.

Mr PAGETT: And the carp.

Mr IAN COHEN: What role would better environmental flows play in this regime? Can you see a solution there? I asked an earlier witness, there is a lot of talk about the set lines and the issues, and we can understand particularly with carp that that is an issue—

Mr PAGETT: I see that particular part as whatever agenda you wanted to achieve. If you wanted the cod to breed out, I would say if you slowed the volume of water down, let it clear, let the weed grow and improve the quality of the water and have it as a very low current coming down, they will breed as they are now, big time. If your agenda was to get the yellow belly, you need to flood the river and get it out over the banks, out in the lignum and everywhere else, and that is when they breed. They lay their eggs and wash back into the river. They do breed in other circumstances but I do not think their strike rate is anywhere near as good. That is their best strike rate. We are still catching a lot of yellow belly in the Lachlan River and it has not faded since the early 1990s. It has not been high over the banks since the early 1990s. These fish that we are catching are only four or five years old, two pound or a pound and a half, so they would only be four or five years old. They

are obviously still breeding and the adults, the bigger yellow bellies, are obviously still laying their eggs because the yellow belly will hold their eggs back year after year in an impound. If they cannot get even where current is running and where they lay normally, they will just hold their eggs, they will not lay them. Year after year nearly everything you catch out of the dams still have the full eggs.

CHAIR: Gentlemen, thank you for coming today. Would you agree to receive additional written questions that members of the Committee may want to send to you? If so, could you have them back to us within 21 days?

Mr PAGETT: Absolutely.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

PETER JAMES CRAIG, Recreational fisherman, , sworn and examined:

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr CRAIG: Just to be clear on the fact that I am a recreational fisherman. I definitely am not solely here by myself. Hundreds of people have given me support and views. That is basically what I would like to say to start. I think I have covered it in my submission.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Thanks for coming before the Committee. In your submission you expressed your frustration with the set line issue. Would you like to let the Committee know what those frustrations are?

Mr CRAIG: Yes. The frustrations are many. The main one is the social aspect of fishing. I mean, the guys I have grown up with are now elderly people that I tend to fish with these days. They are very reluctant to go to the river because of the risk it poses by not attending your lines. Some of these guys are very old. They are fearful of the fact that if they were to make a slip up they cannot afford the large cost of fines. The issue of a set line is proven and proven again. It is just very hard to catch a fish of a legal size without the skill of set lines. This is a skill that is a tradition. It is not a matter of chucking a line in and hoping for the best. There is water, there is depth, there are locations and river heights that go hand in hand. I say sincerely it is near impossible to catch legal fish these days on two attended rods. You might catch a lot of tiddlers but it is near impossible. That is vast experience.

As I say, as do hundreds of people I associate with, it is driving the sport down the gurgler. The aspect of travel to the Darling River, the Lachlan River and down here, the money that is taken out of the economy by these trips. One trip I have taken each year for the past 12 years. I ceased that after the last trip. It was so fruitless. When I say that, there was never an abundance of fish but it was good to come home with a prize fish or a couple of prize fish. But to go up there, we had old guys who were not going to go into the boat. They removed their lines after a couple of days because they were so frustrated if they moved away and the fact they could be caught so easily.

We were so put off with that trip. In doing that now, we estimate that probably in the vicinity of \$6,500 to \$7,000 in our camp alone is taken out of the local economy. We travelled up to Tilpa and support the little towns on the way. That is just one trip. I know probably a dozen that we associate with through our little region here who would spend the equivalent amount of money. I feel people are even reluctant to renew fishing licences now because you may as well go down and paddle your feet in the water for the sake of the possibility of catching the required fish that you can keep. Basically that is my frustration.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is your understanding of why those regulations were introduced?

Mr CRAIG: My understanding of it—and that is only through a lot of verbal, from fishing clubs where I have asked the question—I feel the point was there are not a lot of fish caught. There are plenty of fish in the river, undoubtedly, but catching them is another thing. I think it was brought in to build up the numbers of fish. It is not required. There are ample fish in the river and that is where my argument can be flawed. You could say if there are so many there why is it so hard to catch the darn things. But it is a skill you need to catch those and with the set lines that gives me and my fellow fishermen a fair chance of spotting a fish. To be quite honest, I have heard of the cruelty to a fish, the fish may be left there. I can assure you, we get around the lines quite regularly and that is the case with everyone. We are out their fishing and I can assure you the lines are very well attended and even though we are not within 50 metres of sight all the time they are definitely well attended. We do night runs, we do a couple of day runs and I can assure you the fish, if that is the case, it is really a fallacy.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What would your preferred course of action be if you were in control? How would you change the regulations to make them more workable?

Mr CRAIG: I would go back to the system of four lines and the rod or two rods. I think that is quite fair. I am not concerned about east of the range. We are fishing western rivers here. That is fine. Empowerments well and good, I do not think anyone has an argument with those regulations, but the western rivers is a different type of fishing. I, and I am sure my fellow fishermen, will accept that but it is a different type of fishing. If we are going to compete with the numbers on the coast, and we are definitely a minority out here, we are never going to change it. But there has to be some fairness to say in these areas we will stick to that but in fairness to our country cousins let us go back to what we were happy with. It is more sustainable and the economic side of things with restocking.

I am sure the fishing clubs would have mentioned that the recreational fishermen were only too happy to buy raffle tickets and contribute to restocking. With the way it has been restricted with no set lines, it makes it very hard for you to put your hand in the pocket, not only to buy a licence but also to go down there and try on the very slim chance of catching a fish with two attended rods. It is near impossible.

Mr IAN COHEN: For the benefit of the record, could you explain why the two attended rods make it so difficult to catch fish? The difference between that and the set lines and the different methods, just briefly, so we have that on the record?

Mr CRAIG: I can talk sincerely from my experience as a young boy. I am now 49 years old. The situation was two set lines and hand-held rods. With the cod fishing and set lines, as I mentioned before, they are very territorial. This is my analogy of the situation and I am sure it will be backed up. The territory around snags, deepwater and, most of all, they are shy fish, the cod. They tend to move at night. In the evenings we have found that 80 per cent of our catch is at a 10 o'clock run at night when we go in and tend the lines at night after the initial sunset baiting. During the day you would be very lucky to catch a fish on a set line. That is usually when you are down there in the daylight attending the rods.

A lot of times we go up north when it is very cold; it is not the best place to be with an attended line, even though I have mates who have done it. But they do not have the same success as with a set line, which is left in a secluded, quiet situation, acceptable to the fish and the environment. When the fish is ready to feed and move at night, that is when the bait works.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is a different mode of operation altogether, between set lines and rod fishing?

Mr CRAIG: In the sense of the locations you can place a line, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: You were talking about cod fishing there. Does it apply to yellow belly, for example?

Mr CRAIG: Yellow belly are very similar—not to the extent of cod. But I find that cod are very territorial. You have marginal success a bit more with the yellow belly, with the daylight fishing around stumps, bobbing. Lure fishing, yes. Just driving over a local canal gives you an idea of what the river is looking like. Today, it is as muddy as anything. Probably one year in a decade you will get a situation where the water is clear, which is conducive to lure fishing. Generally, lure fishing is a non-event. You need clear conditions. We do not see many of those conditions, especially in the rivers.

Mr IAN COHEN: You said that there are plenty of fish there; it is just a matter of using the right method to catch them. Do you have any evidence, or has a study been undertaken, or do you know of any process that has been undertaken to establish the health of the fish population, particularly the cod population, in the areas you are talking about?

Mr CRAIG: I am not a high-tech fisherman. I have fished with guys with sounders. It blows me away with the fish that are under boats. As I say, whether that is a fallacy or not, they tell me they are the fish that are under the boats. I have actually witnessed, probably some 15-plus years ago, professional fishermen using string weed nets at Carrathool, some 60 miles downstream. There were that many fish caught in that. They were yellow belly, they were not cod, but they were all about a kilo and a half to two kilos. There would have to have been 120 or 130 fish in the couple of nets that I witnessed the guy pulling up.

I had fished there for the three days previously and landed two yellow belly. That was the situation with using set lines as well. But there were that many fish moving in the area. With the span of the net from you to

me at two locations, that quantity of fish were taken from the river. My analogy from that was that there are definitely plenty there but your resources for catching them are very limited, unless you are in this guy's business, which I was glad to see ceased a few years ago.

Mr IAN COHEN: For example, if the two-rod rule were replaced by a two set line rule, would that be an acceptable compromise? If not, why not?

Mr CRAIG: Only because of the situation with the quantity of fish we were able to catch with four lines, which was very limited. I do not think it is asking too much to go back to the four set lines, given the amount of fish we were able to catch, which was very minimal but it was acceptable. I have also seen the days when a person would put in 50 to 100 lines. I think the skill is taken out of it in that regard. By putting four set lines in, if that is your quantity, you have to make sure you have made the best possible choice given your experience, and it is a matter of hoping for the best. I do think we would be really cutting short if we went back to just the two lines.

Mr IAN COHEN: Could you tell the Committee what you consider, given your experience, to be the greatest threats to the ecological sustainability of New South Wales inland rivers, perhaps using the example of the rivers in this immediate area?

Mr CRAIG: Coming from an agricultural background and living in an agricultural environment here, obviously the biggest detriment is the environment. Okay, there is also the river flows. European carp are a big nasty on our rivers, with the plant life. I think cod restocking—which the fishermen were buying for fingerlings and restocking—the cod being put into the rivers I think is probably more sustainable than a lot of flows.

Mr IAN COHEN: You would rather see ongoing fish stocking, rather than getting the environmental flows right? You think that is a better way to go?

Mr CRAIG: Yes. Regarding the environmental flows, history shows that the earlier settlers said that the Darling River was nothing more than a salty brine, a trickle. But fish have survived through that; they still tend to survive. I have been up there and walked through the Darling River for miles without any water; it has been dry. The flowing flush comes through, you fish there a month or two later, and yellow belly would be back there. I do not think the flows have a great deal to do with it. As I say, that is not my expertise. Fisheries will tell you they need them for the fish to spawn.

We get that one in 10 years. They tell me that is 10 years breeding that is over and above any stocking. We do get those big flows naturally every 10 years or so; hopefully we get more. I think the fish naturally will come back. But in saying that, the restocking of the rivers—and that is done largely by fishermen with their licences, their fundraising, and to get rid of the carp I think the cod are starting to do a good job. I am finding that they are doing a good job.

Mr IAN COHEN: Your answer sounds a bit political, in that you are perhaps not really having a good look at the impact of the agricultural industries and regulation of the waterways. Would you agree, or not? You did preface your answer by saying you are from the agricultural sector, which is fair enough. But are you downgrading the real impact of that sector?

Mr CRAIG: When I say that, I am here on both sides of the story; I am totally neutral—

Mr IAN COHEN: It is not both sides of the story. I am trying to understand what are the real impacts and what are potentially the real solutions.

Mr CRAIG: Okay. I will make the point that there are plenty of fish there now, given that the environmental flows have been very limited over the last few years and I have not seen a decline in the fish numbers. There are a hell of a lot of small fish in the river that you are quite able to land with the small, unattended rods. So I do not think the environmental flows are impounding on the fish stocks, as I am here today to give my evidence and view on. By all means, if the political arm pulls that way, so that they can manipulate the flows, at a detriment to others—it is a very fine line to walk. There is not a lot of water around, and a lot of people do not like it going out into the wilderness. As I say, I have a vested interest either way. But, as far as fishing and the fish stocks go, I do not think the environmental flows are having a great impact either way.

Mr IAN COHEN: You cannot really have it both ways. You cannot say a lot of people do not like the water going into the wilderness. There is an argument to say that that is, in part, where it belongs. If we are to have a balanced fishing industry and a recreational fishing industry, we really have to look after our environment and our environmental flows. So maybe you cannot have it both ways.

Mr CRAIG: Exactly. But, as I have stated, I do not think, from a fishing point of view, that the man-made environmental flows are rarely over and above the natural flow which we usually get once in 10 years, and hopefully more often. Even though I will say we need them to get the fish spawning, they also say when we have our big floods that these floods multiply and multiply whatever these environmental flows do, and a natural flood really gets the fish going. It cannot be artificially created to achieve the extent that that natural flow will achieve.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Are you a member of any of the fishing clubs?

Mr CRAIG: No.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Can I ask why you are not? You just do not have the time?

Mr CRAIG: I have never been. I do fish with guys that have been in the clubs. There is not any particular reason. I do associate with a lot of the guys in the clubs, and I understand they have a good time. And I am independent; I come home when I go. In the quieter times, I am always willing to support their functions and their fundraising ventures.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: How do you rely on getting information about fishing and any changes that might come up from time to time?

Mr CRAIG: Do you mean from Fisheries?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: From Fisheries, yes.

Mr CRAIG: The media, through the newspapers, is basically the best way. I have spoken to a few people, even today, who were not aware of this process. It was only by chance that I found out myself through the local leagues club when Mr Longford had an article in the paper and I went on to the site. It was only word of mouth through the fishing club that they said, "Peter, you might be interested in having a look at that. You guys independently go down fishing." That was how it came about. I think a lot more could have been done. Even with the changing of the reel, I do not think we were really aware of what was going on there; we did not have great input into it. There is still speculation on how that came about.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: From your point of view, what do you think would be a better way of getting out information that is relevant to you people? Is there anything that you feel should be done?

Mr CRAIG: I think, justly, the person that carries a fishing licence, first and foremost, should be privy to that information. I know it is not cheap to pass out information to individual members, but perhaps a small increase in the fee, or something to that effect, would put us in the loop and keep us right on the pin. Any other association—whether it be leagues clubs or licensing—where people are contacted through that means, if they are a member. If they are not a member, or do not carry a fishing licence, really they should not be down there anyway, legally. That would be one aspect. You would get straight to the horse's mouth—you would send it to the guy that holds the licence.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: If that were to be the case, would an email system be the way to go as far as you are concerned?

Mr CRAIG: In this day and age, it is getting that way. My elderly friends, who are pensioners now, are not savvy with the computer system. But in saying that, that information could be put through their email that we pass on to these people we know. Yes, I would go along with that. That would be a great start.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Is there a Fisheries website that you have a look at from time to time?

Mr CRAIG: There it is, I understand. I have not looked at it, but I understand there is a website, yes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Is that information good information for you?

Mr CRAIG: I understand it is, yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Going back to the set lines and how the decision was made on that, in 2005 a discussion paper was released that included a proposal regarding set lines in New South Wales waters. We had a submission from Mr Peter Grant earlier in which he said a vote was taken of 3,300—I suspect that that is 3,300 submissions to that discussion paper on set lines—and that the majority supported that proposal. Given that we have had 1,021 submissions to this inquiry—which is quite a lot for a parliamentary inquiry—how is it that people do not seem to have been part of that loop?

Mr CRAIG: As I understand, I was not aware of it, I was just informed of the change and, as I said to Tony, the information was not there. Did you say 330?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There were 3,300.

Mr CRAIG: That have now put submissions in?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, at that time. I assume the discussion paper was released and there were responses to the discussion paper, the majority of which supported the move regarding set lines.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: And that was the 3,300.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There were 3,300 submissions.

Mr CRAIG: Having us go to attended lines?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Not all of them would have supported it, but the majority of them did.

Mr CRAIG: As I say, on my information, and I can speak for myself too, I was not aware of the submission that was required at the time. The point is that it was not publicised. I know with a lot of people it just hit them really in the gut. The information was not supplied to us for that submission.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There were 1,021 submissions to this inquiry and I have read a lot of responses from recreational fishermen regarding a submission written by another person that I have never seen, so that information got around to recreational fishermen. What I cannot understand is why, when this proposal was put forward, there was not the same flow of information?

Mr CRAIG: I just think it was east of the divide, it was stacked there and, from what I understood, the information did not get to us to submit.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How did you find out about this inquiry?

Mr CRAIG: It was the president of the recreational fishermen from the leagues club that put an article in the paper, and also it was brought around to me by one of my elderly friends that I fish with.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sorry, it was brought around to?

Mr CRAIG: Brought to my notice, to my place, and he said, "Peter, did you read it?" I said, "Yes, what is it about?" He said, "Here's the site, go and have a look at it", and I went from there.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Was he a member of the leagues club fishermen?

Mr CRAIG: No.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It was an article in the paper?

Mr CRAIG: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So which site did you have a look at?

Mr CRAIG: The site that I subscribe to.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So you went to the parliamentary site?

Mr CRAIG: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And applied that way?

Mr CRAIG: Yes, and I definitely would have at the previous hearing, if I had known. I would have certainly then too.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That was a discussion paper, but the issue was drawn to your attention by another fisher person?

Mr CRAIG: Yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I have read and re-read the conditions on lines and it says 50 metres and in line of sight, so you can put the rod in or the line in, or the process you use for a set line, but it is the problem of having to be able to see the thing all the time?

Mr CRAIG: That is correct, yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Is there any way to negotiate for longer than 50 metres, so that campsites can be taken into consideration? I had a bit of trouble getting the perception of 50 metres, but my friend has informed me the size of an Olympic swimming pool, so I can grasp that now, but campsites often have to be a bit further away than 50 metres. Would it be possible for it to be a bit further away and be practical?

Mr CRAIG: No, not really at all. The rivers that we fish in, the western rivers, are very densely forested. The rivers are very winding. Some of the banks of the Darling River could be up to 20 metres high and the point is, for an elderly chap—and myself too in that regard—you are trudging 20 metres down an embankment. If you need to get something from camp, you basically have to bring your line up, go back up, and get yourself back together again to make the trek back down again.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I understand that, but we have heard about the difficulty with the set lines and have read about problems with them being left far too long and half dead fish that have to be freed. I know that many fishers do not do that, but we have heard stories of them being left overnight, so we know that it does happen, and you cannot guarantee that every fisher is going to be honourable and do their several-hour checks in the night time, for example.

Mr CRAIG: Well, I have always been vigilant.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So increasing the distance would not function?

Mr CRAIG: No, I do not think we are achieving anything there other than becoming very political with the situation, and how you police something that is 50, 70 or 100 metres away—I mean you nearly have to go fishing with a set of binoculars.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: If you increase the distance?

Mr CRAIG: Well, the fish could be on there, I mean—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You would not know.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The 50 metre distance is an increase on what it was previously.

Mr CRAIG: Exactly, yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: What was it in the beginning?

Mr CRAIG: It was something like 20 metres.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: And when the changes were made it was increased to 50 metres.

CHAIR: If you were given the opportunity to say how it should be tomorrow, what would you suggest?

Mr CRAIG: I would suggest that we allow the recreational fishermen four set lines and two rods.

CHAIR: Have you ever come across compliance officers when fishing?

Mr CRAIG: In 1978 at the Darling River was the last time I saw and spoke to inspectors.

CHAIR: Do you believe there should be more inspectors?

Mr CRAIG: I have no problem with more inspectors. I feel if our resources are going to just go to funding inspectors, it is not going to sit well with fishermen. I think it was sold to the fishermen that the increase in the licences was to fund restocking, which fishermen jumped at, but to actually police fishermen, I do not think there is a lot of economics in that. Fishermen do the right thing. With mobile phones these days, it is only a matter of a phone call to the authorities if someone is doing the wrong thing—and believe me, fishermen are out there to look after their livelihood, and that is fish in the water. They want the right things to be done. I would be more than happy if we got the set lines back, but at the moment there is a bad taste in fishermen's mouths, namely, two attended rods. It has really depleted the sport and the small businesses in this region that rely on a lot of the money that we invest when we go on our expeditions.

CHAIR: Previous evidence has suggested that redfin in these rivers are all but gone, and the carp are doing it hard at the moment. Would you agree or disagree with that evidence?

Mr CRAIG: I have not caught a redfin in the river for a long time. I know my mates in the canals are catching plenty of them—they are not an endangered species, I can assure you—but the cod are definitely lightening the load on the carp. The restocking over the years, which has been contributed to by Fisheries, and a lot by recreational fishers funding these programs—it is my analogy that the cod are certainly knocking the carp numbers back.

CHAIR: So cod will eat juvenile carp?

Mr CRAIG: They will probably eat anything that is juvenile, but there is plenty of carp for them at the moment, yes.

CHAIR: Are there any other suggestions you can make as to what would improve the lot of western anglers? Do you believe, for example, that you have adequate representation through the inland trust moneys, which is where your fishing licence fees go? Do you know anything about how that organisation works? Do you know how the trusts put together programs for habitat restoration or anything like that? Were you aware of any of that sort of information?

Mr CRAIG: I am aware only through Fisheries, the brochures or booklets that they put out with our local licences. They actually state where funding goes. There are some big flash Land Cruiser station wagons there too, but as far as our representation, I feel that we are a minority, and unfortunately that is a fact of life out here, but a lot of people together can hopefully make a voice. I do not think any of us is jumping up and down saying that resources are being wasted, but when we are restricted on how we can use our resources, that is what really is a bit hot, I feel.

CHAIR: So you feel that fishermen, provided they think they are getting a fair go, are happy to pay their licence fees?

Mr CRAIG: Yes, and at the moment they are not, and I am probably sure the Government figures or the Fisheries figures will highlight that fact.

CHAIR: That the number of licences is dropping?

Mr CRAIG: I would assume so, just through word of mouth—"It's a waste of time, Peter, I don't bother any more, I'd rather go down and take the kids for a swim than jump in the boat and stay the night." It is a social outing in these areas, the fishing camps. I know for my girls, as young as nine, it was the highlight of their weekend to go around and check the few set lines we had in, and for them to land a fish is something I will never forget.

CHAIR: Do you feel that if the Government were to review the regulations and allow four set lines and two attended lines you would go back to your trips to the Darling and reinstitute some of the trips you had been taking?

Mr CRAIG: I have got guys sitting at home praying, yes.

CHAIR: You have a lot of weight on your shoulders.

Mr CRAIG: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming today, we appreciate it, particularly being an angler with no club support. We thank you for your submission and we are glad that you put your views forward. If there are questions that the Committee was not able to ask you today, we would like to send them to you as written questions. Would that be okay with you?

Mr CRAIG: Definitely.

CHAIR: Would you be able to reply within 21 days?

Mr CRAIG: Not a problem.

(The witness withdrew)

TIMOTHY BECROFT, President, Tocumwal Angling Club,
examined:

, sworn and

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr BECROFT: I would, if you don't mind. Our angling club is an angling club, service club. We do a range of multiple things in and around the Tocumwal area. One of the things we have participated in in the past 10 years is stocking in the Murray River. Through our small organisation and with government help, so far in the last 11 years we have put \$100,000 worth of fish into the river. What is of concern to us, now that we have national parks on either side of the river we are very concerned that the river itself will be turned into a marine national park. That is probably number one on our minds at the moment. We are quite concerned that may become an eventuality. We just do not think that would be right.

On the length of cod, we run a fishing competition every year, it is about the 600-millimetre length of fish. A proposal that was put to us and I was asked to bring to the hearing was that the cod length regulation be reviewed. At the moment it stands at 600 millimetres, two fish, and one not over one metre. We believe that should come down to 500 millimetres with only one fish in your possession. In other words, instead of having two you only have one. That gives people the opportunity to go fishing for the weekend, catch their fish, and they are happy they have got their fish and the rest of them get them back.

At the moment—and we know it happens—undersized fish are being taken simply because they realise they are not going to catch the 600-millimetre fish. That is what is happening. We have seen the evidence of it. We have seen it down in our area where the fillets have been knocked off a fish and the carcass is thrown back into the river again. If you are allowed to take one fish at, say, 480, 500, and one fish only, most anglers would be happy with that, to go away fishing for a weekend.

CHAIR: Have you any thoughts on the statement you just made about the size of cod and the relationship between cod angling and, say, people catching trout cod? Do you think there is a problem caused by the limitation on the size of the cod?

Mr BECROFT: There is a lot of discussion in our area. If you talk to anglers from the Tocumwal, Barooga area they will just say the trout cod are in plague proportions. We have had reports of a trout cod being caught up to 700 millimetres, which is 100 millimetres above the legal length for Murray cod. Presumably that is because the area between Tocumwal and the Mulwala Bridge is a protected area for trout cod.

CHAIR: I just wondered whether you thought the ban on trout cod in that area, all the way between Milawa and Tocumwal should be reviewed?

Mr BECROFT: Yes, we do believe that.

CHAIR: How many members are in your club?

Mr BECROFT: It fluctuates between 60 and 80.

CHAIR: And most of your members would fish primarily on the Murray River?

Mr BECROFT: We have a very diverse club. The majority of them would fish in the Murray. A lot of our members come from Melbourne and a lot of our members go fishing down in Melbourne. So, we have a very wide range of angling pursuits by the members, but most of them fish in the Murray, yes.

CHAIR: Would any of your members fish as far apart as say, the Lachlan, the Murrumbidgee and the Darling?

Mr BECROFT: No.

CHAIR: I notice you are wearing what looks like a club shirt. Is that a club shirt?

Mr BECROFT: That is our club shirt, yes.

CHAIR: It is good that clubs present their members well, because it gives a good image to the community. Would you say your club is particularly involved with your community?

Mr BECROFT: Very much so. We run a fishing competition on the Australia Day weekend every year, and the primary function of that is to restock the river.

CHAIR: What would you consider would be the greatest threats to the freshwater aquatic environment?

Mr BECROFT: My perspective would probably be that the cod, like any fish—cod, in particular, I understand—need a flush down the river to breed in. Those flushes occur at the wrong time of the year. Probably the timing of the flushes; when they put environmental water down the river may not coincide with when the cod are breeding. That is probably a bit of a concern. We get a higher river in the summertime and if you go down there at the moment you can walk across it.

CHAIR: Do you believe that water quality in the environmental releases is given fair consideration? In other words, do you feel you are getting too much cold water?

Mr BECROFT: I think where we are situated that is not a factor. It comes down through Mulwala and then gets re-released out of there. So, I do not think that is an issue for us.

CHAIR: So Mulwala acts to raise the average temperature?

Mr BECROFT: I think so.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I may have got this wrong, but in your opening statement you mentioned that you were concerned about the river becoming part of a marine park?

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What makes you think that way?

Mr BECROFT: I guess it is just discussion that has occurred between members of our club and members of other clubs, that now we have national parks on both sides of the river the next thing on the agenda will be the river itself. As I say, we are conservationists in our own right, our club, and we would be greatly concerned that that would even be looked at seriously.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Have you had any notification that they are looking at that?

Mr BECROFT: There has been no notification. Discussions have just been held basically during the fishing competitions by people who are angling, people who are there.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: So, it is more—

Mr BECROFT: Scuttlebutt, but we look at it seriously because we have invested quite heavily in fish stocks in that river.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Is there any reason why they would particularly want to do that?

Mr BECROFT: I do not know. I could not offer an opinion on that.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: We have received evidence that recreational fishers find it hard to keep up to date with changes to their sports rules and regulations. How do you ensure that your club members are educated about these particular issues?

Mr BECROFT: It is pretty much by word of mouth. We have one member who is a member of RivTech. He brings a lot of information back to our club. Kevin brings a lot of information back to the club, but other than that there probably would not be a lot.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What material would like to receive from, say, Fisheries?

Mr BECROFT: We receive quite a lot coming in via email, mainly by Kevin. He was secretary at the time. A lot of information comes in from Vicfish. We do get a lot of information coming in from time to time.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What about from the New South Wales side? You have different regulations from one side to the other. How would you get your New South Wales stuff?

Mr BECROFT: Again, normally by press releases, emails, what are sent to our secretary, and just general discussion.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: How can that be done better, in your opinion?

Mr BECROFT: I would certainly like to see more community-based events like this, where we will be discussing fishing in the Tocumwal, Cobham, Barooga, Moama area. Some of those committees that presently sit up in Sydney could come down to our area and the local people would have the opportunity to address them.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Do you liaise with the Department of Fisheries at all, or does your club?

Mr BECROFT: The club does from time to time. We have a pretty good association with our local area people and they will visit us, in particular, the competition weekend. Generally one or two of them represent themselves there as they are passing through.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: With the four lines that people are wanting or are telling us they want, what is your view about that?

Mr BECROFT: You are referring to set lines?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Yes, set lines.

Mr BECROFT: Our club's position on set lines is that we are not in favour of them. That decision was made a couple of years ago now. The club's position was that we are not in favour of set lines.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Why is that?

Mr BECROFT: I guess what determines a recreational angler. Is a recreational angler one who sits on the bank with the set line or someone who is fishing with a rod? We have seen what set lines can do, we have seen them in our area, obviously set by people who knew what they were doing. They were using stainless steel shaft hooks coupled to a small book with live bait with a small cod. We do not have a happy position on set lines, no.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: A discussion paper was put out quite some time ago that asked questions about set lines. Did you take part in that?

Mr BECROFT: I cannot answer that question. I do not recall it. We may very well have through our secretary but my involvement is I cannot recall.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: In order to get involved in the restocking process who do you confer with?

Mr BECROFT: Sorry?

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You people have been very active in the restocking process?

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So which department do you work with to do that?

Mr BECROFT: Fisheries.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: What is the process for contact for that?

Mr BECROFT: We generally go on to the website and download the form. It used to be dollar for dollar but it is not any more. We would put up, say, \$5,000 and then the New South Wales Government would put up the other \$5,000.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So that is just a routine thing that you people know how to do?

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: What is the process to be involved in the negotiation for bag limit changes and size changes? Who do you talk to?

Mr BECROFT: That is a good question. I do not really know and that is why I brought it up here today.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So, the decisions are made, the peak body puts the recommendations to the Minister?

CHAIR: No, I think that is usually a Fisheries function. We might ask that question of them.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So you are trying to work through how to get that information?

Mr BECROFT: Pretty much. I just brought it up here today because our club had discussed it and it has been brought up with us beforehand.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is a question for us that the process is not clear about how to renegotiate bag changes, and it has come up before when others have said to us it is not appropriate. Some people are saying some of the bags are too high on the salt, and some are saying they are too low.

Mr BECROFT: I guess that is something that could be solved relatively easily by, as I say, having this type of opportunity on a more regular basis.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: That will not happen regularly, but you need a process?

Mr BECROFT: Yes, you do need a process, and I am unaware of what the process would be.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I have read about the trout cod. It is not a 12-month closure, is it? The closure is from 1 September to 30 November, for breeding times?

Mr BECROFT: For the trout cod, yes. It is an entirely protected area.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: In relation to your comment about marine national parks, are the clubs starting to talk in this fearful way because of the misinformation campaign that is running up and down the coast that everyone is going to shut the coast off?

Mr BECROFT: I guess that is where part of it would be coming from. It has been fairly topical in a lot of releases we are seeing come through the club. That is in relation to salt water. Obviously, with regard to the freshwater, it is only the type of water that differs.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: There is certainly no Government policy?

Mr BECROFT: We know that. But when you get people talking, what do you discount and what do you not discount? Some time in the future it may happen; we do not know.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: A lot of the discussion we have had during this inquiry has been about how to ensure that real information is out there.

Mr BECROFT: I would agree with that.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: The Hon. Tony Catanzariti asked questions about communication and so on. When you have a sequence of misinformation around, how do you make sure that at least someone has the facts?

Mr BECROFT: I guess it comes back to individuals. We get all this information coming to our monthly meeting, and it is all there for people to read and it is read out by the secretary. But how often do you see people pick up the bit of paper and actually read it? But we do tend to take notice of when those press releases come out. If there is anything of interest in our area, we do take notice of it.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: With regard to the changes to bag sizes, I think the evidence we had earlier was that Fisheries does a regular review at a set time period. I think it is every five years. I think there are boards that report to the Minister. The Chair might correct me on that. Is that right?

CHAIR: Yes. Is your club a member of the South West Anglers Association?

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

CHAIR: The South West Anglers Association is a member of the Coalition of Freshwater Anglers. They then sit on ACoRF, which is the ministerial advisory body. I am assuming—I do not know; we might ask the Fisheries representatives later—that those reviews are taken to the ACoRF level and therefore pass back down to the fishing clubs for comment, and go back to the Minister for comment. That may be how it works, but I am not quite sure.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I recall that they did say that they were due to review some of them and they were looking at putting them out. We can get that information to you. You spoke about changing the size limits. That issue came up in another part of the inquiry. The issue there was: Why do we not change the size to be consistent with Queensland? But there is also the argument against that: That when this stock is denuded, and that is the reason you are not catching them because there is not as much stock, dropping the size really still has a negative impact on the fish stock. If you are catching a one metre plus a 600 millimetre fish, then you are catching decent size, mature fish. Does it not have to do with the breeding ability of those fish—that the more mature fish, the greater the number of eggs or breeding capacity they have?

Mr BECROFT: That is not my area of expertise. But the colloquial evidence that I have heard over the years is that the bigger the fish, the less breeding capacity they have. That is what I have heard over the years.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The most recent reviews of the fishing stock sizes were completed in 2000 and 2007. The next review of fishing rules will commence in 2011, and these processes involve consultation and input from the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing and the broader community. So it will go through the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing, and you may need to go to ACoRF with that representation. That is from the information that was provided to us as part of the inquiry; it is in the New South Wales Government's submission.

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: My colleagues have already said that the Government has a view that it is not creating more marine parks. With regard to some areas that do not have marine parks, it is interesting to note their perception about what they do. When you are looking at issues like the breeding areas for cod and the closure, quite often marine parks have exactly those kinds of provisions within them, and certain areas that are

sanctuary no-takes and certain areas that are largely recreational fishing and taking a wider commercial fishing. Even though the Government does not propose any more marine parks, and it has been very clear about that, in terms of the mixes of marine parks do you see that as appropriate accommodation? Some marine parks obviously work better than others. You may not have any experience with them. We have found that some have better zones than others. But in terms of the idea that most fishers are conservationists to a certain extent, many people are saying, "That is kind of reasonable. And what about looking at us only taking baitfish, if we can troll across certain areas?"

Mr BECROFT: We do not have the figures. Where we are situated, we have had nothing to do with the marine national parks. I have not had any close association with them. They are going to be of benefit in some areas; I have no doubt about that. But there are properly some areas that are probably going to be questionable.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Last night we heard evidence from the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority representatives. Firstly, have you had any discussions with catchment management authorities, which seemed very involved in the water quality? They had some interesting things to say about during times of erosion there has been a slow-moving sludge through the river system, about the importance of all these kinds of things, and about that holistic approach to the river, the water quality and the environment, and how it all works together.

Mr BECROFT: We have had no contact with them, to my knowledge. The water quality in the river in our area is a bit of a mix of what is coming out of Mulwala. An awful lot of waterskiing goes on in the river, so you have bank erosion in the water, and that tends to cloud it up a bit. The water is 100 per cent clear at this time of the year, because no-one waterskis in winter. We are in a situation where, to try to work on water quality, it is very difficult for us to have any accurate say in that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There are obviously other parts of recreation that are having an impact on the water quality there, so that is still part of that holistic approach to a group of users. Jervis Bay is probably a good example, where you have different types of users using different areas. The Tubes is one area that springs to mind, where they like to catch kingfish off the rocks. But during certain times of the year they ban anchoring so that the divers get a go, when the big fish are not running through the area.

Mr BECROFT: Yes.

CHAIR: We have heard evidence that there are not enough compliance officers monitoring waterways. What is your experience and the experience of your club members? Do you feel that there is enough compliance? I do not just mean Fisheries compliance; I mean environmental compliance as well.

Mr BECROFT: I would say it is adequate. I would not say it is over the top. As I described to you before, what we have found in terms of the set lines in our area is that it is all stainless steel gear. Obviously, whoever was doing it spent a lot of money making all their gear up. That was on a cod opening weekend that we found those down the river. We gave one of them to one of the local Fisheries officers. But we do not see them all that often. I have been fishing on the river for 30-odd years, and I have been pulled up by Waterways for a licence check but not by Fisheries.

CHAIR: Have you had any experience with your groups of fishing clubs being involved in other compliance issues? You say there is a lot of waterskiing in certain parts. I understand that down your way a developer did the wrong thing and took some snags out. Do you feel that there is sufficient emphasis on environmental compliance on the river?

Mr BECROFT: In our area, which is fairly popular, I would have to say no, there is not. A number of things have happened in our area—perhaps not on the riverbank but a little bit away from the river—where trees got knocked down, and when they are down they are down. Whether it was legal or illegal, it is not for me to say.

CHAIR: We have heard previous evidence about the changes in the prevalence of carp in the Murrumbidgee, the Lachlan, and these areas up here. What is your experience of carp in the Murray River? Are they on the increase or on the decline?

Mr BECROFT: They are definitely on the decline. You are flat out catching a big carp now. If you catch one, it will be a big one. They are used quite commonly for crayfish bait down our way. You will not catch a small one, or very rarely. We believe there are two reasons for it. We believe the native fish are starting to get on top of them. But, more importantly, my opinion is that we have had no floods. The billabongs have not flooded and the carp have not bred up in the billabongs. I think there is a two-pronged answer to that.

CHAIR: Are there carp in the Millewa?

Mr BECROFT: I am not familiar with that area; I do not fish down there.

CHAIR: If you were handed the Black Rod tomorrow and you were able to make some suggestions, apart from the suggestions on bag and size limits, do you think anything could be done to protect the environment, particularly in the Murray River area, insofar as your aquatic reserves are concerned, and fishing and the environment?

Mr BECROFT: I would have to say that overall I believe the quality of the river around Tocumwal is excellent. You go out fishing now and you pull up into a small area where it might be nice and quiet. Years ago there were no water spiders. Now you pull up there and there are water spiders everywhere. They were not there 10 years ago. Now when you pull up in a nice quiet bit of water, there are water spiders everywhere, and there is grass. You pull your line up and you bring up grass off the bottom. When the carp were prolific, there was none of that at all.

CHAIR: So that is a good news story?

Mr BECROFT: Absolutely.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: The carp were contributing to making the river unhealthy?

Mr BECROFT: Most definitely. You could pull up to a log 10 years ago and there would be a lot going down into the river and you would see a carp going along and you would scrape him off on the waterline, off the log. Now you just do not see that at all.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Becroft, I would like to enquire further about your thoughts on the marine parks in the riverine systems. What was your justification for bringing it up? You must have some underlying concerns about it?

Mr BECROFT: It was discussed at our club, at a meeting. It has been discussed at various times. As I say, at the fishing competition people had spoken about it. I asked our members at the last meeting two weeks ago what did they want me to bring to this Committee, and that was one of the issues they wanted me to bring to it. It is of concern to us. We love our camping and our fishing. A beach that we go to regularly—not just to go camping, but we will take our dogs down there for a swim—from 1 July we will not be able to do that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: As a result of?

Mr BECROFT: The national park.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The red gum forests?

Mr BECROFT: The red gum forests, so we cannot take our dogs down to the river for a swim any more.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Two years ago did you know that the red gum forests were going to be converted to national parks?

Mr BECROFT: When Victoria did it I realised that the same thing would happen in New South Wales, it would be very difficult to stop it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That is a concern your members have about the marine park and the river as well, now that the national park has been created on land?

Mr BECROFT: That is pretty much the concern. It did happen. There was speculation three or four years ago that, no, it won't happen, but it did happen. What concerns us is that it will happen.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You mentioned that your club has put 11,000 fish into the river. Can you give us a bit of an indication—

Mr BECROFT: No, \$100,000 worth.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you give us an indication of what the species balance was?

Mr BECROFT: We do yellowbelly and cod. It is generally 50-50 of each, so if we get 60,000 fingerlings, there might be 40,000 cod, 30,000 yellowbelly.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I was interested to hear your view on the set line issue, given the evidence we heard earlier today, and the example you gave of the small cod on a hook baited to catch bigger cod. Surely that is illegal?

Mr BECROFT: Absolutely.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So what this particular person was doing was highly illegal?

Mr BECROFT: Highly illegal.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you agree then that a small minority of those illegal—I am a bit hesitant to use the word "fishermen" because they have already been described in other forums as criminals.

Mr BECROFT: They are not fishermen.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you think that those illegally operating persons will destroy the fishing experience for everybody, or for the vast majority, by using those illegal techniques?

Mr BECROFT: I do not know that I would go that far. I mean it is abhorrent, what they are doing. To any recreational angler, that is just the bottom of the barrel, we just do not do that—would not even consider doing it. Whoever is doing it, or whoever was doing what we found, I would say they were being taken somewhere else and being sold.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The problem is that the same applied to people who were using set lines and, even when the limit was 10 set lines, I know from personal experience, walking along rivers, that some fishermen were putting in maybe 100 lines. That certainly contributed to reducing the number and destroyed the fishing experience for everybody. You mentioned what the recreational fishing experience is. For you it is obviously fishing with a rod and reel or a hand line, but we have heard today that that fishing experience for other people is about putting in three or four set lines and also using a rod and reel, checking their lines while they are setting up their camp and that sort of thing. Some prefer a boat, some prefer set lines, some prefer fishing with a rod and reel. Do you think it is up to individuals to pursue the type of fishing that they really enjoy to get the most out of their experience?

Mr BECROFT: Well, we live in a democracy, so everyone has their own right to have their own preferred style of fishing, but the overall opinion of our club members was that we were not in favour of them. That is not to say that we are not in favour of being camped on the river or having a boat pulled up to the bank and having two rods out of it and being 50 metres away. I mean that is just part of fishing. You are going to walk away and get a cup of tea and you just chuck your rod at the back of the boat. To us that is a slightly different situation to setting five or ten lines and going around in five or six hours time. We just do not believe that falls under what our terminology of what recreational angling is all about.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Could I ask you to take on notice finding out when the club made that decision as a whole, and whether or not you put a submission in—which you could only get from your old secretary?

Mr BECROFT: I can certainly try to do that, yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I was also interested to hear your ideas about the bag and size limits. We have heard from quite a few fishermen that they would like to see bag limits reduced, but certainly not from the cod fishermen to reduce it from two to one and reduce the size as well. With the small number of cod that you are catching now, do you see that in maybe five or six years time, when the cod have grown to a reasonable size or a much bigger size, you would be catching more and bigger fish?

Mr BECROFT: I am sure that in 10 or 15 years time, when I am probably no longer able to fish, my sons will think they did a wonderful job 15 years ago, restocking the river, but just to go back to the other point, the suggestion to lower the size and one fish only, that came from Melbourne-based anglers who would come up to Tocumwal for a weekend, fish there all weekend, get 45, 48, 500, and chuck them all back, but if you are allowed to take one, at least the trip up to the river has been fruitful for them. They do not want any more than one, they just want one to take home as a token fish.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you mean that they would only be able to take one under 600 or just one fish, full stop?

Mr BECROFT: One fish, full stop.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Drop the size?

Mr BECROFT: Drop the size down.

CHAIR: Drop the size down, but halve the take.

Mr BECROFT: Yes, and that is not my personal view, but I brought that up because that was brought up with us by a number of people—primarily when we were running our competition—and most of them were Melbourne based, Shepparton or Bendigo-based annuals.

Mr IAN COHEN: You mentioned concern with the red gum parks establishment and not being able to fish, but have you fished on the Victorian side of the border in recent times?

Mr BECROFT: Not in recent times, no.

Mr IAN COHEN: They have already declared national parks over there, but would you not agree that there is quite thriving camping and fishing activity happening in national parks there?

Mr BECROFT: Yes, there probably is. Victoria is only 40 kilometres away from where I live, but in all essences we probably do not do as much angling in Victoria as we do in New South Wales. Our concern is that the river will be turned into a marine national park, no fishing altogether.

Mr IAN COHEN: With marine national parks, we have had experience on the coast where the information goes out often by political interests, a bit of agitation and so on saying "No fishing", and in actual fact it is only in specific zones and for specific reasons. There is not necessarily any blanket ban on the activity and I think the Victorian side shows just that, that fishing activities are alive and well there.

Mr BECROFT: I could not disagree with that.

Mr IAN COHEN: We heard evidence earlier of plenty of fish in the river and difficulty getting them, and that was one of the arguments for set lines. I understand your club is responsible for very significant restocking in the river system. What do you think the state of the fishery is at this point in time, and is it cyclical flow change in the level or are we facing a critical situation in terms of fish stocks?

Mr BECROFT: Fish stocks are ample in our area. You can go down and catch a fish—it probably will not be a legal one, but you will be able to catch a fish any day you like.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: That is pretty good.

Mr BECROFT: Look, it is. Tocumwal is a tourist town. People come to Tocumwal, play golf, go down to the river and go fishing. They want to catch a fish. These days we certainly find that catch and release

fishing is far more prevalent than it used to be. That is not to say that people don't take them. I have seen people take a metre-long fish. I do not know why, I would not even take it out of the water, but they do take them.

Mr IAN COHEN: We were discussing from your point of view or your club's point of view the health of the fishery itself, the number of fish, and there has been some argument that there are plenty of fish but the argument for the set lines has been that they are a more effective way of catching cod, in particular?

Mr BECROFT: It probably is a more effective way of catching them, but again it comes back to what your interpretation is of a recreational angler and set lines do not fit into our club's perspective of what a recreational angler is. That is our view. It is just one view of one group of anglers. We find if you are using the right bait and you get down to the river at the right time of the day, you will catch fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: Have you had much to do with Fisheries compliance officers? Are there too few or too many? Are they having an impact in a positive way? Could you give an assessment of what members of your club experience with Fisheries officers and their activities, and their level of control on activities?

Mr BECROFT: If I go back to what I said earlier, I think it is probably adequate. I would not say it is over the top. Personally, at particular times of the year, I would probably like to see more of them on the river. What has happened now is that with the closure of the duck season in Victoria in particular, cod season has become the de facto weekend away and you will find large numbers of campers coming up from wherever, somewhere in Victoria or maybe New South Wales, and that is when we tend to find illegal things happening. When you find them, it is generally a weekend like that, when there is a high number of people on the river.

Mr IAN COHEN: With the number of people fishing there is obviously a high impact, and with the restocking that your organisations have been part of, do you have any assessment in terms of the balance in the river, the prevalence of bigger fish, mature fish, and the viability of the population without stocking, for example, or are we now stuck in a dynamic where stocking is essential to maintain the numbers?

Mr BECROFT: That is an interesting question. Our club has decided this year not to restock because we just feel that maybe it has got to the point now where we need to give it a bit of a rest for a while, because we have been putting a lot of fish in. We do not know what the survival rate is, of course; we have no idea.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is there any way of examining that? Are there any assessments, scientific assessments, being done?

Mr BECROFT: We have asked that question and we really have not got a satisfactory answer to that, so we are in the dark, and we want to know where our money went to as well. If we go and spend \$10,000 a year, do we only get \$2,000 worth of fish? We do not know, but we certainly would like to know that. I know that the Fisheries were in our area just recently doing electro-fishing and counting numbers, but we do not know the result of that, we do not know what they found. We do know that they did catch some fish over a metre, but how many they got we have no idea. We have only just heard that locally. We would like to see that information, but we have never seen it.

Mr IAN COHEN: In an ideal world, with a change of environmental water flows, more water in the system, could you see a situation where an adjustment of environmental flows could replace the need to restock and bring the population of native fish up to a level where there were sufficient and sustainable stocks?

Mr BECROFT: If there was ever a time to do that, now is the time. I mean the native fish seem to have the upper hand on particularly the carp and if you were going to go through that process of trying to get the fish to breed in natural circumstances, with the numbers that they are at the moment, probably now would be the ideal time to do it.

Mr IAN COHEN: Has there been any specific assessment? I understand that there has been evidence saying that sometimes, with the best will in the world, if environmental flows are badly timed they do not match particular fish breeding seasons. Is there a group or organisation, or are there particular scientists who have a handle on that and can advise the most effective environmental regimes?

Mr BECROFT: I am sure there would be, but I am not aware.

CHAIR: During that questioning from Mr Cohen you used a couple of words in the same sentence—recreational fishing and high impact. Do you believe that recreational fishing in relation to the Murray River, in relation to the Tocumwal area, in relation to native fish, is a high impact activity?

Mr BECROFT: At certain times of the year, but overall I would say no.

CHAIR: What do you believe has the most impact on the health of the river?

Mr BECROFT: My kids will probably kill me—ski boats.

CHAIR: We heard from previous witnesses that cod require low flows and moving water to breed and yellow belly, on the other hand, require higher flows over the bank into billabongs to breed. Do you agree with that?

Mr BECROFT: That sounds fairly logical to me.

CHAIR: It has also been suggested but I cannot remember where—perhaps in reply to Mr Cohen's question—the best time to have the environmental flows are at times of high rainfall or pending storms because the river, the birdlife, fish, et cetera, expect the flow therefore when it comes it is matched to a flow. If that could possibly be done, do you think that makes sense or is it just the timing of the breeding season?

Mr BECROFT: It makes a bit of sense but it has to do with timing. It is no good putting a flush down the river to do environmental rehabilitation if it is mistimed with either cod or yellow belly breeding times.

CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence. Along with any questions you took on notice during your evidence, would you agree to receive additional written questions that members of the Committee may not have had the opportunity to ask of you today?

Mr BECROFT: Yes, certainly.

CHAIR: Would you be able to reply to those questions within 21 days of receipt?

Mr BECROFT: Certainly.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

CHRISTOPHER JOHN BEALE, President, South West Anglers Association,

TERENCE MICHAEL MALONEY, Secretary, South West Anglers Association, , and

JIM MUIRHEAD, Member, South West Anglers Association, , sworn and examined:

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would one or any or all of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr MALONEY: Just to clarify our position. South West Anglers Association is an association of recreational angling clubs in this Riverina and south-west region of New South Wales. We have a current membership of 23 recreational angling clubs and probably represent the interests of around 2,500 individual anglers. Our range is from Echuca, Moama on the Murray up to Albury and from Gundagai down to this region on the Murrumbidgee.

As far as our concerns are, we have concerns with access for anglers. We have concerns over the proposed freshwater protected areas that we have heard rumours about and we have some concerns over compliance officers. We feel there are not enough of those. Probably going back to some of the things we heard earlier, the set line issue is something that the association probably would not comment broadly on because we did circulate the information of the review in 2007 extensively through our membership. We discussed it at length at meetings and we found that our membership was split about 50:50 for and against. So, as a result, the association refrains from commenting on that, and we urge our members and individuals to go away and make their own comments on that discussion paper. From the association's point of view, we do not try to influence our clubs. They are totally independent. They are members because they choose to be and their beliefs are their beliefs and, as I say, we do not try to influence them in any way.

CHAIR: Would either of you gentlemen wish to make any statements?

Mr BEALE: I will wait for questions.

CHAIR: Mr Muirhead?

Mr MUIRHEAD: I will wait for questions as well.

CHAIR: Is the South West Anglers Association affiliated with the Coalition of Freshwater Anglers?

Mr MALONEY: Absolutely.

CHAIR: And through the Coalition of Freshwater Anglers to the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing?

Mr MALONEY: Yes. The Coalition of Freshwater Anglers is considered to be the peak body for freshwater anglers in New South Wales. We are a significant member. We are probably the largest member as far as membership goes.

CHAIR: Are there any other freshwater angling associations that cover the fishing clubs out in these regions?

Mr MALONEY: Not that I am aware of.

CHAIR: You have heard the previous evidence and you stated in your opening remarks that you have fears of the creation of aquatic reserves or freshwater marine parks. Would you explain to the Committee why your association feels the need to worry about that?

Mr MALONEY: Previous speakers have said they have only heard rumours but the moves were significantly more than rumours. The proposal was put forward by a freshwater scientist several months ago. It was broadly covered in the media in this region—I know in several newspapers—and it was also discussed at a Murray cod forum at Mulwala a couple of months ago. It is more than a rumour. This was a definite proposal put forward by this person for marine protected areas to mirror the marine parks on the coast, I suppose. Our concern about that is that it will severely limit access to recreational fishing. It will have the effect of pushing that fishing pressure to the extremities of that area. It will just add pressure to other areas. Quite frankly, we do not see any need for it. We see a healthy river at the present time; significant numbers of younger fish and, for the better fishers, some pretty good fish. Considerable restocking has taken place by clubs and they would like to see the results of that stocking come to fruition in years to come and not be locked up.

CHAIR: In the evidence immediately before you it was stated as part of a question that the declaration of national parks on the Victorian side of the border had not affected recreational fishing or camping or those sorts of things. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr MALONEY: Only to say that fishing is permitted in national parks, yes, but when you consider the cultural, traditional way of fishing in these regions it is dispersed camping. It is going down the river and pitching a tent, taking the dog, all those sorts of things that are not permitted. Campfires are not permitted in national parks.

CHAIR: In Victoria, do you mean?

Mr MALONEY: In most national parks, to my knowledge. I do not think you are allowed campfires. Certainly there is camping, but it is controlled camping and I think the recreational angler in these regions really prefers that dispersed camping. They like to camp by the riverbanks and slip the boat over the side.

CHAIR: A previous witness stated that they felt the level of compliance was adequate—I think that was the term used—except during peak times. In your opening statement you took a different point of view. Would you like to elucidate on that please? Tell us what you think the situation is as far as the South West Anglers Association is concerned?

Mr MALONEY: I do not think there are enough compliance officers, period. I think the compliance officers we have are totally overworked. Recent changes to their work practices suggest that they cannot work one out so we need two of them. Their work has been taken up quite often for extensive periods of time in the office, with a lot of paperwork and issues like the significant environmental damage caused down on the Murray River at Corowa at the Kunanadgee development. That particular incident took up a compliance officer's time for a year or more investigating those charges. That is time this compliance officer did not spend on the river checking gear and checking boats.

From a personal point of view I have not seen a compliance officer on the water in New South Wales for probably 10 years. The last compliance officer I talked to on the water was at Mulwala about 10 years ago and he was only there because I phoned him up and asked him to come down and have a look at something. I have met with compliance officers in Victoria on several occasions during that period of time but certainly not in New South Wales.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Going back to this business about the marine protected areas, you mentioned you were at a meeting where a person talked about this being a possibility. Can you tell us, perhaps not the person's name but who that person was representing and what authority he had to make those comments?

Mr MALONEY: I am not sure who they were representing but it was personal opinion that he had espoused through the media and publicly on numerous occasions. He is a freshwater scientist. I will not mention his name.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The previous witness said that it is their club's position that they agreed with the no set line policy. What is your association's position on that?

Mr MALONEY: As I said in the opening address, our association did not take a position on set lines because the membership of the association was divided probably 50:50 in all our discussions leading up to the 2007 review of regulations. Again, we asked them to go away and make their own decisions. Some clubs were adamant that set lines had to go; others were of the opinion that set lines should remain. It is very difficult for an association such as ours to represent our members when they are so divided.

Mr MUIRHEAD: Can I comment on that? I put in a personal submission on that, so this is just a personal thing, not that of South West Anglers. I put in a submission saying that I went for two set lines. I have fished with set lines all my life, and I angle and I lure fish. As you heard today, you have had a lot of different ideas about the set lines and you have had a lot of elderly gentleman who are set in their ways. I thought, why cut their throat, so allow them to go through that process and still have a few set lines, to make it fair for everyone. Then you had Tim Becroft saying about the swimmer on a set line, which is illegal. So you need more compliance officers to oversee that and to stop the illegal side of the problems. Then you would have an even balance, if you had more compliance officers. That is just my opinion.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is pretty much a compliance problem, rather than a fishing activity problem, which you agree?

Mr MUIRHEAD: If people do the wrong thing and there is no-one out there to police it, they are going to get away with it. We do the right thing, because we want to see the fish stocks work and keep going for future generations. But if there are people out there doing the wrong thing, you need more officers. And, as Terry said, they are snowed under: there are a lot of acres out there to cover.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: You said it was about 50:50 of whether they do or do not want the set lines. Are these coming from specific areas where one group is saying, "We don't want them" and another area they are saying, "We want them, and we need them"?

Mr MALONEY: No, interestingly not. We have about 23 member clubs. No, I do not believe so. I think it just depends on the club itself and the culture of the members. Some particularly like to rod fish with lures and so on; others like the more passive set line-type fishing. It varies from club to club.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Gentlemen, in item No. 7 of your submission where you talk about the protected status of trout cod, you make the point that, "The numbers of this species in some areas are exceptional and a limited and restricted fishery would be sustainable". Are you talking about a commercial operation in that regard?

Mr MALONEY: Not commercial, but perhaps a limited take by recreational fishers. Numbers are exceptional. We have heard of the sizes that they are attaining now. This species has recovered remarkably well; they are getting quite widespread. As I also mentioned in the submission, people are losing respect for this total protection status. I have even heard people say they are bonging them on the head and throwing them up the bank, which is pretty disturbing when you have a fish that is allegedly endangered. We just think it is time, in this recovery stage, to at least give the anglers a light at the end of the tunnel. We are not saying open the fishery up now; what we would like is to be seriously looked at and for them to say, "Well, in five years time when we have got a certain number or whatever"—just so the anglers can be given a light at the end of the tunnel, rather than this total closure and "You must not touch them" attitude that exists at the moment.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I will be asking the Fisheries representatives about this later on. In relation to the remnant restricted inland commercial fishing licences that are still on the rivers, what is your view on those? Do you think they should be paid out immediately and taken out of the system altogether?

Mr MALONEY: As I understand, there is very limited commercial activity.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: There are about 20 licences that are still current.

Mr MALONEY: I was very active quite a few years ago in trying to have the commercial fishery removed. I believed it was just totally unsustainable. We campaigned for many years to have a commercial fishery removed from the rivers in New South Wales, and we only achieved that after the licence was reintroduced and we had enough money to buy them out ourselves. My view is that commercial take on the inland rivers is totally unsustainable and should be stopped—with the exception of perhaps yabbies or something like that, but certainly not kingfish.

Mr IAN COHEN: From the point of view of your fishing clubs, is there any difference in perspective between catching fish that are restocked compared with fish that are naturally built up in an area? Is that in your thinking at all?

Mr MALONEY: Most of the clubs involved with us are very heavily involved in restocking, and I think their aim is just to have fish in the water. Up to this point it has been fairly difficult to determine whether they are a wild fish or a hatchery fish. There have been some pretty good developments in recent times regarding chemical marketing and so on to identify these hatchery-bred fish. But I think from most of the anglers' points of view, a fish is a fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: I was just wondering if there was any feeling that fishing a natural fishery was one up from dealing with a stocking situation?

Mr MALONEY: Once they are in the wild, I think they are pretty much all wild; I do not think there is any difference. I think some of the trout fisheries, where they release yearling trout, for example, as a put and take type of fishery, there probably is a difference there. But I do not see any difference with native fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: I can understand that there is concern about national parks restrictions and so on. Whilst it is of interest to certain political groups to put the fear in about these national parks, would you accept that there is continued fishing, for example, in Victoria and also in the marine parks on the coast, where the sanctuary zones are often only less than 20 per cent of the overall marine park area? Would you accept that there is that balance, that in certain circumstances the recreational fishermen are not unhappy? I would suggest, for example, in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, that the numbers are showing a keenness to continue, that it is not necessarily a lock-out situation. Have you gotten that information at all, or is that just not filtering through?

Mr MALONEY: The information is filtering through, but again with the national parks our concerns are not so much with the fishing as with the access issues—with dispersed camping, taking the little dog along, and lighting the campfire and having a beer at around the campfire, which is the cultural way.

Mr IAN COHEN: I take your point; it is an interesting one. Obviously in any pastime in the bush there will be an element of people who are not responsible—who make a mess on the riverbank when they are launching their boats and who do not look after unregulated fires, and there be some regulation where the campsites might have set fires and things like that. Is that not a reasonable step, given that we are living in a society where there is a lot more pressure on these resources?

Mr MALONEY: Absolutely. But we are always going to get people who do the wrong thing. If somebody is speeding on the highway out here, do we ban cars? There are a lot of people who do the right thing.

Mr IAN COHEN: But we do have speed limits, and we do have policing.

Mr MALONEY: And we are subject to a lot of fishing regulations as well.

Mr IAN COHEN: But not necessarily camping regulations that may well be needed. We have had evidence at these inquiries in the past of people saying that some fishermen have made a mess, leaving messy campsites et cetera, and this then impacts on the next fishermen to come along. So there is an impact right along the line, would you not agree?

Mr MALONEY: Yes, I would agree. We get that situation not just in national parks, but we get it on travelling stock reserves, we get it on Crown lands, and we get it on private property unfortunately. We do have a minority element out there in society who do the wrong thing. We do not want to punish the good guys.

Mr MUIRHEAD: I would like to add to that. It is the access into the national parks. You keep going back to the Victorian side. When they implemented those national parks, nearly straightaway the access was slowed up during winter. In national parks in winter time, they stop the access on the roads because of the dirt and the weather. In our area, we do not get that much rain as there has been a drought for the last 10 years. But if it rains, we do not go in for a couple of days, and then we go in after that. In winter time, if the national parks shut the access you will not be able to take your boat in to launch your boat, and that is a major problem that we worry about.

Mr IAN COHEN: But you would be comfortable with that, in that you would not go in there anyway because—?

Mr MUIRHEAD: But I do not need a national park telling me that—

Mr IAN COHEN: You might not, but you would agree that a lot of other people might?

Mr MUIRHEAD: City people, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: City people are the only ones who make a mess?

Mr MUIRHEAD: A lot actually, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: But I think it is important to recognise that all sorts of people regulate. The more people who do it, the more pressure there is, and therefore, unfortunately, there is a need for a bit more regulation. You would not disagree with that?

Mr MUIRHEAD: No.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is one of the unfortunate things in life. I have dealt with it from my days of enjoying national parks and other areas, where you do not need regulation but once you get the numbers in you need to regulate. I think it is just one of those things—

Mr MUIRHEAD: I disagree, in a way. That is why we keep going back to the compliance. If you have people policing the rubbish and policing things like that, you do not need a word saying "national park". Then down the track, we do not really trust some of the government people, and that is why we worry about that.

Mr IAN COHEN: Where do you think this mistrust comes from?

Mr MUIRHEAD: Every day you read the paper, the Government changes its mind on things all the time. As you know, the Labor Party did the five-year deal and the people down in Deniliquin lost five years of the national park, so they would not be able to use the timber and things like that. So that was a mistrust.

Mr IAN COHEN: But also, from your point of view, there is going to be possibly more recreational access into those areas than would have happened otherwise?

Mr MUIRHEAD: No, I disagree.

Mr IAN COHEN: I put that to you, in any event.

Mr BEALE: Can I say something there? Regarding the national parks that happened last week, all the State parks that were taken over. I have camped a lot in those now national parks. I have never seen a compliance officer in my entire life—whether it be to control camping, or fires, or anything else that you worry about. So, why is it now locked up so it can be looked after? Haven't we done a good enough job?

Mr IAN COHEN: I guess I am asking the questions, not you.

Mr BEALE: But did you not bring up that we were worried about access? Our access is dispersed camping. At the moment, on the Victorian side you can only go, like most national parks, in set areas. Now, because it is not labelled yet in New South Wales as to how they are going to manage it, we are worried about access only going to be in set, little spots. So most of the river we have stocked, we will not have access to. Or, have we got to go down river by 20 miles in a boat?

Mr IAN COHEN: I do not think it is that bad. I would suggest, have a look at what is happening on the Victorian side. I was there just a matter of weeks ago and there was far more camping activity and things were looking far healthier overall on the Victorian side than they were on the New South Wales side. Mr Maloney, with regard to the set lines issue you said there was a real 50:50 division between the arguments for and against. Regardless of which way you see it, could you indicate what were the major arguments for and against that were raised regarding set lines?

Mr MALONEY: I think they were pretty much the same arguments that were raised across the board regarding the review of the regulations. Some people just did not see the need. Some people were concerned about the issues that had been raised, about lines being left set or not attended. Others probably have been more alert to those factors, those who have looked after their lines and have managed them well. Pretty much it is just the same arguments that we have heard all day today.

Mr IAN COHEN: Any issue about the condition of the fish—for example, damage, the wrong species or undersized?

Mr MALONEY: No, I do not think so. One of the earlier speakers commented that a cod hooked on a set line does not jump through hoops for an hour and a half, he just lies on the bottom and sulks. They really do not do any damage. I think you will find some of our fly fishermen up in the mountains who bash their trout against rocks for 45 minutes on really light line are doing more damage to a fish than a fish caught on a set line.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So the only fish you are getting on set lines are cod?

Mr MALONEY: No, they would be the predominant species though, the target species I would imagine, but no, they will catch carp and golden perch or yellowbelly.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So everything basically?

Mr MALONEY: Basically, it depends—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Adult and juvenile?

Mr MALONEY: Yes. It depends a little bit on the equipment they are using, whether they are using big bait on big hooks or small bait on small hooks, I guess.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The concern by Fisheries is about the survival rate of those that are hooked, the length of time that they are hooked and their release afterwards, is it not? It is not just about an adult cod, is it?

Mr MALONEY: I am not sure where we are coming from.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You were saying a cod will lay "doggo" on the ground, but it is not just about an adult cod, is it? A juvenile cod would be distressed when faced with a redfin and try to escape, would it not?

Mr MALONEY: You will not catch redfin on set lines.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, a juvenile cod on a set line.

Mr MALONEY: A juvenile cod acts much the same as an adult cod.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So if a redfin was around, the cod would just lay "doggo", would it?

Mr MALONEY: They will sulk. They will only react when the line is pulled or noise—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So they would have no predators?

Mr MALONEY: Well, we are talking about juvenile cod, but what size cod are we talking about? If we are talking about little fellows, we are not going to catch them on a set line, we are going to be talking about something that undersized, but it is not exactly a little fish.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So there is nothing that will stress them and Fisheries are completely wrong—the survival rates are very good?

Mr MALONEY: I am not saying there is nothing that will stress them. I would imagine getting caught by any means stresses them to some degree.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you are attending a line and something is caught, you know it is there and there is a limit to the time that it is under stress, as opposed to a set line. Is that not true?

Mr MALONEY: Yes.

CHAIR: The Fisheries paper you are holding does not talk about stress, does it? It talks about the survival rate as a result of stress. Is that correct?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am not holding anything in regard to Fisheries at the moment.

CHAIR: You were quoting from something, though, were you not?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, which I previously quoted in terms of survival rates, and in fact I outlined the survival rates in my question. That is specifically what I was asking about.

CHAIR: I am not sure that the witness understood your question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I think the witness did, because he answered it. I started asking about survival rates and said that one of the concerns was stress, but that is fine, I will go on to my next question.

CHAIR: No, please continue.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You raised the issue of freshwater marine scientists.

Mr MALONEY: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Last night in one of our hearings Dr Philip Creagh put forward a submission within which he raised a huge number of issues, but one thing he said was that Verity Firth, who was the Minister for the Environment at the time, stated in Parliament that Professor Bob Kearney is literally the lone voice in the scientific community opposing marine parks. He then went on to outline a letter that was sent by the University of Canberra. Given that occasionally scientists put forward their own views and governments do not necessarily pay any attention to them, the Government has been pretty clear that it is not putting in any more marine parks. I do not know of any inland marine parks. Why is this freshwater scientist any different from any other scientist? Why is this any different from the range of other submissions we have had from non-government organisations and individuals in terms of people being concerned that there is some proposal before the Government?

Mr MALONEY: We do not have any reason to believe that this guy is any different from anybody else, but when they make these statements and they are printed widely in the media, our members take them quite seriously and they worry about them.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: A lot of recreational fishermen have come before the Committee raising concerns about commercial fishing. Would that make commercial fishermen seriously question whether there is a real threat to commercial fishing? Why would people's opinions before a committee represent anything other than a view? For example, why would the view of one recreational fishing club be taken more seriously than another recreational fishing club?

Mr MALONEY: I do not think it is.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is why I am wondering why the view of one person in a meeting is taken differently from the views of other people who might have been at that meeting?

Mr MALONEY: One person is a fairly well known freshwater scientist, he is with Charles Sturt University, and when people like that make statements to the media we tend to take them seriously.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We have lots of scientists running around making statements to the media.

Mr MALONEY: So are you suggesting that the next time a scientist makes a statement we should tell them, "Up you", and not take any notice of it at all?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I suggest that when a scientist makes a statement it is the individual view of that scientist. When a departmental officer or Government makes a statement, that is the view of the Government and a proposal has been put forward. The 2005 discussion paper, which we have already discussed, was the view of Government that was put forward for community discussion, which I think is the normal process that the Government goes through when it is putting forward ideas for discussion, is it not?

Mr MALONEY: Again I must repeat that out of little things big things grow and, while these suggestions were perhaps only floated around by an individual scientist, they were taken very seriously by our counterparts across the river—the Victorian peak body came out all guns blazing.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Which Victorian peak body?

Mr MALONEY: VRFish.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It came out blazing in terms of what?

Mr MALONEY: Absolutely down-crying the whole suggestion, blaming the media.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How is that different from the New South Wales Government's statements that there are not going to be any more marine parks?

Mr MALONEY: I think they were saying that they do not want a marine park. They came out against the idea of freshwater—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And the New South Wales Government said there were going to be no marine parks either.

Mr MALONEY: Have they said that?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, numerous times.

Mr MALONEY: We only heard the scientist; we did not hear the Government.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There seems to be a lot of that going around. There is one more question I would like to ask in regard to where individual recreational fishing clubs could go and put their own submissions in to the 2005 discussion paper. You said that it was 50-50. Was there an actual vote taken?

Mr MALONEY: I said it was approximately 50-50; it was about half and half. We were in a position where, as an association, we could not take a position one way or the other.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But would you know how many of your recreational fishing groups did make submissions?

Mr MALONEY: No, I do not know. I know that we circulated the information to them extensively.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So you would not have looked at the views that were put forward by those that did make submissions?

Mr MALONEY: Our clubs are all totally independent and their views—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I understand that, I am just asking if you looked at their submissions and the views that were put forward?

Mr MALONEY: People within Fisheries were quite thrilled to get 3,300 responses. I thought it was terrible. So I do not think too many of our people did—not too many recreational anglers did.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What I am asking is whether you looked at the submissions of the people affiliated with your organisation, what they put forward?

Mr MALONEY: No.

Mr MUIRHEAD: He is overworked.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: As a peak body for fisher persons in this region, which you obviously are, is there any process that you know of or are thinking about to work with the national parks to ensure that there are appropriate camping sites in the new national park? Is there any process structured for that to happen?

Mr MALONEY: We do not know of any immediate process.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Would that be a valuable thing?

Mr MALONEY: It would be something that we would certainly take on board. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues, but, as you are all aware, the national park proposals are all very new.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is just that access has been an issue from the first day that we had witnesses coming, particularly for freshwater fisher persons, because of private lands and paper roads, as they are called, and this is yet another one. So we know that it is a major issue. I am just trying to think constructively forward about a peak body like you, because when a national park is formed—it is not just plonked there—there is a lot of community consultation that goes on, and I just wondered if you could think of a process, or perhaps we might need to think of one in our recommendations. There will be a consultative process, but it is making sure that they are considered as part of that process because of the river.

Mr MALONEY: We would welcome any moves, if we can get involved—we would very much welcome that—but at the present time, no.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You could get all the clubs that are affiliated with you and then it would not be such a complicated and messy process. Another question I have is why on earth the Fisheries officer was involved in the environmental investigation for one year?

Mr MALONEY: Good question. I guess it is their job.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: How? Is this because fishes were killed?

Mr MALONEY: No, the environment—

CHAIR: Habitat.

Mr MALONEY: In the first instance, when our members actually reported that initially, that was the responsibility of the compliance officer.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: What actually happened?

Mr MALONEY: A developer destroyed about four kilometres of river and a heap of floodplain.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: By clear felling?

Mr MALONEY: Pulled out all the timber, all the snags out of the river, cleared and excavated floodplains. It is a huge thing. It is before the courts now, so I cannot really comment about it.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Building houses?

Mr MALONEY: If you believe it, it was an eco-tourism resort. His interpretation of "eco" was a bit different to ours.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We had better not talk about it if it is in court, but it is interesting that the Fisheries person was pulled off compliance for a year.

Mr MALONEY: I dare say it is their responsibility.

Mr BEALE: Maybe Fisheries got heavily involved because, as a fishing organisation, they were our first port of call.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You notified them?

Mr BEALE: Yes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Mr Maloney, I am still concerned about the position that your association is taking on the set line situation because we had pretty solid evidence here today from two groups of people and one individual recreational fisher who were quite adamant that they are losing members, and they are losing their lifestyle in not being able to go out and fish the way they know how and the way they want to. We asked them what they would like to see and they said quite adamantly that they wanted the four set lines as they were. Your association, which they are affiliated to—

Mr MALONEY: They are not.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: They are not affiliated?

Mr MALONEY: No.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: My mistake, I am sorry. I was of the understanding that they were affiliated with your association.

Mr MALONEY: Tocumwal, the last witness is, but the previous clubs are not affiliated with us—and that is their choice.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I was quite bemused really because here we had solid evidence from some people, and I thought they were affiliated.

Mr MALONEY: No.

Mr BEALE: Can I reply to that?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: If you are not associated, there is no point.

Mr BEALE: I want to reply to the set line thing that you brought up. Why we sit on the fence is because we have 23 clubs. We meet every three months. Between that we send out emails every week and all the clubs get back to us. When we have a discussion on something like this, that is parochial at best and is heavily divided, as an executive we have to sit on the fence and let them make their own submissions like they did in the 2005 one. It is going to come up again next year. They will have to do the same thing then but as far as divisions, I am vice-president of a local fishing club called Burrumbuttock and the club is heavily divided on set lines. Half do and half do not. That is within 50 people, that is not within 2,500.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: But the point I am making is the people we heard here today were quite adamant and fully supportive of one view. I thought they were associated with you people. My apologies for that.

CHAIR: At least one of you—Mr Muirhead—said you had fished with set lines?

Mr MUIRHEAD: Yes.

CHAIR: From your experience, what is your answer to Fisheries' contention that set lines are detrimental to the survival rate of those fish that are too small and would have to be released? Do you agree or disagree?

Mr MUIRHEAD: I do not think it makes any difference. The fish are released and off they go. I have never found a dead fish on a set line, ever.

CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence today. Your evidence is valuable to us. Along with any questions that you took on notice during your evidence, will you agree to receive additional written questions that members of the Committee might not have had the opportunity to ask of you today? If so, would you agree to return the answers to those questions to us within 21 days?

Mr MALONEY: Yes.

(The witnesses withdrew)

CAMERON WESTAWAY, Senior Fisheries Manager, Industry and Investment New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions are forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr WESTAWAY: I would.

CHAIR: Please proceed.

Mr WESTAWAY: As outlined in previous evidence by senior departmental staff, the department's functions reflect the primary objects of the Fisheries Management Act which include the conservation and protection of fish stocks and key fish habitats in New South Wales and within that context to sustainably share fish resources and provide quality recreational fishing opportunities. As senior fisheries manager inland I am responsible for providing advice on the regulation and development of recreational fishing for freshwater native species such as Australian bass east of the divide, Murray cod and golden perch in the New South Wales portion of the Murray-Darling Basin rivers and our trout and salmon fisheries in the cooler regions of the State. I supervise production of salmonid fish for stocking at the Government's two salmonid hatcheries at Jindabyne and Ebor, near Armidale, as well as production of a range of native recreational and threatened species at the Narrandera Fisheries Centre. I also work closely with my research, technical and compliance colleagues at sites such as the Narrandera to gain an informed understanding of the fishery. Industry and Investment managers and researchers are also working closely with our interstate colleagues to attempt to get a basin-wide approaches for fisheries management.

I also provide planning and assessment of all stocking proposals from both government hatcheries and authorised private hatcheries in accordance with the statutory fisheries management strategy for freshwater fish stocking and its associated Hatchery Quality Assurance Program. This management strategy is based on the outcomes of an environmental impact assessment conducted under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and provides a comprehensive process for addressing genetic disease and threatened species risks from stocking. All stocking proposals are subject to internal independent assessment and approval by the department's conservation and aquaculture branch. The department approves stocking of between five million and eight million fish annually of which approximately one million native fish are stocked from private hatcheries under the dollar-for-dollar program that you have heard a bit about today, with funds from community groups and matching funding or almost matching funding from the Recreational Fishing Trust. The remaining four million to seven million native and salmonid stocked fish are produced at our hatcheries.

We also employ recreational fishing access officers funded by the trust to work closely with the Land and Property Management Authority—formerly Department of Lands—the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, local government, water infrastructure agencies and private landholders to maintain and enhance recreational fishing access. As you have heard from previous angler witnesses, maintaining access is a key concern for recreational anglers. Our inland recreational fisheries and their associated tourism activity generate significant economic activity in the regions and it is difficult to underestimate the social importance of recreational fishing in inland New South Wales.

The good news is that in my opinion our freshwater recreational fisheries are doing very well, especially the Murray cod fishery. Consistent anecdotal reports of best fishing ever are now being matched by measurable increases in cod numbers from scientific monitoring and research programs such as the sustainable rivers audit, where unpublished at this stage fish sampling results indicate that cod numbers have improved since 1994. Some of the reasons for this significant improvement in the past two decades could include Murray cod characteristics such as their main channel preference as opposed to flood plain, their ability to out-compete and utilise invasive species—that is the carp—and there have also been significant changes in fisheries management over that period, with the cessation of the freshwater native finfish commercial fishery—which is now carp and yabby only—introduction of conservative bag, size and gear limits, including recent changes,

closed seasons, a comprehensive stocking program—although recovery is also occurring in unstocked areas—and a significant shift in fishers' behaviour towards more of a sports fishery and stewardship attitude. Considerable numbers of fishers now practice catch and release of most or all of their catch although there is nothing wrong with taking a feed within the conservative bag and size limits.

Notwithstanding this recovery and changes in fisheries management, considerable environmental threats to inland fish populations remain. Direct loss of fish from water extraction, mortalities from passage through weirs, cold-water pollution, disconnection through loss of fish passage, invasive species, poor water quality, loss of habitat and sedimentation and, of course, drought and climate change all continue to impact on native fish in inland waters. Considerable research and habitat rehabilitation is taking place but much remains to be done. Many species—not angling species but many species—are in series trouble especially those species which rely on water flows, wetlands or are more vulnerable to habitat damage and invasive species. These species include catfish, Macquarie perch and small bodied natives such as Oxleyan pygmy perch, olive perchlet, purple spotted gudgeons and flathead galaxias, which are all listed as threatened in New South Wales.

In relation to set lines, by definition set lines were only checked periodically and may not be checked for up to 24 hours. This equates to longer hook-up time leading inevitably to higher mortality for any undersize or non-target fish species, including threatened fish species, and possible mortality of air breathing amphibians and mammals. The changes to set lines and the increase in the minimum size limit for cod were introduced in 2007 after the release of a discussion paper which received over 3,000 responses, the majority—a slim majority, but a majority—of which supported the banning of set lines and increased size limits. The ban has caused angst amongst some fishers who gained considerable enjoyment from the traditional use of this method. While this is unfortunate, I discuss issues with recreational cod anglers on a daily basis, and I am confident that the majority—a slim majority but a majority—of anglers support the change and that the mortality impacts of set lines justified the change. Release mortality from fishing where the angler is in attendance for undersize or non-target fish is very low and is not an issue for air breathing animals.

The increase in cod numbers has also meant that fishing with up to two attended lines from bank or boat now more consistently produces good catch rates and in my view a more enjoyable fishing experience. I acknowledge and recognise the angst and the impact on a class of fishers, a large class of inland fishers who do fish traditionally with set lines—especially elderly people for whom it is difficult to spend time in an uncomfortable but for extended periods. I believe you can fish with bait successfully and, if you travel the same amount of time in a boat and fished periodically with bait moving around regularly, your catch rates might not match the set line catch rates but they will be okay, given the recovery in the cod species, where the fishery is experiencing some fantastic results. For example, down here at Narrandera Fishing Club, 12 people, and afternoons fishing, 400 cod, most of which were undersize, but that is not any longer exceptional. There are a lot of clod out there.

CHAIR: Catch and release, I assume?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes. Of all undersize cod, yes. That is my report, but I wanted to acknowledge some people are affected by that change.

CHAIR: The Committee has taken all of government submissions at a number of previous inquiries. The Committee is aware that you are only representing Fisheries here, so we will try to restrict our questions to your area of influence. You mention in your opening statement that the department liaises with a broad range of other departments that have an effect on the health of the rivers and the health of the fishery. In particular, could you describe what processes are in place for you to liaise with, say, the Catchment Management Authority, and in particular I am interested in issues such as combined research projects or those sorts of issues. The second question is do you have any input into the decisions made on releases, either environmental or otherwise?

Mr WESTAWAY: In the first instance, our department, and especially our habitat protection and habitat rehabilitation people liaise constantly with catchment management authorities. As recreational fishing manager I also liaise with catchment management authorities, not as consistently, but I have a good relationship with the Murray Catchment Management Authority. I have a good relationship with the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, and it sounds like you had a witness statement from one of the Miners brothers from the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority. I have a good relationship with those guys. The Recreational Fishing Trust funds \$200,000 in habitat rehabilitation every year for freshwater, \$500,000 for salt water, and one of my staff sits on the committee along with an angler from Rivtech—he is also a member of Tocumwal Angling Club—to assess those. So, yes, we have a good relationship and we are all

fighting for funds to do good habitat works in conjunction with catchment management authorities. When I say fighting, fighting for good projects to get up like all catchment management authorities are all the time, to get quality projects up that have a positive impact on the freshwater aquatic environment.

CHAIR: You also mentioned in your opening statement, amongst the duties you undertake, the word private hatcheries. What private hatcheries are there that are involved?

Mr WESTAWAY: There are five or six private hatcheries who are accredited with us to do fish stocking. Others can only stock private farm dams, for example. When the licence first came in, one of the key issues was stocking. There was a desire for stocking. The salmonid stocking, we have more than enough capacity there in my two hatcheries. We do not need any more fish. I could produce them if we needed them. There are private hatcheries out there and we approve their stocking in conjunction with community groups. They are accredited and they have to abide by our rules so it encourages that regulation as well as maintaining that industry and providing an outlet for community groups to stock fish.

CHAIR: In previous evidence the South West Anglers Association explained that its members put in \$100,000 for stocking, but they would like to see some feedback or some opportunity whereby research could tell them what sort of effect that stock was having. Does the department have any research projects underway, or a plan that would give some feedback on the relationship between the stocked fish, the bred fish, and the wild fish?

Mr WESTAWAY: Recently the Arthur Rylah Institute in Victoria developed some chemical marketing techniques. We have those approved now for use in fish, from a food-safe perspective. There is no residue, and we can now non-fatally test stocked fish. In other words, we can wave a magic light over them and they will respond, if they are stocked or not. That will teach us a tremendous amount, not just about stocking but about the health and carrying capacity of the rivers et cetera. We are hoping to roll those projects starting now; we have specific marked fish in place.

At Tocumwal, one of the restrictions on stocking is the trout cod area, where we do not stock them. We do not stock Lake Mulwala. Tocumwal is on the border. They can only stock downstream, and there is a considerable amount of river upstream. One of our best trout fisheries in Mulwala is not stocked with cod. It is going very well as well. So it is not just stocking. But we need to understand where we need to stock, but we do not need to stock we should not stock.

CHAIR: What policy and what operational effect is given to the use of recreational fishing clubs and social individual anglers to leverage your research effort? In other words, do you involve the clubs in the research—catch and release, mark, and that sort of thing?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, as much as possible. And certainly, with our catch and release mortality program our scientists work with tournaments and club organisations to go out and test mortality-released fish. Wherever we can, we get involved in tagging projects. But sometimes anglers want to tag and record for the sake of it, and then you get a lot of data and a lot of tags out there, which we then get phone calls on. So we try to control it. But yes, wherever possible.

CHAIR: In evidence given today, at least two opinions were stated—which were anecdotal—about the condition of the native cod fishery, which you have confirmed, but also concerning the decline in the level of carp and the decline in the level of redbfin in certain areas. Do you agree with those assessments, and is there any scientific evidence to back that up?

Mr WESTAWAY: Generally, yes. And generally, yes. Certainly in our main river sections carp have declined. As one witness said this morning, that is a general trend with an invasive species such as rabbits. There are nowhere near as many rabbits now as they were in the 1930s. So cod ate themselves out of house and home; their habitat adapted to them. But mainly it is due to floods; they do prefer these floodplains to breed. Above some of the empowerments, for example, up and down every year the carp are breeding very well. Because every year, at the right time, it floods the billabongs at the top of those lakes and it creates perfect conditions. Whereas, down on the main stem there has been very little wetland flooding. Also, we are starting to do things to specifically target carp, through carp traps et cetera, so we are hoping to make progress there.

CHAIR: In an advisory role, what involvement do you have, if any, in the determination of environmental flows?

Mr WESTAWAY: Personally—

CHAIR: Your department, I should say.

Mr WESTAWAY: The department provides advice, and the department provides advice in terms of the impact on agriculture as well, because our department is responsible for that. From a recreational fishing perspective, I do not make too many comments on that, other than a general comment that environmental flows should be best timed. We do not have all the information yet; we are starting to gather some of that. Environmental flows, of themselves, if they are not at the correct time, will not necessarily be of benefit to the fish.

CHAIR: With the conversion of the Millewa forest to a national park and the intention to supply X numbers of gicalitres of water to those areas, including some works to make sure the waters get into them, environmental flows could then re-inundate the floodplain area. Is there any concern that that may lead to breeding booms in carp? If so, have you put forward any ideas as to how that might be handled in the future?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, it would be of concern. Our habitat protection people work on those opportunities, because when you just water infrastructure our legislation can kick in and we utilise that opportunity to put carp traps there, and we are doing that on Lake Cargelligo and Lake Brewster, for example. So it is a threat and an opportunity, and we certainly work closely with the water groups to make sure we take that opportunity.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: With regard to the stocking of the inland rivers, what science and research do you have to know what sort of success rate is there?

Mr WESTAWAY: Until this marketing program has come about, we have not got specific research that would indicate exactly what the survival percentage rate is. We can test fish post-mortem and do otolith counts, and we have done that. But the evidence is that in an area where cod or yellow belly were degraded or could not get there due to fish passage, in the case of yellow belly, where we stocked we have got fish there later. So we think the survival is quite reasonable. But now that we have this marking technique we will be able to much better get a handle on that and we have the specific research program to look at that.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: When do you expect to get that?

Mr WESTAWAY: In the next three to four years we would get some very good answers, I think.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We just heard that one of the Fisheries compliance officers had spent 12 months on an environmental investigation. Is this possible?

Mr WESTAWAY: Not full-time in that investigation, but he has certainly been heavily involved and very busy in what is a complex prosecution. The best avenue for prosecution in this case was under our Act. There were other avenues—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It went under your Act?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, damage to fish habitat, which we specifically protect. It is very complex, and it involved a lot of interviews and a lot of investigation, mapping of damage, et cetera.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Should there not be some way that Fisheries can organise for some other process for compliance officers to be there?

Mr WESTAWAY: We have specific environmental compliance officers now. One of them is based at Narrandera, but he has been a bit sick lately. Every compliance officer has environmental components to their past, and it is unfortunate that this was such a complex component—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: This was an extreme case?

Mr WESTAWAY: It was. Indeed, South West Anglers were instrumental in terms of raising awareness of that. We get some frivolous ones from time to time, and indeed this was almost thought frivolous until the evidence demonstrated to us that it was far from frivolous.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I acknowledge that there will be debate about whether trout cod are endangered or not, and I will not go into that. What is the process for classifying endangered species and reviewing that status? I have a special interest in your answer to this, but not in relation to fish.

Mr WESTAWAY: The environmental species listing legislation is not one that I am aware of. I deal with the consequences of it, good and bad, but it is not an area of my responsibility. There is strong anecdotal and some unpublished scientific evidence of recovery. It is not universal recovery—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: In relation to specific areas?

Mr WESTAWAY: Where we have stopped, they have recovered. Certainly on the Murrumbidgee River, no-one would deny that we seem to have succeeded. We have not proven that yet, but no-one is denying that we have established a recovered population, it seems. Indeed, our environmental component of Fisheries has agreed to look at the establishment of specific trout cod recreational fisheries in stock empowerments.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is under review at this time?

Mr WESTAWAY: It is. There are no guarantees, but they are certainly looking at that opportunity.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Is this a State declaration or a Federal declaration?

Mr WESTAWAY: In the trout cod it is both, on my understanding.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Some people we have spoken to over the past weeks perceive they have very good access to fisheries; and some people perceive they have none. Do you have any thoughts on how this can be addressed?

Mr WESTAWAY: My access officer, who is highly competent, is a very busy man. There are parks, Crown roads and statutory water authorities. Liability is a key concern, a straw man in my view, in most cases. It can be legitimate, but in most—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: A straw man on the landholders' side or the fishers' side?

Mr WESTAWAY: On the landholders' side. Liability is a good excuse—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: "You can't come because you might break your leg and I don't want to get sued"?

Mr WESTAWAY: Exactly. The Department of Lands has extensive land holdings and Crown roads which are no longer used. And the Department of Lands has been very cooperative, and where there is an amenity or protection required they have declined to sell Crown roads. At the same time, that is a significant potential impact on a landholder, who will be open for a Crown road which is 80 years old in the books and goes straight past his house. So we had to take both those things into account. So it is a lot of hard work. In other States and countries such as New Zealand they have a very, very strong commitment to recreational fishing and bushwalking access to rivers and areas of importance. It is something that, in my opinion, we need to do much better here, to protect that amenity for the long-term future for our kids.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: This may have to be taken on notice. Do you have any thoughts on addressing the deliberate misinformation campaigns which we have seen through this inquiry, which seemed to be successfully spreading into inland New South Wales? Do you have any ideas on how to at least get the facts out there on the ground?

Mr WESTAWAY: I will step back a bit; it is not my area of responsibility. I have previous extensive experience, although it is not my area of responsibility. The stakeholders have genuine concerns, and I do not think it is appropriate to tell them to relax and calm down and go away. They have legitimate concerns, and they

will continue to raise them. Some of their concerns may be invalid, but the best way to deal with these issues is to talk in the open. But it is not my area of responsibility and it is certainly not government policy.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We heard evidence earlier that there had been a public meeting of freshwater scientists who started talking about marine parks. Did you have anyone approach you in that regard?

Mr WESTAWAY: I have spoken to the scientist. It was a media issue because of the concern that the media knew that it had generated. It was only part of what he said; he was mainly concerned about habitat stuff, and that was a minor part of what he said. But the media ran with the small part, quite frankly. I talk to him regularly. I do not necessarily agree with his views, or disagree, but again he came to that meeting and discussed it with anglers. I think he got some information, and vice versa.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But did any anglers raise that with you?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, they were concerned about it. He was an independent academic scientist, and he has a point of view. They were concerned—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But given that you say it is not your role to get involved, certainly when they have approached you you would have told them that that is not government policy?

Mr WESTAWAY: I did.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So the fishing community should have had that message?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes. But again, I just say that they have real concerns in the longer term, so I would not discount their concerns. The best way to deal with it, in my view, is by talking the issue through and saying we will get the information and get the evidence, it is not government policy, and talk to this guy, for example, because he has been taken out of context in my view. He is not a ranting freshwater aquatic protection area person; he had a point of view, which was a modest one, and it was taken out of context. So I put those people together—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It was just a local paper attacking this scientist, and taking words out of context?

Mr WESTAWAY: No. They emphasised a part of his brief statement. And it was not just local, it was national.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What kind of meeting was this?

Mr WESTAWAY: The media release from the scientist came out previously to our meeting.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Previous to our meeting—you will have to be specific.

Mr WESTAWAY: At Mulwala, because I wanted to get targeted research on Murray cod—and my Victorian colleagues are the same—with a fisheries perspective, we organised and got funding for a conference to bring scientists, managers and anglers together at Mulwala, and he was one of the invitees and I specifically worked to get him there so that we could discuss these things, because that is the best way to go in my view. The intent of the meeting was to get a targeted priority research program for quality Murray cod research so that my interstate colleagues and I could better manage that. He has a contribution to make, he is a good freshwater scientist, and his views were aired and discussed and people had a variety of views on his views, which is as it should be.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Which media people were at the conference?

Mr WESTAWAY: Local and ABC. Just to clarify, the main media run came previous to that meeting. He had been to a conference in South Australia on Murray-Darling aquatic habitats, much more of a habitat-focused meeting, and he made statements when he came back and a little bit of his statement at the end of an interview talked about freshwater protected areas.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And that was in relation to the South Australian conference on the Murray-Darling?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, not my context, not the recreational fishing context, but his context, and the media of course ran with the one that would cause angst—as they do—and that ran, and ran again, and he was interviewed again and again, and that is what raised some concern. But he is an independent private person who is entitled to his views.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You go to the recreational fishing clubs and talk to those people all the time?

Mr WESTAWAY: I try to.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In terms of prosecution of people under Fisheries, how often would you prosecute recreational fisher people?

Mr WESTAWAY: Very rarely would we prosecute fishers. We prosecute illegal criminals who take fish for sale.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But they are masquerading as fishermen.

Mr WESTAWAY: That is a matter of some concern to fishers. They do not regard them as fishermen, they regard them as illegal commercial fishers. We do that inland—we might have five or six prosecutions. I can take that on notice and provide accurate information.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sure, but would you tend to caution rather than prosecute recreational fisher people?

Mr WESTAWAY: We have written cautions, verbal cautions and infringement notices, which are written tickets.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Would they all be residents of New South Wales or often be people from interstate?

Mr WESTAWAY: Interstate people as well. In terms of the details—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Could you take that on notice and check that?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You consult with recreational fishing groups; what about Aboriginal Land councils?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, where appropriate, we try to consult heavily with Aboriginal groups where it affects them in terms of recreational fishers.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Do you know if they are sitting on any of the oversighting bodies?

Mr WESTAWAY: We have had indigenous members on the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing [ACoRF]. I do not know what the current membership status is, but we have certainly attempted—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Could you take that on notice and check that as well?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Westaway, whereabouts is the Victorian-New South Wales border? Is it on the Victorian or the New South Wales bank?

Mr WESTAWAY: It is absolutely on the Victorian bank. The Murray River is in New South Wales.

CHAIR: Do you have an understanding of who is responsible for, or who has custody of, or who manages the river bottom?

Mr WESTAWAY: My understanding is that it is New South Wales Lands.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Your area of expertise includes the Barwon, Darling, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers—all the western-flowing rivers. Is that correct?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, and the eastern-flowing rivers above the tidal limit.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: My question relates to the commercial restricted inland fishery licences in western New South Wales. I understand there are still 20-odd of those that are current. Is that correct?

Mr WESTAWAY: Twenty-six, of which 21—this is from memory, if it is 21 or 22 I apologise—are carp and yabby fishers, and four or five are carp only.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How many of those are still working actively, or how many are inactive?

Mr WESTAWAY: Recent rainfall means the number could be up around 10. I have recently asked for that information, so I can take that on notice. We are hopeful that the recent rainfall would have increased some yabby fishing because they have had no income for the last six years basically due to the drought.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you aware that many of those licence holders are very keen to be compensated and paid out?

Mr WESTAWAY: I am aware that the lack of income has caused significant stress to those licence holders and they are after some sort of resolution.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Have you had much contact with them in that regard as to a way forward through their situation?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes, we have had a number of meetings—not recently. I do not currently manage that fishery, but when I did we had a number of meetings and they certainly put their hand up and said we would like something to be done to close the matter down basically and make a decision.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What has been the hold-up with that? I always thought if the commercial operators were keen to have their licences revoked and take a compensation package, the Government would have been willing to help them participate in that.

Mr WESTAWAY: That is a Government priority decision in terms of where they go and what they do with their moneys. I provided advice up the chain that these fishers are stressed financially and would be happy to consider some sort of compensation package, and that advice has gone up the chain.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: From a fisheries management perspective, would you be keen to see those licences revoked?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Point of order: the Hon. Rick Colless is asking a departmental person a question on a decision that should be made in regard to Government policy. He cannot ask that question.

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In terms of yabby fishermen, would it be advantageous to the yabby population, given the environmental conditions that we have had over the last 10 years, if those licences were revoked?

Mr WESTAWAY: The yabby fishery is a boom and bust fishery. They respond to floods and droughts very well. As the manager, I am quite comfortable about the impact of commercial fishing on those boom and bust yabby fisheries. They primarily fish in lakes that fill up once every 10 years. Now they will be having some impact—I do not think it is dramatic, but if you take an animal, you have taken that animal. Increasingly now that fishery is traditionally fished in areas that are now national parks, so the national parks have expressed some

concern about the broader ecological impacts, and also some recreational fishers in the Broken Hill area have expressed concern about competition between recreational yabby fishing and commercial yabby fishing. It is no longer to the extent that it was when they were targeting native fin fish, but there is some concern from recreational fishers, specifically in the Menindee area, where there is some conflict.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: There has been some discussion about environmental flows. The situation is that environmental flows can be damaging to the environment if mistimed. Is that correct?

Mr WESTAWAY: That is correct, especially if they are low flows in high summer, and the water authorities are particularly aware of this. There have been a number of fish kills that have resulted. The water authorities are trying to provide water for stock and domestic purposes to people who are desperate as well as to provide environmental water. If you get that wrong, yes, it can result in fish kill and there have been two occasions where that has occurred in the Wakool system and in the Darling system, and certainly our habitat people and scientists work very closely now with the water people to address those issues.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In a perfect world, when would you consider is the most appropriate time for environmental flows to be released?

Mr WESTAWAY: On the Murray system, the bigger flows generally came at the end of winter when you had rainfall on the alps and the snow melted, so October. The Darling system tended to have, as it does now, more summer flows from Queensland events basically, but the regulation primarily is in the south in terms of the big water storages, so springtime is the best environmental period for environmental flows.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: With regard to set lines and the new regulations regarding set lines, we have heard evidence today that if a fisherman has two rods in the water and he needs to go back to his camp to put dinner on, if he leaves his rods in the water while he walks up the bank to make dinner, he is in breach of the Act. Is that correct?

Mr WESTAWAY: You could mount that technical argument, but that is not the intent. The distance was increased to 50 metres, I think from 20 metres from memory, so that people could enjoy camping and still have an attended line. The wording can be reviewed at the review next year. We recognise that that is not the intent. If you go to get a beer from the esky, as an earlier witness said, you should not be—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: They would not drink and fish at the same time, would they?

Mr WESTAWAY: I am sure that wouldn't happen. It is not the intent, but you could mount a technical argument that they are in breach because they are not in line of sight and they are more than 50 metres away.

CHAIR: When did you say the regulations would next be reviewed?

Mr WESTAWAY: In 2011.

Mr IAN COHEN: I understand fishers' concerns, and they would like to be in an unregulated situation obviously, but have people actually been fined for that type of thing? In terms of that type of breach of the rules, do you have any clear rules within your own organisation?

Mr WESTAWAY: There have certainly been fines for unattended lines. I am not compliance staff, but I can take it on notice. I doubt that anyone leaving their rods to go to the camp very briefly for whatever purpose and return have received—

Mr IAN COHEN: Leaving the lines unattended overnight?

Mr WESTAWAY: Overnight would be considered unattended. Again I am not compliance staff, but I would imagine they would issue some kind of caution and/or infringement.

Mr IAN COHEN: On the carp issue, there seems to be general agreement that the impact is lower now, that there is adjustment in the environment that is having a go at the carp. The cod actually predate on the carp.

Mr WESTAWAY: They do. The significance of that predation is unknown, but in my personal opinion it is more to do with a lack of breeding due to lack of flooding of their favourite spawning areas, but certainly the cod do impact and will impact on juvenile carp.

Mr IAN COHEN: You mentioned two separate operations: carp fishers and carp traps. What is the extent of by-catch on those sorts of operations?

Mr WESTAWAY: We preclude any carp fishing permit. Each carp fisherman is licensed, but they can only go carp fishing in an area and using a method where there is minimal risk of by-catch, so we keep that to a minimum. In terms of carp traps, it is almost zero. There are one or two native fish that get stuck, but they are retained live until the carp are removed and then the native fish can be returned.

Mr IAN COHEN: In terms of overall impact on these fisheries, we hear a lot about carp and various agricultural inputs and so on, but what is the level of impact of cold water pollution? How big is that as an issue overall, and is your department or other government agencies working on how to remedy that situation, if it is the case?

Mr WESTAWAY: It can have a massive impact. For example, cod need degree days, days at a certain temperature, to spawn successfully. If there is cold-water pollution below a dam it could mean that hundreds of kilometres of river are not viable for cod spawning, for example. My colleagues in fisheries conservation and researchers monitor this and try to put in place measures to remove cold-water pollution but it is very expensive infrastructure that changes, and they work very closely with water authorities to prioritise and make those changes as best they can.

Mr IAN COHEN: Are engineering works undertaken to change the dam regime?

Mr WESTAWAY: There has been, yes, multilevel off takes—and again not my area of expertise.

Mr IAN COHEN: But they are working to some degree?

Mr WESTAWAY: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Without touching on that specific legal issue you mentioned before, but in terms of damage to fish habitat, speedboats—it was mentioned by an earlier witness that one of the biggest impacts on the river system are speedboats. Can you comment on that?

Mr WESTAWAY: No, I do not know the significance of the impact of water skiers. We know our stakeholders are concerned. We talked to maritime about it, but I am not aware.

Mr IAN COHEN: Not your area?

Mr WESTAWAY: No.

CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence. You have been a good witness. Along with any questions that you took on notice—and there were a couple tonight—would you agree to receive additional written questions that members of the Committee may not have had the opportunity to ask of you today?

Mr WESTAWAY: I would.

CHAIR: Could you confirm that you can reply to those questions within 21 days?

Mr WESTAWAY: I will.

(The witness withdrew)

(Dinner adjournment)

GREGORY LEONARD DAVIS, President, Canberra Fisherman's Club,
Territory, and

Australian Capital

ANTHONY NAKAMURA HEISER, Member, Canberra Fisherman's Club,
Territory, sworn and examined:

Australian Capital

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. If you take any questions on notice today, the Committee would appreciate it if responses to those questions could be sent to the Committee secretariat within 21 days of the date on which those questions were forwarded to you. Before the Committee commences with questions, would either or both of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr DAVIS: Yes, I have a brief statement I would like to make.

CHAIR: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr DAVIS: Firstly, I thank the Chair and the Committee for holding this inquiry and inviting us to appear today. This inquiry is just as important to our club and Australian Capital Territory residents as it is to the residents of New South Wales. I understand 50,000 Australian Capital Territory residents hold New South Wales fishing licences. As we mentioned in our submission, most or all of our committee members hold licences and regularly fish in New South Wales, and 11 of our 12 club outings each year are held within New South Wales waters. Favourite fishing spots were a day trip to Googong Dam, Burrinjuck Dam, Eucumbene and Jindabyne, and Batemans Bay. As the Australian Capital Territory is a landlocked jurisdiction, Batemans Bay is our most successful coastal fishing spot. It is probably the only coastal spot available for an easy day trip. Due to this, we do not hide the fact that locking up 20 per cent of the Batemans Marine Park from fishing has upset a lot of people, including some of the members of our club.

Given a few will have already appeared before the Committee and expressed these sentiments, we will only cover it in the context of trying to offer suggestions for your consideration. I would also like to state again the two main concerns we have that we have put into the inquiry. That is that we consider it is important to enhance the inclusiveness and transparency of the consultation and decision-making process to ensure enhanced outcomes for recreational fishers and ensure that stakeholders have confidence that those processes are fair and equitable, and the establishment of an independent peak body that is adequately resourced to represent the interests of recreational anglers within New South Wales.

CHAIR: Mr Heiser, do you have any comments?

Mr HEISER: No.

CHAIR: Your submission suggests amending the Fisheries Management Act 1994 and the Marine Parks Act 1997 to expressly state that those Acts and the regulations made under them do not extinguish the public right of fishing. Why do you consider this action to be necessary?

Mr HEISER: Prior to the Blue Mud Bay decision it was understood widely among maritime lawyers that the public right of fishing existed in Australia, albeit in a heavily regulated manner. The Blue Mud Bay decision found that the Fisheries Act in the Northern Territory totally regulated fishing in the Northern Territory and, as a result, extinguished the public right of fishing by clear implication. We do not want to see this to be repeated in other jurisdictions such as New South Wales. I note that the New South Wales Fisheries Management Act has a note referring to the public right of fishing. I am not too sure whether that guarantees the public right of fishing in New South Wales or whether it is just an explanatory note with no legal standing. The implications of extinguishing the public right of fishing might not be immediately noticeable but it might have a ripple effect which, further down the track, has unintended consequences that we cannot perceive now. In the Northern Territory recreational fishermen are now having to pay a \$55 fishing licence fee to the Tiwi Land Council to fish near Tiwi Island. We do not want to see a repeat of this happening in other jurisdictions.

CHAIR: It is a pretty far-reaching comment, but it is interesting because no-one else made it so clearly. We have had other representations.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: On page 8 of the submission you raised some anti-fishing perceptions that happened as a result of the Batemans Marine Park. That authority told us it called for some 90 meetings during the consultation process. Were you aware of those meetings and did you participate in any of those meetings?

Mr DAVIS: Yes, we were aware of the meetings as they were scheduled up and down the coast in relation to the Batemans Marine Park. In fact, members of the Canberra Fisherman's Club attended one of those meetings to discuss the zonings or the proposed zoning is of the Batemans Marine Park at Narooma. . The Canberra Fisherman's Club also invited the previous person who was here, Cameron Westaway, who was involved with the Batemans Marine Park, to come to Canberra because we thought it was important that Canberrans had a say, because, as I said in my opening address, it is very close to where we go and it is a one-day trip or shorter for us. So, we felt strongly that we needed to have input into this. Another meeting was held in Canberra as a result of the previous meetings, and obviously the interest in Batemans Marine Park, what it had generated within Canberra. So, yes, we were aware of the consultation process and the meetings, and we did attend them.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Within your fishing club has there been a hesitancy to go back to the area covered by Batemans Marine Park?

Mr DAVIS: No, we still go down to the coast and still do fish, yes. Some of the perception, I suppose, marine parks have had ill effects on recreational fishing throughout Australia as they have been introduced, and that goes back to the ones down in Victoria. Statements are being made by fishermen in Victoria now because the sanctuary zones have been put in place and they cannot go through certain areas and they now have to spend more time at sea in their smaller boats, so there is more of a danger for them to participate in their recreation than there was before. Throughout most of the marine park processes we have been asked to say where we fish and, in most of those cases, the high majority of our most favoured fishing spots have been locked up in sanctuary zones. So, that is why there is anti-marine park sentiment within the fishing community.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: On a percentage scale, what percentage of your favourite spots have been locked up in Batemans Bay?

Mr DAVIS: I am not quite sure what the percentage is but there are certainly areas there. I cannot give any specific examples.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But a significant proportion of them are now in the sanctuary zones?

Mr DAVIS: Just outside Batemans Bay are the Tollgates. That is now a sanctuary zone. Is it Jimmy's or Black Rock, that is also tied up in a sanctuary zone. They are accessible spots that people in small boats could get out to on most occasions. They are no longer. You cannot fish in those areas any more. So, if you only have a small boat you have to go further out from Batemans Bay or go and put in somewhere else. That is something that has been removed.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Your members do go over there on a regular basis. How have they found identifying where they are in the water in terms of marine park boundaries? Are they confident now they know where they are within the park or is there still some confusion where the sanctuary zones are?

Mr DAVIS: I think generally there is some confusion unless you have it programmed into your GPS, if you are lucky enough to have a GPS in your boat. Marine parks are not all that clearly marked. In some instances they might have one yellow buoy out to show one corner but you might not be able to see the next corner. So, if you do not have those electronics to say you are inside those boundaries or not, you are not real sure where you are. There is definitely some confusion over where the boundaries are.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: On page 17 you talk about the dangers associated with rock fishing and the benefits of the angel ring project. Do your members do some rock fishing over there as well? Is that where that comes from?

Mr DAVIS: Yes. I have personal experience of nearly not being able to be here tonight, from back in January—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: We are very pleased you are here.

Mr DAVIS: Thank you—through a rock fishing incident. I was very lucky, I did see a wave coming. I admit I had been complacent. I had fished these rocks in heavy seas many times before. They were high elevation above it but this one wave came through and it convinced me there are things like freak waves. All of a sudden there was in excess of a metre of water coming over the rocks towards me, so I was lucky I could get up on to some high rocks. Definitely it can be a dangerous activity. Where I was fishing, at Snapper Point out by Merry Beach there were two lots of angel rings installed there by the Australian National Sportfishing Association. I believe the figures say that 33 lives have been saved through the implementation of these angel rings.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What other initiatives do you think should be looked at to make rock fishing a safer pastime?

Mr DAVIS: I believe they are currently looking at lifejackets. It has been said for some time that lifejackets should be worn by rock fishermen but most rock fishermen are probably too macho to do that. I think it is about time that we started listening to the evidence that is there. In recent times—I think in the last three weeks there have been six deaths in New South Wales from rock fishing.

CHAIR: Seven.

Mr DAVIS: Seven is it, sorry. It is a significant issue. I do not think we can lock up or prevent people from doing it so, if we can educate people on ways to make them a lot safer, make them more aware of the dangers and the initiatives—I am not quite sure there is an initiative to introduce the use or promote the use of lifejackets for rock fishermen. I think that is a good idea. It could well save lives as well.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is there sufficiently slim-lined flotation devices on the market? A lot of these jackets are very bulky, even the better designed ones. If you are fishing they are still quite an encumbrance.

Mr DAVIS: There are. If you are looking at the self-inflating ones or the auto-inflating ones. In the example of my incident, if I did not see that water coming and I was knocked over, there is a possibility that my lifejacket would have inflated because I would have been saturated at the time. But, also, if it had knocked me over, 10 metres behind me was another jagged rock ledge of a metre high. So I probably would have slammed into that and there is the possibility that that jacket could have been torn and I would have been unconscious, so in that case I would have been better off with another form of lifejacket. There are members of Canberra Fisherman's Club who will not go on the rocks without a lifejacket, and they are not necessarily the self-inflating ones, they might be the slimmer lined or better fitting, higher quality foam ones, specifically because of the risk that is there.

CHAIR: Are you aware that the Australian National Sportfishing Association [ANSA] is now trying to steer the Government towards, as well as the angel rings program, putting some money into their English as a second language program? You are probably aware that with regard to five of those seven deaths the people came from a non-English speaking background?

Mr DAVIS: Yes. I am not aware of the details, but Canberra Fisherman's Club is affiliated with ANSA and we do have an involvement with ANSA. Yes, I am aware that they have a rock fishing education program that goes along with the angel rings project, and that they are involved with people from non-English speaking backgrounds—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: May I seek clarification on that? Are you talking about the DVDs and CDs that have been produced by ANSA? I thought they had already been funded by Government going back some number of years.

CHAIR: They have, jointly by ACoRF and I think a Federal Government grant. They are now going back and saying, "Give us some more money because we need to expand it"; it is obviously not working. The

program I am talking about—which includes the English as a second language and rock fishing DVDs—were funded jointly by ACoRF and I think the Federal Government. I may stand corrected on that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We may seek clarification on that.

Mr IAN COHEN: There is a safety vest that is worn by big wave tow-in surfers. It is extremely fine profile and very effective. It might be worthwhile having a look at that. It is a body-hugging vest that gets these people out of wipeout situations and is extremely effectively. There may be real opportunities look at the technology there, if it is not a bulky, ugly thing to wear that could do the job.

Mr DAVIS: Inflatable vests are also an opportunity.

Mr IAN COHEN: I think your point on inflatable—

Mr DAVIS: If it was an auto-inflate vest, it might have been an issue. If it was not an auto inflate vest, was I in a condition to energise it—

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes, there are a lot of issues there. There seems to be a lot of angst in terms of your organisation's members and around the State. Yes, there are regulations with marine parks, but often, I put it to you, they are overstated and the panic button with a lot of recreational users and suchlike is often being pushed by people with political interests. Do you find that there has been pressure on your organisation, or have you had any visits from people such as ECOfishers and suchlike making political mileage out of this issue?

Mr DAVIS: I would say no. I know that there have certainly been some issues raised that "We are going to get locked out", and there have been some things said as to marine parks. But I do not recall being approached by any clubs with any specific agendas.

Mr IAN COHEN: No-one from the North Coast, for example, and no-one from ECOfishers?

Mr DAVIS: No, not directly. But I know there are emails or websites and so on where they are singing their song, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you think it is possibly to the detriment of your organisation not to get with the Government? Obviously there is a restriction, but often in the marine parks the no-fishing zones amount to less than 20 per cent of the overall marine park area.

Mr DAVIS: As I said before—and it is a controversial issue—that 20 per cent may well be 60, 70 or 80 per cent of the local fishing grounds that the local fishermen find productive. So it is only 20 per cent of the open area. A lot of the general fishing areas that are left, which is the other 80 per cent, is barren sand, and the fish just are not there.

Mr IAN COHEN: At Jervis Bay, for example, and also I understand at Batemans Bay, specific concessions were made. In terms of Jervis Bay, there was the opportunity for game fishing off the coast, and that was maintained as an active fishing area. They are fairly significant concessions made in the establishment of the marine park. Has that side of things been addressed at all?

Mr DAVIS: We are grateful that those areas are still available for us to fish.

Mr IAN COHEN: But they were kept open in response to user groups such as—

Mr DAVIS: Through a consultation process, yes, and we were listened to in those respects.

Mr IAN COHEN: Are there not a number of areas where you feel, through your organisation, that you were listened to?

Mr DAVIS: Certainly we were listened to in some areas, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: In your submission you talk about a peak body representing the interests of recreational fishers. Could you enlarge on that, particularly with regard to how that would work with ACoRF as it currently exists and how you would see that working together?

Mr DAVIS: I think there is definitely the need for a representative body to represent the angling community across the board. People cannot be bothered getting off their butts sometimes, so a representative body would make sure that their views are heard. In things like marine park debates, there are other groups that are well organised, that have funding through being well organised over the years, and the recreational fishing community would like to have a similar representation for consultation processes and for lobbying the Government members of Parliament so that our views are heard.

ACoRF is knowledgeable and interested fishermen, or people who have an interest in fishing, but they are there at the Minister's pleasure. So, in my opinion, they cannot come forward and be very realistic or outspoken about certain issues. If they feel strongly about them, they are there to advise, but they certainly cannot lobby the Government or lobby other politicians with their view. That is where I believe we miss out as a group.

Mr IAN COHEN: You would be seeking a peak fishing body, funded perhaps but independent of government, to give advice based on your experience?

Mr DAVIS: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: May I seek clarification? There is an organisation called Recfish, which is a peak body that was funded—

Mr DAVIS: That is the Commonwealth Fisheries. That is the Commonwealth peak body, and they are represented—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: May I finish my question? That is a peak body that was funded Federally and also by the New South Wales Government. Have you ever approached the Australian Capital Territory Government with regard to funding a national body such as Recfish, or the Federal Government about ongoing funding?

Mr DAVIS: Us as a group?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Given that you are from the Australian Capital Territory, and they were funded by the New South Wales Government and they did have Federal funding, I understand that neither State or Territory has provided any of that funding. Have you ever approached your Government in regard to that?

Mr DAVIS: No, not that I am aware of.

Mr IAN COHEN: The Australian Capital Territory is, as you have said, a peak catchment for, say, both Jervis Bay and Batemans Bay?

Mr DAVIS: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: We have had quite a few reports—and there is obviously a lot of variation, different experiences with different individuals or groups. Batemans Bay people are saying fewer people are coming down, businesses are suffering, the marine park is being quite negative, and there is negative information getting around. On the other hand, we have quite a few businesses saying that locals cannot get in the water at Jervis Bay during the peak season, there is such an influx of people in boats, on the boat ramps, et cetera, and businesses are enjoying a lot of success. Is that difference in perspective just a belief, or is it realistic? Do you see it from your side of the highway coming down to the coast? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr DAVIS: I do not think the introduction of the marine park has prevented people from Canberra going down to the coast, no, if that is your question. The roads are still very busy on weekends going down and returning from the coast, so there are a lot of people still going there. Whether they are participating in activities in Batemans Marine Park or not, I do not know. But it has not affected us as a club; we still go down there. But there are some areas where, as I said before, we cannot fish any longer.

Mr IAN COHEN: But from your experience and your club's experience, it has not blunted the rush to go fishing in that area?

Mr DAVIS: When we were approached by the Batemans Marine Park to have to have a permit to hold our club outings down there, there was quite a lot of sentiment within the club then, "Why bother going down to the coast?" It was just seen as another form of regulation and another opportunity maybe to find out where we liked to fish. This is the sentiment that is there once again: If we disclose these spots we may well lose—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Excuse me. Was this for your competitions?

Mr DAVIS: They are not competitions. We do not hold any competitions as such. Within the club we have a yearly competition where people can fish on any given day of the year, and they can catch fish and score points for those fish. We organise fishing and social outings on a monthly basis. I think around six of those would be down on the coast per year. There are no entry fees; it is not an organised fishing competition. But we still have to apply for a permit from the Batemans Marine Park to hold those competitions down there; that was how it was explained to us.

Mr IAN COHEN: You feel that when you give away your fishing spots, the marine parks jump on them? You do not feel it is just a legitimate scientific exercise where they are assessing the most sensitive areas and looking at that as an incubation area, if you like? Do you really think they are just jumping on fishing spots; that is the main criteria for their assessments?

Mr DAVIS: I understand there is a scientific assessment to break it up into the different bioregions and the like. But there is, throughout the fishing community, that sentiment that whatever we disclose will get locked away. That is widespread throughout the fishing community, not only within New South Wales but—

Mr IAN COHEN: There is no doubt that it is widespread, and I appreciate that. But is it not just one of those notorious, tall fishing stories that get currency and people run that around a community, and there has been a great deal of fear and some pushing of that idea by vested political interests and suchlike, to stir things up?

Mr DAVIS: I do not think the communications strategy associated with the creation of marine parks has been all that great, and that is where some of this has come from. Even some of the so-called specialists, the scientists, cannot agree on whether the science has been put forward for the establishment of marine parks or the benefits of marine parks. We have scientists that cannot agree as to whether that is the case or not. I think a lot of the communication strategy and communication within the groups is a big failing on those—

Mr IAN COHEN: You are saying that there has been a failure in the overall setup of adequate communication and consultation overall?

Mr DAVIS: There certainly was consultation there, but the information for us so that we can digest the information is not easily accessible. Some of the science that is associated with it is very hard to come by, and then for the man on the street it is probably hard to digest, to see whether it is valuable.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Your submission states that the Canberra Fisherman's Club raises money to stock native fish through its annual Canberra Carp-Out. Can you tell us about this event, and about the effects that fish stocking has on the environment?

Mr DAVIS: The event itself is something we have been running now for three years; I think we have had three carp-outs. I think we have sought funding to run these events on two occasions from the Federal Government, and the last one was from the Australian Capital Territory Government. There are two main benefits of the event: to raise money for fish stocking. We also donate the other 50 per cent of the proceeds to the Eden-Monaro Cancer Support Group. This year I think we raised \$6,000 throughout the day and we have put \$3,000 into fish stocking. I am sorry, this year we raised \$12,000, so we put \$6,000 towards fish stocking within the Australian Capital Territory region and \$6,000 for the Even Monaro Cancer Support Group.

As far as the fish stocking is concerned, we are adding on to what is in the Canberra region. That is there because in a lot of cases the local weights do not necessarily provide for the fish to breed themselves. So we are adding to the put-and-take fishery that is there, and that provides the whole community with recreational fishing activities within the Canberra region, and it does take the pressure off the natural recruitment that does happen in some areas.

CHAIR: May I seek clarification. With regard to the carp-out event, what do you actually do? Do you kill carp?

Mr DAVIS: We fish for carp.

CHAIR: You are not releasing carp?

Mr DAVIS: No, we fish for carp. Last year we removed in excess of a tonne of fish out of Lake Burley Griffin in the day. This year we had 2,049 people within the Canberra area fishing on that one day, who entered that competition, and the carp and the redfin that we extract from the lake, which are both pest fish—one of our sponsors is ANUtech and they recycle those, and I think within one week they are mulch on their rose beds at the university.

Mr IAN COHEN: What is the estimation of the amount of carp and redfin in the lake? What is the tonnage that we are talking about?

Mr DAVIS: I do not know, but I would have a guess and say we are fighting a losing battle because you remove that sort of mass and they are just going to fill the hole. That is where fish stocking comes into it as well, because if you put more native fish in there, they themselves, once they reach a suitable size, will feed on the small redfin and small carp, so another benefit of fish stocking is the reduction of pest fish.

CHAIR: That seems to be the evidence that has been presented from the Fisheries people and from other angling groups, that where native fish are introduced, over a period of time they will grow in size and predate on the carp and redfin.

Mr DAVIS: Yes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Given that Canberrans go to Batemans Bay quite a lot and fish there, I would like to know your thoughts regarding marine parks. Looking at Jervis Bay, there seems to be quite good consensus that the marine park is working okay, there has been plenty of consultation, and it is accepted reasonably well, if not really well, but if you talk to people at Batemans Bay there seems to be quite a bit of disenchantment. They say they did not have enough consultation and areas of fishing that were hotspots for people have been taken away. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr DAVIS: The answer to some of that would be yes, I do not think the consultation process—I do not know whether we were really involved. As I said, I went to the one at Narooma and I do not know whether there was as much involvement as we would like. I suppose I am going back to the anti-marine park sentiment, but some of the reason for resentment is that when the recreational fishing havens were created that was at our expense, and that is what we have paid back to get recreational fishing havens, where in some instances the marine parks have taken things away from us, I suppose, and to lock up those areas, to buy out those, that was all done at government expense, so the people who are beneficiaries of the sanctuary areas now have not had to pay for them and do not have to pay for any upkeep.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: The other thing that came out was the fact that business houses are finding it very difficult and are under a lot of strain because people are not fishing there as much as they used to. Would that be Canberrans' view as well, so they do not come down as often as they did?

Mr DAVIS: I do not think it has affected the majority of people from our club, we still go down there, but I am sure that there are people who no longer go down there because they might not be as informed as to what the marine park boundaries mean. Anthony and I were speaking on the way down about one of his friends in North Stradbroke Island who was talking about the marine parks that have been set up there, and their impression was that because there was a marine park they could not fish there, full stop, whereas in fact, providing it is not a sanctuary zone, you probably can fish there. There would probably be a lot of people who are under that impression.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: How can you change that misrepresentation of what is going on?

Mr HEISER: I did a comparison of the Fisheries website and the Marine Parks Authority website and I think the Marine Parks Authority website could adopt some of the things that are on the Fisheries website in terms of being more open and transparent. For example, with the minutes of meetings of the Advisory Council

on Recreational Fishing and the Marine Parks Authority, ACoRF frequently publishes their minutes and you can read what is discussed at those meetings, so it is very open and transparent, whereas the only minutes that are published on the Marine Parks Authority website are for 5 May 2009. There is mention of a meeting scheduled for early December 2009, but the minutes do not give much away.

The annual report for the Department of Industry and Investment has a specific section on fisheries whereas the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water—I had a bit of trouble trying to find a section on marine parks and it appears that it is interspersed throughout the annual report, so it might help if you put them all in one section so that people like myself can go to the website, not have to go through the entire PDF document but go straight to the section. The other example relates to research. The Fisheries website has a science and research page and they have an extensive library of abstracts and reports for research going as far back as 1998 for wild fisheries, aquaculture and aquatic systems, and they provide details of current research. With the Marine Parks Authority website, you have the research framework, you have a bibliography of scientific literature and then you have the research work plans for each year, but they do not really go out of their way to even give you abstracts of what the outcome of all the completed research is, so having that on the website will help inform all the fishing writers and magazines.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: You have given us some very good suggestions about having information available to people. The consultation process was fairly enormous—90 public meetings. Do you think it has fallen into the same trap that a lot of consultation falls into when people do not get their expectations on the other side and, if so, how do we resolve that?

Mr DAVIS: Well, is it consultation or just a selling exercise? There is a perception there.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We were shown two maps—before the proposal and after consultation—and there were changes. The other thing about that that was interesting is that habitat zones were really quite large throughout the Batemans Marine Park, but even when the questions were asked of fisher persons they did not register that. There was an incredible area of habitat zone, which is available to recreational fishers, which was the buy-out process. It was as if they did not register that that had happened. In Jervis Bay, the majority of the habitat zones, although they had negotiated some little areas, were in sand country. Many of the Batemans Bay habitat zones were in reef country. People had not grabbed hold of the information very well. Can you comment on that?

Mr DAVIS: I am not sure. It could well be that people were not aware of what was under the water. From Canberra you have a few spots where you fish because people have told you about it. There is a lot of water out there. That could be one of the reasons. A lot of the spots in the Batemans Marine Park—there might be a lot of reef, but there is also a lot of sand from beaches just going out.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: That is right, they said it moves.

Mr DAVIS: It gets back to the argument about the prime spots. The prime spots need to be preserved, I am not going to deny that, but they also are prime fishing spots and they have been taken away.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: So there is a perception of loss.

Mr DAVIS: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: In relation to the review process that occurs each five years following a marine park, it would appear from what we heard at Jervis Bay that they are actively working with interest groups to amend any big issues and scientific data is constantly being collected. I agree with you that it is not published anywhere and it would be helpful if it was. Do you have plans on how you are going to participate in the review process that will occur for Batemans Bay in 2012?

Mr DAVIS: No, we do not have any plans.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Do you have any ideas on what would be an effective way to go?

Mr DAVIS: If there has been scientific evidence or gain throughout the previous five years then that needs to be put forward. A lot of the evidence that is there now shows that the benefits of marine parks and

sanctuary zones are not necessarily within New South Wales. If there was local data that could show the benefits and if that was communicated effectively to the man on the street—and I am not exactly sure how to do that, but the website may well be one way. It has probably been said before that there is already a huge database of adults that buy licences to fish. That could be our source or a means to communicate with people, if you have people's addresses and email addresses.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is not very complete data.

Mr HEISER: There are also local papers, like the freebie papers that you get in the suburbs. We have written a number of articles to promote the Canberra Carp-Out and I do not think we have had any difficulties getting stuff printed.

Mr DAVIS: It was written by the *Chronicle*—they wrote those for us—and it was actually fantastic advertising.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: We have had that suggestion from up north, about using the newspaper because a lot of people do not have computers.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In your opening statement I think you talked about the public's right to fish.

Mr HEISER: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And you specifically referred to Tiwi islands where the public is restricted. How is the public restricted?

Mr HEISER: Having been in the Territory for about a year, I followed closely what was happening originally, and since I have moved back to Canberra I have only been watching and sort of updating what is on the ABC website.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What exactly is the restriction?

Mr HEISER: As a result of the Blue Mud Bay decision, you now need to get a fishing licence from one of the land councils to fish in any intertidal zone on Aboriginal land.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So they are not restricted, but they need a licence?

Mr HEISER: They are not restricted. They need a licence.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So, when you are talking about the public right to fish, what are you envisaging there? If you are talking about native title, is it just the decision of the High Court?

Mr HEISER: No, this does not affect native title. This is not the native title decision.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, I understand, but you are saying the public right to fish. What exactly are you talking about? You said you wanted the Government to enshrine the public right to fish. Are talking about a bill of rights?

Mr HEISER: No. I just want some legislation to affirm that the public right of fishing has not been extinguished in New South Wales either by the Marine Parks Act or the Fisheries Management Act.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So you want something similar to what we have done with mining where we say that mining within New South Wales is held by the New South Wales Government on behalf of the people, the resources underneath the ground, as opposed to anything that might be happening above ground?

Mr HEISER: I am not familiar with mining laws, sorry.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We are talking about a resource.

Mr HEISER: It is to reaffirm a principle of common law to ensure it is not unintentionally extinguished. I am fairly certain the Legislative Assembly in Darwin was not aware that when it passed the Fisheries Act many years ago it would result in what is happening today. Part of the purpose of my section on the public right of fishing was to make the public more aware of the existence of that right.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am sorry, you are talking about common law. Common law is only as good as government legislation. The Government has a right to legislate, particularly in regard to resources.

Mr HEISER: Sure.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The waterways, the catchment areas, from inlands out to the sea are all public resource to be managed.

Mr HEISER: It is a public right of fishing, it is not—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, it is a public resource that needs to be managed. There are certain areas where fishing is prohibited, so I am not sure what you mean by the public right to fish.

Mr HEISER: The public right of fishing is that in any intertidal or seawaters the public has a right to fish, and that right is unrestricted in that—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So that would override sanctuary zones?

Mr HEISER: No. Legislation would regulate the public right of fishing. You need legislation to ensure that fish are not depleted by the public right of fishing but the public right of fishing is, sort of, a guarantee that we are not going to be locked out of our fishing spots.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But if we legislate to lock you out of your fishing spot—

Mr HEISER: That overrides it—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Therefore—

Mr HEISER: —in a particular spot.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Let him answer.

Mr HEISER: In a particular spot, yes, it will be overridden.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Point of order: Mr Heiser is attempting to answer the question and he continues to be interrupted by the member.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am asking for clarification. Therefore—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Let him answer.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. I am not sure whether you have covered this issue in your submission. Could you take on notice the question from Ms Voltz and try to explain in a bit more detail the point you were trying to make earlier?

Mr HEISER: Sure.

CHAIR: I draw this session to a close. With the detail that is in your submission I am sure the Committee would like to keep you and us you for another couple of hours. Thank you for coming today, it has been a long trip for you. Thank you for your submission, it is very detailed—19 detailed recommendations for the Committee to consider. Any questions you may have taken a notice today or any questions the Committee was unable to ask you, would you take them on notice?

Mr DAVIS: Yes.

CHAIR: Could you undertake to return the answers to those questions within 21 days of receiving them?

Mr DAVIS: Yes.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 7.19 p.m.)