

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON CRONULLA FISHERIES
RESEARCH CENTRE**

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

At Sydney on Monday 3 September 2012

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. N. Blair
The Hon. D. J. Clarke
The Hon. C. Faehrmann
The Hon. M. A. Ficarra
The Hon. M. S. Veitch
The Hon. S. J. Whan

CHAIR: Welcome to the second public hearing of the Select Committee on the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. Before we commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal clan, the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to the elders, past and present, of the Eora Nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

This Committee was established in June 2012 to examine various aspects of the decision to relocate the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence, including the impact that the decision will have on the research being carried out at the centre and its effect on the staff and families who cannot move to other areas of New South Wales. The Committee will also review the costs and benefits of the decision and the potential loss of scientific expertise held by staff who are unable to relocate. Today the Committee will hear from representatives of the Sutherland Shire Council and then three panels of witnesses.

The first panel consists of witnesses from the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence and the Public Service Association. The second panel includes representatives of the National Marine Science Centre, the Australian Marine Sciences Association, the Australian Society for Fish Biology, and Scientific and Environmental Services. The third and final panel consists of representatives from Saltwater Fishcare, the Australian National Sportfishing Association and ECOfishers NSW. There will one further hearing on Monday 10 September when the Committee will hear evidence from other organisations and individuals, including the Minister. Today the Committee will also hold a public forum at Parliament House from 5.30 p.m. in the Jubilee Room. Details of those events are available on the Committee's website or by contacting the Committee Secretariat.

The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public hearings. Copies of the guidelines governing broadcast of the proceedings are available from the table by the door. In accordance with guidelines of the Legislative Council for the broadcast of proceedings, members of the Committee 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 this Committee the media must take responsibility for what is publishes and what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

Witnesses are advised that if there are any questions they are not able to answer today but that they would be able to answer if they had more time, or certain documents on hand, they are able to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer at a later date, usually within 21 days. Witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendants or the Committee clerks. I also remind you that freedom afforded to witnesses by parliamentary privilege is not intended to provide an opportunity to make adverse reflections about specific individuals. Witnesses are asked to avoid making critical comments about specific individuals and, instead, speak about general issues of concern. I remind everyone to please turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

CAROL PROVAN, Mayor, Sutherland Shire Council, and

JOHN WILFRED RAYNER, General Manager, Sutherland Shire Council, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms PROVAN: Yes, I do. I appreciate the opportunity to present, on behalf of Sutherland Shire Council, to the Legislative Council Select Committee. Since the announcement of the closure of the Cronulla fisheries centre in September 2011 council has made representations to the Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson, MP, and to the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP, and to other members of Parliament, including Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, MLC. Council has made a number of points in its argument against this closure. Most importantly, council is concerned about the potential loss of experienced staff and scientific knowledge to the State of New South Wales through this closure.

Other points include: no business case or financial analysis has been undertaken to support the proposed closure; recent financial investment to the site will be wasted; the adverse impact on Sutherland shire as a region to the benefit of other regions—by this I mean loss of jobs—the flow-on effect to small businesses in the area and the cumulative effect with other recent closures and businesses in our Sutherland shire; moving staff to Chowder Bay, Mosman, is contrary to the decentralisation objectives; uniqueness of quality of research that can be undertaken at Cronulla compared with other centres; the close links with universities which will be totally lost; the splitting of research, commercial and recreational teams, and relocating to, maybe, 15 separate locations across the State will lead to poorer interaction with fishers, scientists, and the like; the strong opposition from commercial and recreational fishers; and the difference in water quality between Cronulla and the brackish water at Port Stephens.

Council has always felt that the argument put forward by government on the reason for the closure could not be supported by fact. I believe that site visits by the Committee and other presentations would demolish the arguments presented that: the Cronulla site has limited access; Cronulla has constraints, with modernisation expansion capacity; decentralisation of the centre will ensure there is a greater interaction between fishers, scientists and fisheries managers; and this initiative will be undertaken in the manner which meets the needs of all fishing stakeholders while also providing associated economic benefits to those regional centres.

The council has put a contrary argument in its submission to that presented by the Government. As you are aware, council strongly opposes the closure but accepts that the Government has taken a position, and will not change its position, and therefore council must respect that decision and seek the best outcome for the site and for the people of the Sutherland shire and, indeed, the many people who visit Sutherland shire for recreation. It is hoped that council being honest about its thoughts on the decision and the process will not jeopardise its request for State Government funding and support to convert the site to open space use.

Council's submission outlines its detailed case against the closure. Council has made a submission to Mr David Harley, who I must say is in sympathy with the council. He has consulted with the community and has taken detailed notes about what the council has said, and it thanks him for his concern. Council believes the following general principles should apply to the use of the site—this is probably council's wish list: open space linking Salmon Haul, The Esplanade and Darook Park; other appropriate community uses such as education and occupation by government agencies—I believe Mr Harley has taken that into consideration; a low-key commercial facility such as a cafe or kiosk to provide a revenue flow to assist in maintenance and management of the site. Site values: preservation and management of the site's Aboriginal, natural and heritage values. Land ownership preferred options: community use, open space and commercial facility to be transferred to the council or managed by a very special trust; and other land may be utilised for research, education and government agencies, to be exercised and managed by the Government, a management committee or a special trust or a special trust for the whole site properly resourced from the handover.

The finance: all costs associated with decommissioning and/or demolishing of unwanted structures to be met by the State Government; site works necessary for employment and safety of public to be met by the State Government; maintenance and improvement of facilities and surrounds by use of other parties to be met by those parties; revenue streams from low-key commercial facilities to remain with council and/or special trust to manage and improve community and open spaces; council not to be burdened with any establishment costs; if

other parties have roles or interests they must contribute financially; and a condition assessment of all buildings should occur to determine potential benefit and/or use of each building.

Council believes that the future use of this site—assuming that there will be a closure—should predominantly be open space as exists with adjoining parklands such as Darook Park, Salmon Haul and The Esplanade. There will be significant cost associated with creating a park worthy of the site and council requests that these costs be met by the State Government. As council does not have access to the site it is unable to provide any costs associated with planning and developing the site. However, a preliminary inspection shows that there are significant costs associated with the demolition of buildings, reconfiguring of the car parking space and internal access and creating useful open space. Like many parts of the Sutherland shire, particularly the areas around the ocean and the waterways, council has provided facilities which are used by people from all over Sydney, particularly the St George area and western Sydney—with Cronulla having the only train station to the beach. When converted to open space this site will become a regional facility and will draw visitors from all parts of the metropolitan area. Therefore the significant establishment costs should not be met by the ratepayers of the Sutherland shire.

I would assume that the relocation of the centre will bring an overall financial gain to the State Government. Part of that gain should serve as compensation for job losses in the Sutherland shire and the impact on business, and the fact that it will not just be the residents of the Sutherland shire using this new facility. I am very appreciative of the opportunity to make this presentation to the Committee. On the understanding that the Government's position will not change, council seeks an outcome that would be in the mix of uses proposed in this submission ensuring the protection of the cultural, heritage and environmental values of this unique site.

CHAIR: Did the council share in any consultation with the Government before this announcement was made? Did the council have any contact with the Minister?

Ms PROVAN: We have not had a reply to any of our correspondence as yet.

CHAIR: So there was no contact with you before the announcement was made? You were not involved in any consultation?

Mr RAYNER: No, there was no contact made prior to the announcement.

CHAIR: You used the term "open space" a few times in your opening statement. There are obviously many buildings on this site but you are not sure at this stage how many buildings are to be retained or demolished, is that correct?

Ms PROVAN: We are waiting to hear from Mr Harley. He was talking to the community and he has spoken to a lot of people about their concerns and about what they see happening on this site. I believe he has spoken to the water police and everyone involved in fishing in that area as well.

CHAIR: Have you done any assessment of the heritage value of the buildings, if some buildings are to be retained in any case?

Mr RAYNER: Some of the buildings are heritage listed. In fact, one has had money spent on it recently. Those buildings I would understand should be retained. Mr Harley, as the Mayor has said, is conducting an analysis of the site and what would be appropriate uses, but through that consultation, and also through feedback that the council has received, the residents of that part of south Cronulla peninsular feel strongly that the majority of that area should revert to public open space. It does provide a good link between The Esplanade, Salmon Haul and Darook Park and it is something the community has been after for decades. If the council has not been successful in stopping the closure, it sees that it needs to try and get the best possible use of that site for the community. In doing that, it respects that the Government has said that the site will not be developed. So the council has come from the position that if it is not going to be developed then community use should be what prevails, protecting of course those heritage values that exist on the site.

CHAIR: If view of the statement "not be developed", have you made any inquiries under freedom of information as to whether there are any development plans in any government department—the Lands department or the Treasury?

Mr RAYNER: No, we have not made that inquiry under freedom of information.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Can you tell the Committee what the reaction to the closure has been in the Sutherland shire and what it means to the community generally?

Ms PROVAN: Extremely disappointed. The residents are very concerned. They held many rallies and tried to do everything they possibly could to get an audience with the Minister to put our case forward. We understand that decentralisation is the choice of the Government—this is what they wanted to do—but when we started asking questions it did not seem like decentralisation to us; they certainly were not going very far away. They were taking from our economy and propping up someone else's economy, which seems such a contradiction. The amount of work involved—probably the Fisheries was the biggest employer of people in the Cronulla area. So all those jobs were lost and it was just a snowball thing because it was not just a matter of dad losing his job and being relocated; the whole family was in turmoil. I had so many families ring me and many other councillors saying: We have to take the kids out of school and we have to move on. It just seems so unfair. This does not make sense to us. Why would they take this amazing place away? With the scientific knowledge that is there and the heritage it just did not make any sense. It was very frustrating for us as a shire.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You said you have spoken to people who have said they would have to take their kids out of school and move on. Of course a lot of people have indicated that they cannot move. So it would seem they are losing employment in the Sutherland shire and it is impacting on the economy. Would you like to expand on that?

Ms PROVAN: That is exactly right. We just recently had Caltex moving away from us—we have got that closure. We had Carbon Black at one stage. There is a lot of unemployment happening in the Shire and it does impact on all of us. As I said to our general manager, is Toyota on shaky grounds? At this stage they are still there but we do not know what is around the corner. We have to try and fight to keep these people here. As I said, the Government might see it as propping up some other community but it is doing it against us and we are losing a lot of employment. Even Sylvandale—a company that supplies food and disabled people work there—it has impacted on them as well. There are so many arms and legs to this site, which helps so many people.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: One of the reasons given for the closure, as I am sure you are aware, is issues of access and capacity for modernisation. What is the council's view regarding those justifications for the centre's closure?

Ms PROVAN: I cannot understand how they could say access. It is the most accessible site. You can walk into it from many different directions and it is a link. It is the headland of the shire; you walk right around it. That does not seem to be a good argument to me at all. There is so much room for expansion and there is so much access. I do not know whether Mr Rayner can enlighten me any more on that.

Mr RAYNER: No, but our submission did make that point. For members of this Committee who have visited the site, I am sure there was not a problem of access, getting to it. In terms of modernisation, there had been—probably the Fisheries or the departmental people could talk more about it later—about \$1 million invested in one of the laboratories just recently. It is a big site and some of the buildings are in very good condition. I fail to see why, if that was the direction, the site could not be modernised. I guess vacating the site also leads to some other issues such as how we manage the heritage fish tanks that are currently on the foreshore. I am just not sure how that will happen into the future but the council did find that the arguments for the closure did not stack up.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that council has made several freedom of information [FOI] requests—at least one, possibly more. Why did you feel the need to make FOI requests?

Mr RAYNER: I guess the council was considering that there must be more to this than has been stated as to the reasons. So we did make a number of requests of the Minister, I think the Premier's office and the department to get what information we could. The council was working with the union and the community because this is a very compatible establishment with our local community and was looking for something to try to support arguments against the closure. That was the reason that the FOIs were lodged.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: And you said at the beginning that the Minister has not replied to your correspondence. Is that correct? Have you met with the Minister?

Ms PROVAN: Sorry, I might be corrected. The Minister has.

Mr RAYNER: The Minister has and we have had two meetings with the Minister. There is one outstanding letter to the Premier, but the Premier has written to the Sydney coastal councils, of which we are a member, and maybe that was the reason we did not get a direct response but we were able to look at that response from the Premier.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Did the FOI requests that you submitted tell you anything that the Government did not or perhaps reveal anything that might be of interest to the Committee that you may not have put in your submission? I am finding it a little difficult to get information from the director general, for example.

Mr RAYNER: No, there was not a lot in those FOIs that we were not able to access in other ways.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: There was definitely no business case revealed in the FOIs?

Mr RAYNER: No.

Ms PROVAN: If I might add, in the very beginning when we were first aware of what was happening we tried very hard to speak to the Minister and she was not available to us. That was very frustrating for us, and we were told, "This is what's going to happen", and either we came up with a plan of what we wanted on the site, and if we did not do it then they would do it for us. So we were I suppose between a rock and a hard place. We were very concerned that we were going to lose this site but then we thought we also would have the opportunity of saying what we would like to see there. So it was a very difficult time for us as a community and a council to know how to approach this.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you done any quantifying of the costs this closure will have on the community?

Mr RAYNER: We have not directly done any work on that. I know there are certain multipliers that can go through into other job losses, business impacts. We are aware of the benefits that regions are seeing through those relocations, and if you applied the same factor to the losses that we would experience it could be around 350 jobs.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What are the unemployment statistics for the Sutherland shire compared to the rest of New South Wales? Do you know, given that you have just said about 350 job losses?

Mr RAYNER: I think we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the State at the present time but those figures would not take into account the direct and indirect losses associated with Fisheries and they would not take into account the losses at Caltex, which will occur over the next two years, and I think that is 350 jobs plus about 700 contractors plus others who do business with the refinery. So I think that multiplier will be reflected in future unemployment statistics in Sutherland shire.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Just so I have it clear in my mind, in February the council—I am assuming the two of you and perhaps others—met with the Minister, her staff and the Director General of the Department of Primary Industries to discuss relocation of services from the Cronulla fisheries site. We believe that during the meeting all of you clearly articulated strongly the community's concern regarding the move of the site and all the staff. I believe the Minister acknowledged your hard work in presenting the matter to her and also advised that the Minister made it clear at the time that the decision would not be reversed and that the relocation process was already on track and proceeding as planned.

We listened to the statement that you have put on record, and thank you for that advice. What has been the actual process involved from a council level in determining the options for the future? Let us say, if the centre is closed and you have outlined certain activities that you want and certain funding situations that you require, what sort of processes have been involved to come to that stated position?

Ms PROVAN: I believe David Harley, who has been appointed by the Minister, came to us at council first to introduce himself and say why he was here. He did a thorough investigation at the site. He met on site, I believe he met some of the staff at the Fisheries. He spoke to so many people in the community, and I have had feedback from that. As I mentioned earlier, he was very sympathetic to what was happening. He thought it was an amazing site of excellence, just the marine biology, he had never been there before. I do not think he had been to the Sutherland shire before—I am not sure—but he had not been to the Fisheries. He did say that he

would do everything in his power to come up with something that the community would love and respect. I believe he is doing that because we are getting feedback that he has spoken to so many people and he is trying to come up with the best outcome for the people of Sutherland shire.

We want to keep the Fisheries there. We want the marine biology. Just the resources and the students who come there and the scientific research. The day we went there, there were a couple of young students investigating all sorts of sea things and this will be all gone and that will never happen again. It is something we will never retain. I do not think it is something you can put in another location because it is years and history that has gone on for so long. It is just very sad this is happening.

Mr RAYNER: If I might add, the process the council went through, we have got pretty intimate knowledge of that site which has been collected over many years. We did have a workshop with the councillors to talk about what possible uses that site could revert to, bearing in mind the council's bottom line was keeping the centre open. From that discussion, a draft paper was put together outlining the uses, the issues of funding and the issues of management. That was endorsed by council and then sent off to David Harley for his attention and it has also been outlined in the submission made to this Committee.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Have you had much interaction from some of the groups that are going to appear before the Committee today and next Monday? Have you had much interaction or have you had submissions from the Australian Marine Sciences Association or the Society for Fish Biology? Has there been much interaction from them with the council—with the mayor, officers or councillors?

Ms PROVAN: Not on my part.

Mr RAYNER: Not directly.

Ms PROVAN: We all have a role to play and we are doing the best we can.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Would you say that, in your opinion, council has been kept informed on a regular basis with respect to the future of the site?

Ms PROVAN: I think it is still a work in process.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are you happy with the level of communication you are receiving?

Ms PROVAN: Yes, David Harley has been extremely good. He has rung and keeps us up to date with where he is at. That is where we are at at the moment.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Councillor Provan, you are aware that on a number of occasions the Minister has said that this site is not going to be sold off?

Ms PROVAN: That is right.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You accept that?

Ms PROVAN: Well, the Minister has said that but is she going to be the Minister all the time for this site?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Are you aware that previous governments had plans to sell the site?

Ms PROVAN: No.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You have never heard that before?

Ms PROVAN: No.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You hear that for the first time today?

Ms PROVAN: I thought we were safe there forever.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Would you be surprised to learn that previous governments had been considering other plans for that site?

Ms PROVAN: I had no knowledge of that.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: That would surprise you?

Ms PROVAN: I have been on council for 11 years, on and off, and I have never heard that before.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Would it surprise you that previous governments had sought commercial valuation of the site?

Ms PROVAN: I should imagine governments would want to know what their assets were and to value their assets but I had not heard that they were going to sell it in the future. I suppose I did not think about it.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When you have met with the Minister or the Minister's representatives, you have made clear what you believe should happen to the site if the centre is closed down, to protect the heritage and so forth?

Ms PROVAN: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You said in your opening statement that you were concerned that what was involved here did not seem like decentralisation.

Ms PROVAN: No.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: What do you mean by that? If jobs are moving, for instance, to Port Stephens why would not that amount to decentralisation?

Ms PROVAN: Jobs were going to Mosman. Some were going to Port Stephens but some were going to Mosman, some were going to Nowra and I think some were going to Campbelltown.

Mr RAYNER: I think we were told Batemans Bay and Coffs Harbour. But as we understand, some have gone to other parts of Sydney and to Wollongong.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You do not think there is any issue of decentralisation here at all?

Ms PROVAN: There is part of it, I would say. When you put it to me like that yes, part of it.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You said in your opening statement that if the centre were closed down it would take the heritage away. Why would it take the heritage away? Did you get the impression, when you met with the Minister, that she was aware that there was aboriginal and cultural heritage associated with this site?

Ms PROVAN: I am sure she was aware and that is why she put someone like Mr Harley there to do the best he could for the site. But I suppose where it would lose the heritage is that it would lose the experience and the history that has been there for so many years. That is what I am referring to. It has been an amazing site and the amount of research and scientific knowledge that comes out of there is incredible. You will lose part of that. You will never move that somewhere else.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: At the beginning you said there would be flow-on effects to other small businesses in the area. Mr Rayner, you said that is an assumption—based on what? You have not done any studies of this at all?

Mr RAYNER: No, I have certainly not done any studies but I think any time that you take a large group of employees out of a fairly well-defined centre like Cronulla, it is going to have spin-off effects to other businesses that might provide to Fisheries and might even just provide shopping opportunities for people who might work there and who would call in on the way home. Those spin-off effects are pretty well documented when you talk about the multiplier effect of putting a business or a Government department in a country town. If

you pull those people out, then the reverse must happen. But we certainly have not done any close analysis of that.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Can I clarify again—it may have been clarified by the Hon. Cate Faehrmann—but you said in your opening address that the Minister had not responded to your correspondence. Can we clarify that that is still the case?

Ms PROVAN: In the very beginning I stated that, when we heard of the closure we instantly tried to contact the Minister to have an audience to please explain to us why they were doing what they were going. I do not know if it has been documented how many times.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: The reason I ask is that in your mayoral minute, you quote a response from the Minister to your councillors, to your original letter. So when you make the statement that the Minister had not responded to your correspondence, the response has been quoted in your mayoral minutes. I wanted to clarify that that was responded to. But I also want to ask about the original request to meet with the Minister. When was the first time the Minister or her office actually met with council?

Mr RAYNER: I could not tell you exactly when we met with the Minister.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Are we talking weeks or months after the announcement?

Mr RAYNER: It would have been weeks. Just to clarify, the Minister has responded to the council and, as I said earlier, there was only one outstanding letter and that was the letter we wrote to the Premier. But the Minister has responded.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Councillor Provan, have you been at all those meetings? Were you at the original meeting with the Minister, the first meeting when she met with the council?

Ms PROVAN: I think the deputy mayor was there at the first meeting because I was tied up in another council issue. I was at the second one.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mayor Provan, we have been inquiring about the responses from the Minister and the written responses that you have received. Would you say that the Minister's written responses had adequately addressed your concerns?

Ms PROVAN: Yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: they satisfied you that she had a strong argument?

Ms PROVAN: Well, she is in control and she has the power to close it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Well, I don't know about that.

Mr RAYNER: The council took the position that it did not agree with the stated reasons for the closure and outlined those to the Minister and in the submission it has made.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You have made a number of mentions of your consultation with Mr Harley who is undertaking the work on future use of the site. Have you been given any indication of how the future use will ensure that those heritage assets you talked about will have ongoing maintenance funded?

Ms PROVAN: No, I have not.

Mr RAYNER: No, we have not. We are not privy, of course, to what Mr Harley will put to the Minister. We have had some general discussions about financing. We have outlined to Mr Harley that acquiring or obtaining this site would put an enormous financial drain on the council because it is way outside our required ten year financial plan. We do not have the funds to turn the site into alternative uses.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There is aboriginal heritage on the site but there are also a number of heritage listed items—the pools and things like that. They are maintained best when they are still being used and maintained by a tenant, I assume. Do you have any idea of what the cost of maintaining those would be?

Mr RAYNER: No, we have not had access to the site or to those figures. We do not have that information.

CHAIR: Have you tried to get access to the site? Have you asked for permission to inspect the site?

Mr RAYNER: Yes, we have been on the site on a number of occasions to look at it generally and the staff have been very courteous to us in what would be a very difficult exercise for them. We have been on the site but we have not drilled down into the costs of maintaining or running the site. We see that more as a departmental issue.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I understand one of the freedom of information requests you put in resulted in an email between the local member and Minister Hodgkinson's office, which included the advice to Mr Speakman that they could not save it but the site would remain in public ownership. Is it correct that the email said that?

Mr RAYNER: I would have to take that on notice but I do know the Premier has written to that effect, that the site will stay—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will definitely stay in public ownership?

Mr RAYNER: —in public ownership and will not be developed. I would have to check on the wording but the interpretation is public ownership.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is there no indication yet as to what form that public ownership would take?

Mr RAYNER: No.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You were talking about the flow-on benefits to small businesses. Has council spoken to small businesses that provide goods or services to Cronulla fisheries and, if so, what sorts of concerns have they expressed to you?

Ms PROVAN: The Sylvandale Foundation, which employs disabled people, has little business runs down there and they look after the catering. That is one business that will really feel the impact of it.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And presumably a number of other suppliers of goods and services to the local area. Have you been given any indication in your consultations with Mr Harley about whether the department has done estimates on the cost of decommissioning the site?

Ms PROVAN: No, we have not. We just know that he is still working on it. I believe he contacted Mr Rayner to say the work is still in progress and at this stage we have not heard any more.

Mr RAYNER: We are not sure of the costs of decommissioning the site but if you walk around the site, understanding that some buildings may be retained for government agencies, you will see that turning some of the area into open space would be a pretty significant cost because of the levels and the structures that are still on that site.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mayor Provan, we were talking about decentralisation before. What is your view of the way that a process of decentralisation should work? Do you consider the Cronulla area to be an area that needs to have government business decentralised away from it?

Ms PROVAN: That is a tricky one. The site itself is so well established; as I said before it is a site of unbelievable experience and heritage—and what comes out of that centre. I understand decentralisation; it is a policy of the Government. I just did not understand how a government could take it away from one community and put it in another when I think we have the best facilities here. We have listened to the arguments about the water condition in Port Stephens; it is not as good as the pristine waters of the Sutherland shire. There were so many things against moving this site. I hope I have answered that correctly.

STEVE WHAN: Some people would also think that a government metropolitan planning policy should be to have people living near where they work. Do you think this is helping that sort of objective?

Mr RAYNER: No it does not help that objective and through our local environmental plans and regional plans we have a policy of trying to get people working closer to where they live. In this whole decentralisation issue and the impact on Sutherland shire we feel also you need to question whether you really want to lose the assets we have on that site—the water quality, the proximity to the ocean, the bays, the unique nature of that site, and of course whether you want to lose the scientific knowledge to this particular site. It is a question of how the assets we have, and retaining them, balance up against a decentralisation objective.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You said you have had some meetings with the Minister about this decision.

Ms PROVAN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How many meetings?

Ms PROVAN: One.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Was the local member in attendance?

Ms PROVAN: No he was not. I believe he came in the day before or the day after—are you referring to Mark Speakman?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr RAYNER: The local member was not present at either.

Ms PROVAN: Not at our meetings.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Was he invited?

Mr RAYNER: I have no idea.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There were some rallies.

Ms PROVAN: Yes, there was a rally in Cronulla Mall and 18,000 people signed petitions in a matter of two days.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did the local member attend those rallies?

Ms PROVAN: I cannot recall whether I saw him there or not, there were so many people in the mall.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did the Minister go to the rallies?

Ms PROVAN: No. There was also a rally in front of Parliament House.

CHAIR: The local member publicly expressed opposition to the closure, did he not?

Ms PROVAN: Mr Speakman did come out. He was lobbied very well by the community. They spoke to him and they were very upset. He is a very good local MP.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I gather from his reaction following the announcement that he was not aware of the announcement that was about to be made.

Ms PROVAN: No he was not.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That begs the question of what sort of advice, or in political speak "heads up", the council was given about the decision to be announced?

Ms PROVAN: None.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Essentially do you want this decision to be overturned?

Ms PROVAN: Definitely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you happy about the level of consultation prior to the announcement?

Ms PROVAN: No.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Clearly you are very happy about Mr Harley's appointment and the process he is going through in relation to the future of the site.

Ms PROVAN: Yes. If this decision is going to stand we want the best outcome for our community.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When we visited the site we saw there were clearly a number of matters that needed to be taken into consideration—cultural sites and heritage sites and buildings—but also how they are going to be funded in the longer term. Without knowing what Mr Harley is going to deliver, clearly you would hope the council would have a serious involvement in that process, post-closure.

Ms PROVAN: As Mr Rayner said, we have not got the money to do it in our 10-year plan.

Mr RAYNER: We certainly would like to be involved in the future. If the area is going to revert to some other uses certainly we would like to do that, particularly if it is open space. We are very good at managing open space; that is part of our core business. We would want to be represented in a trust or whatever management structure is set up there. We do not particularly like the current structure of trusts where local government is given care, control and management of land because we think that any revenues, for example, that are generated on that site should stay on that site. As has been mentioned, it is going to be a very expensive site to maintain. The Crown lands trusts at the moment require that percentages go back to the State for other Crown lands but we see this one as being unique and something that down the track would be self-funding, although it would not be for quite some years.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just to be clear, you do not want the site sold?

Ms PROVAN: No.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You want the site to remain in public hands. If the Minister will not overturn the decision, do you want the site to remain in public hands?

Mr RAYNER: Definitely, and that is the feeling of the residents. After the closure and when David Harley put his advertisements in the paper seeking consultation a number of people contacted the council, particularly those who lived in close proximity. When it was explained to them the Government had said the site would not be developed and that we were pushing for predominantly open space on that site, bearing in mind there will be other uses, the community was at ease with it. I am certain they would be outraged if there was any proposal to sell or develop that valuable bit of land.

CHAIR: Unfortunately our allocated time has expired. Thank you for attending. Obviously you want the site to remain as a centre of excellence.

Ms PROVAN: Thank you for the opportunity to come here.

Mr RAYNER: Yes, it is much appreciated.

CHAIR: If you took any questions on notice you have 14 days to answer them. Members have a right to send you questions following your attendance at this hearing. We have to restrict it to 14 days because we are trying to get to the reporting date.

(The witnesses withdrew)

STEVEN JAMES KENNELLY, Director of Research, NSW Fisheries and Director, Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence, sworn and examined:

SHANE O'BRIEN, Assistant General Secretary, the Public Services Association, and

PETER BROWN, staff representative, Cronulla Fisheries Relocation Working Group, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance. We need to clarify your position in giving evidence today. Are any of you representing the Department of Primary Industries?

Professor KENNELLY: No.

Mr O'BRIEN: No.

Mr BROWN: No.

CHAIR: Would you state that—in your personal capacity?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, as a scientist.

Mr BROWN: I am speaking on behalf of the staff, not the department.

CHAIR: Thank you. Does anyone wish to make an opening statement?

Mr BROWN: Yes, please. On behalf of the staff of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence I would like to thank you all for supporting this inquiry and for your personal commitment in participating as Committee members. The time you have put into this inquiry and the genuine interest you displayed when meeting some of us on your recent site visit is greatly appreciated. It stands in stark contrast to our treatment so far by our executive management and the Minister in relation to the decision to close our workplace and effectively force most of us out of our jobs.

The staff feel that we have been deceived and the public misled about the reasons for the decision and the way in which it is being implemented. It brings no credit to the Government, the Minister or the bureaucrats in the department. Having witnessed the lack of due process, failure to follow basic standards of good governance, and deceptive and evasive conduct, staff have lost all confidence in the abilities of our executives to manage the fisheries resources of this State and to provide the leadership in ethics and good governance that are required for us to meet our obligations to the people of New South Wales. We also have no confidence in the implementation of the decision with respect to fairness of decision-making or the following of due process by these executives or by the relocation working group operating under the leadership of the executive director.

Based on the evidence available to the staff and the evidence that has been made publicly available to this Committee so far in this inquiry, the staff request that the Committee give strong consideration to the two following recommendations: reverse the decision to close our workplace; call to account for their conduct those responsible for the decision and its implementation. We submit this is necessary to protect standards of good governance in the public sector to do what is in the best interests of protecting our fishery resources and to acknowledge and repair the damage done to the staff of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence and their families.

I would like to draw to the attention of the Committee the submission from Sutherland Shire Council as I am concerned that the department may be trying to airbrush history. In it you will find a letter from the Premier in response to representations to the New South Wales Coastal Councils Association. The Premier outlines why the decision was made in some detail: lack of access; old site; get us closer to stakeholders, et cetera. This is a letter from the Premier of the New South Wales. It is not a press release or an off-the-cuff response from the Minister, a ministerial staff member or a bureaucrat. It is a carefully considered and prepared response from the Premier to all councils represented on the coast of New South Wales. Everyone is entitled to accept that these are the reasons the decision was made. We are also entitled to expect that if these reasons are found to be flawed then the decision needs to be reversed. Those responsible should not be permitted to invent a new set of reasons if the original ones are found wanting.

I submit that this Committee will find overwhelming evidence to state that the reasons for closing the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence are flawed. It is a unique, world-renowned research centre that co-locates administrators, managers and researchers in an easily accessible location for all stakeholders and it is being destroyed; it is not being relocated. Indeed, closing the centre is not a benign decision. Rather, it is a malignant decision that will eat away at the State's capacity to manage our precious fishery resources for years to come. The staff believe that the Premier has been badly advised and that the advice is so bad and so blatantly false as to constitute maladministration.

Additionally, I would like to draw your attention to the submission by the Save Cronulla Fisheries Group. In it you will find a reference to a study by Dr Stephen Ward of the Urban Development Research Institute, undertaken on behalf of the Queensland Government. This document outlines best practice in de-centralisation. Dr Ward finds that the two most important factors in a decentralisation are that staff are convinced of the merits and it makes business sense. In our case the decision constitutes an epic failure on both counts. It makes no sense whatsoever. The reasons provided are so spurious and so lacking in merit as to be offensive to those affected by the decision. It is obvious to the staff what an empty nod to decentralisation this whole saga has become.

Finally, I would like to draw to the attention of the committee the recent Premier's Commission of Audit report into the public service by Dr Kerry Schott, released on 9 August and made available on the Premier's website. Its release was accompanied by press releases from the Premier and the Treasurer and highlights deficiencies in decision-making and due process in the public sector. I suggest our situation may represent the poster child for the problems identified in Dr Schott's report. Sloppy decision-making with no business case or cost-benefit analysis is no way to run the State of New South Wales. The Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury guidelines need to be respected and followed. Based on the information available so far, the department stands condemned. Staff have given our executives repeated opportunities to transparently justify, with evidence, what is happening and they have consistently failed to do so, to which the staff have taken great offence.

The performance of the department representative so far in this forum is no surprise and in some small way you have walked a mile in our shoes. One big difference is you get to keep your jobs. It remains to be seen where the Minister and Premier finally stand on this issue. I will be happy to answer any questions pertinent to the terms of reference. Thank you.

CHAIR: Any other opening statements?

Mr O'BRIEN: On behalf of the Public Services Association I would also like to thank the Legislative Council for putting this Committee together. It has been a very difficult period for the staff concerned with the closure and the reasons given, and the subsequent alterations of those reasons given. The Public Services Association's concerns regarding the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence relate primarily to the rationale for the decision, inability of employees as major stakeholders to have any real input into the decision or its implementation and the inability to negotiate outcomes to alleviate impact on workers and their families. The association believes a decision will significantly disadvantage staff, yet there has been no evidence provided by the department to support a case for a greater public good outcome.

Some of the reasons given regarding expansion of the site and site constraints that limit that expansion fail when you consider that it now looks like up to 32 positions in the research areas will not be filled in the new location and in evidence already given to this Committee by the department there are no plans for expansion of the role of Fisheries in New South Wales. Against that backdrop, each worker is being forced by the Government to end their career or alternatively in most cases to disrupt their family or their partner's career, their children's schooling and their community networks to save their career.

Changes to public service structure and location should be based on the best possible outcome for the people of New South Wales. They should be underpinned by a business case, a cost-benefit analysis and an assessment of impact on service delivery. In this case not one of those things has been done. The association has sought meetings with the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Minister and provided a formal submission outlining staff concerns and made a formal request to discuss it. I have copies for the Committee to consider in its deliberations. We have been ignored by all of those people. On two further occasions we have attempted to arrange meetings with the Minister, but we have not received an answer to our requests. Attempts were also made by individual staff members to meet with the Minister. Any phone requests about arranging a meeting through her electorate office or the departmental office were usually answered with instructions to put the

request in writing. No meeting has taken place. Staff have collectively taken a series of actions—some of the which have been referred to by the Committee in questioning the council—in an attempt to get some sort of forum for meaningful discussion. All of those attempts have been unsuccessful.

The Public Service Association was specifically forbidden from participating in the working groups that management established; that is, the working groups that the department told the Committee had had some 42 meetings. The association has not been able to attend any of them. Instead, we were confined to meeting with what was known as the "industrial group". In our first meeting to consider the change management plan we were told that the department was under absolutely no obligation to reach agreement with the association. It would simply consider our feedback and ultimately it would decide on the content of the change management plan and advise the Minister accordingly. The only concession of significance in the discussion of the change management plan was the deletion of any reference to the decision to close the Cronulla facility being consistent with a business case. That concession was made because the department conceded that no business case existed. Whenever the association tried to discuss the rationale for the decision, or what we believe was the inappropriateness of it, and whether alternatives could be explored, it was advised that it would have to talk to the Minister or the director general. Subsequently written requests were made to the director general, who then referred the association back to the human resources representatives on the departmental industrial committee.

In relation to staff entitlements, I feel it is incumbent upon me to advise this Committee that there is nothing in excess of the minimum entitlement to staff on offer, despite some of the public statements that have been made. The Government has refused to implement any discretion in favour of affected staff with regard to how they are treated and the relocation. The department also employs a significant number of staff as long-term temporary employees. In the main, these people have been told to relocate with absolutely no guarantee of permanent employment. Those not willing to relocate will receive significantly reduced redundancy entitlements as a result of the Government's recent change to the managing excess employees policy. I am happy to explain that in detail under questioning. The issue of the treatment of long-term temporary employees is one that the association has tried to resolve. It has sought a commitment to permanent employment at new locations, but that has been to no avail. It has also sought the application of severance payments to long-term temporary employees in accordance with what they would have received prior to the change to the managing excess employees policy. It has done that on the basis that it sees this as a unique circumstance. The Government has refused to do that. It rejected the request stating that it believes it will act as an incentive to take redundancy rather than to relocate.

It is now 361 days since the announcement and despite all the issues for staff they are yet to hear any compelling argument for the move. The only rationale being offered now is the decade of decentralisation policy. There is no business case and no cost-benefit analysis. There is not even an estimate of the cost of actually going through with the plan. The plan with regard to decentralisation ignores the fact—and it is a fact—that Sydney metropolitan area does in itself have very significant regions and challenges in moving between regions to get from home to work. In my 10 years of negotiating restructures, relocations and associated redundancy programs in the New South Wales public service, my experience is that Treasury normally sets parameters in terms of both cost and timeframes. It is highly irregular for the department to be unable to provide upper and lower limits of projected employee-related costs after such a long period. The department has offered no information regarding capital costs or accommodation arrangements. It has not disclosed the cost of accommodation at the Mosman site or at Wollongong, Newington or Coffs Harbour. Nor has it disclosed the cost of reconstructing facilities at Port Stephens and Nowra. It has no idea about how the current site will be utilised and whether its future use will be a cost or a benefit to the taxpayers of New South Wales.

For the first time during my tenure with the Public Service Association it appears that there is absolutely no budget constraint on a move. The only benefits that have been outlined by the department in recent times have been that these jobs would bring some sort of benefit to regional communities. Accepting that argument is very difficult for our members for two reasons. First, they predominantly live locally and in a regional area of Sydney. I know that is difficult for some members to accept, but there is a real issue with people living close to work in Sydney and the associated transport problems. Secondly, it is very difficult for public servants in general to accept that answer because this Government itself rejected the argument of the benefit of having jobs in country areas in relation to the recent closure of Grafton jail. Not only did it reject it, it also sent in a riot squad to detain those people who might try to make it. For those reasons, the Public Service Association welcomes this inquiry and is more than happy to answer questions about employee entitlements and their treatment during the negotiations.

CHAIR: Would you like to table the documents to which you referred?

Mr O'BRIEN: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your assistance to the Committee. Professor Kennelly, please outline your experience and record. You are the director of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence.

Professor KENNELLY: Thank you for initiating this inquiry. It has been some time coming for us and we welcome the fact that it is finally occurring. I am here representing science—and fisheries science in particular. I am a scientist, and considered to be a pretty decent one. As background to fisheries science, politicians, Ministers, managers, senior bureaucrats get information from all sorts of different avenues. They get information from commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, conservationists, environmentalists and the general public. They are meant to absorb all that and come up with decisions.

The critical thing about wild-harvest fisheries is that the fish and the ecosystems that drive them are publicly owned resources. This is different from agriculture and aquaculture, where the products are owned by the farmers. Wild fish are owned by the public and the public expect politicians, Ministers and governments to manage those things on their behalf. Over the past 150-odd years, the public have anticipated and believed that governments are doing this on their behalf based on science. They like to think that their fisheries are being managed in the most scientifically valid way.

In recent years, not only in New South Wales but also throughout the world, unfortunately we have seen more stakeholder-based fisheries management rather than science-based fisheries management. That is a worldwide trend and it is a worry. It occurred, for example, in North America a few years ago. However, they saw the error of their ways and they have reverted to a science-based management regime and things are improving in some of the fisheries that collapsed about a decade or two ago. I am here representing that science perspective. That is my job and that is what I have done for the past 25 years.

I have provided the science that Ministers and managers use to manage their fish stocks, not only in New South Wales but also throughout Australia and overseas. Scientific information is absolutely paramount in managing wild fish stocks because of that public ownership issue. I am here to provide objective, logical information to the Committee. I am not here to comment on Government policy; as a public servant that would be inappropriate. I actually believe in decentralisation. I have a very good record in terms of regionalising Fisheries scientific jobs throughout the State. I do not only just manage the research that occurs at Cronulla, but all Fisheries scientists that reside in New South Wales are under my supervision. I have staff in Narrandera, Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens, Batemans Bay, Grafton and Cronulla. I have a pretty good record in that and you may ask me about that a bit later on.

Therefore, the main reason I am here is to provide an objective scientific and logical view on this decision. In that regard I cannot disagree with the points of view made by many international colleagues and national colleagues, and other scientists, that the decision will obviously have, and already has had, in fact, significant impacts on the functioning of our department and its various roles. In particular, the closure of the Cronulla centre will affect our ability to provide scientific advice for the marine fish of New South Wales and the marine fisheries of New South Wales, that is, commercial and recreational. In particular, it will affect our ability to produce our status reporting process and will reduce our capacity to do wild marine fisheries research.

We have already seen it reduce significantly the expertise that we have built up. We have something like 400 years-worth of scientific expertise at Cronulla. We are seeing large numbers of those years leave the department. Finally it will, and already has, I believe, affected what was, 12 months ago, a very good brand in terms of fisheries science and fisheries science-based fisheries management in New South Wales. We had a very good brand for that 12 months ago, both nationally and internationally, and I believe that we are seeing that affected by this business. That is all I have to say as an opening statement. I am happy to answer any questions.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Will you outline your own experience and record?

Professor KENNELLY: I have a Bachelor of Science with Honours from the University of Sydney. I have a PhD from the University of Sydney. I have a Doctor of Science degree from the University of Sydney. The Doctor of Science degree, I am not sure if you are familiar with it, is a very prestigious degree—there are not many of them given out. It is an earned degree which is quite rare. I think there are about four people in Australia that hold a Doctor of Science degree in Marine Research. I think three in fisheries-related work, and I

have got one of those. Another one was given to one of my former students who actually works at Coffs Harbour. I put him at Coffs Harbour, so that was pretty nice.

I have been with the department for 25 years. I was Chief Scientist for the Department of Fisheries for 11 of those years. I was Chief Scientist for the Department of Primary Industries, which included all of agriculture, forestry and mining research from 2004 to 2011, seven years. I am now Director of Research for NSW Fisheries. I have also worked for a variety of organisations internationally, most recently for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome where I was seconded for six months to help them develop a particular piece of policy around trying to reduce discards and wastage in fisheries in developing countries where fish protein is a major source of protein. It is a really big issue in terms of trying to feed the millions. I travelled to West Africa, Madagascar and places like that to try to improve the lot of those countries in terms of their protein availability. That is my background, if you like.

CHAIR: You said the closure would affect the brand. Do you mean the quality of the work coming out of the Cronulla centre?

Professor KENNELLY: If Cronulla closes, of course, there will not be anything coming out of Cronulla but it will affect the quality, I believe, of research that we conduct throughout the State by NSW Fisheries. When I travel to national and international meetings, it is pretty much the only thing people talk to me about. I went to the World Fisheries Congress in Edinburgh earlier this year and closing Cronulla is pretty much the only thing people wanted to talk to me about. Cronulla is quite a famous place. It is the first fisheries institution of any sort in the Southern Hemisphere so people in the Northern Hemisphere are pretty aware of the place. Most senior fisheries professionals in the world who travel to Australia have visited the centre, know about it and like it.

CHAIR: Are they puzzled why such a centre will close?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, basically. I think there have been letters written to that effect to the Minister and possibly to this inquiry.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Given all of your experience and work history with the department over the years, what knowledge did you have of the closure before it was announced by the Minister?

Professor KENNELLY: I think it was announced on a Thursday. I was told the Tuesday night that it would be closed and the announcement would be made on the Wednesday and then it was delayed a day. I found out about it whatever that is, 36 hours earlier.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The advice and input of the Director of the centre who was also at the time Chief Scientist of the Department of Primary Industries was not sought by the Director-General or the Minister? Did they tell you of the decision rather than seek your advice?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, no-one sought my advice. Geoff Allan advised me of the decision but no-one sought my advice prior to it.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is your opinion of that?

Professor KENNELLY: I would not say that it is necessarily typical. My job has been to provide advice to Ministers and senior bureaucrats for 12 years, or more than that. I have provided all sorts of advice to previous Ministers in New South Wales, but also Federal Ministers, Ministers in Africa, the Middle East, and advisers to the United States of America.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Was that advice on issues such as decentralisation, the relocation of facilities and the structure of fisheries management?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, certainly. Those sorts of things come up all the time when you are giving advice to some of these countries and other Ministers about how to best spend their money, how to best approach fisheries science and where you should best apportion your funding. It is a very big issue in developing countries, as you can imagine.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In New South Wales have you been consulted by previous Ministers about decentralisation, jobs in regional areas and the best make-up for Fisheries whenever they are making those types of decisions? Is that a general rule of thumb that you would be included in those discussions?

Professor KENNELLY: I would have expected that, yes. Normally I would have been involved in that but to my mind there has not been a lot of those sorts of decentralisation issues come up over the past 12 years. I have certainly led quite a bit of regionalisation of staff jobs throughout the State over the past 12 years in putting jobs into Narrandera, Batemans Bay, Coffs Harbour and so on. I have certainly done that and we tried consciously to do that to get jobs out of Cronulla, if you like, if it is appropriate to do so, and put them in places where we did not have a presence such as Batemans Bay. We had presence on the North Coast and inland but no presence on the South Coast so I built that up by putting a particular staff member at Batemans Bay and building that up to, I think, we have got about eight people down there now.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you against decentralisation?

Professor KENNELLY: No, absolutely not. In fact, I am proud of my record. When I first got this job 12 years ago there was one scientific staff member at Narrandera, about an hour west of Wagga Wagga which is the centre of our freshwater research, and as at this morning there are 24. Batemans Bay had none, and now there are eight. We have marine research based at Cronulla and brackish water which is a mix between salt and fresh at Port Stephens. The best way to know where people are is to look at the phone list. You can get all sorts of different numbers from different people about who is where and who is leaving and all of that. I look at the phone list because they are really good at changing the phone numbers and the security cards but they are not so good at tracing the salaries, who is on the books, who is paid out of what account, and so on but the phone list is pretty accurate. Because if you phone them they are there, so you know they are at that point.

At Narrandera we had one person; now there are 24; Batemans Bay we had none, now there are eight; Coffs Harbour there were none, now there are five; and at Ports Stephen there were approximately 30, now there are 42. So I have been pretty proud of that, to try and get that happening, because it is necessary. We need those sorts of positions, not just because it is good for the country towns but it is actually good for the science. You need the scientists where the stuff is happening. It is silly to do freshwater research at Cronulla because we do not have any freshwater tanks—well we can, we can get them out of the tap—but it is best to have them where the fish, are out of the Murrumbidgee River, which is a pretty good waterway.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: One of the responses by Director General Richard Sheldrake during the public hearing held on Monday 6 August last—we were trying to work out what type of cost-benefit analysis had been undertaken, and in the end we worked out that there had been none—was that there were two factors in relation to costs largely: one is the cost of exiting staff and the other is transferring staff. He said, "They are the largest costs and we do not know what they will be yet, and approximately one-third of the staff are yet to make a final decision." How many staff will be exiting at this point in time?

Mr O'BRIEN: We do not have a final knowledge of that. According to a statement by Mr Kempson tendered in Industrial Relations Commission proceedings in relation to this matter there is currently 31 staff out of 138 wanting to locate—that represents 23 per cent of staff, not the 40 per cent that was estimated at the last hearing and then later referred to as though it was set in concrete. There have been a number who have already left—I can get those figures to you if I can take that on notice. With regards to the costs associated, it is very unusual for a project like this not to have budget parameters around it. You would expect that the redundancy entitlements would already have been calculated to a notional degree depending on exit date, and you would expect that there would be a budget associated with the transferred officers' provisions. That is a little more flexible because it is basically a cost-recovery system; it is not a profit-making or payment out position—you actually have to produce what you have spent on certain areas of your relocation.

So usually what happens is if there is going to be a restructure of this nature or a relocation of this nature, you will be given approval from Treasury to fund redundancies up to a certain amount and there will be timelines associated with when those redundancies have to be taken. That has not happened in this case. There are variables in relation to employee-related costs in all of this but you can—and usually the department does—put up and lower limits on those things. There has been none of that on this occasion that we are aware of.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Brown, in your submission you spoke about temporary staff. Do you know how many temporary staff at this stage have chosen not to relocate and will be taking exit packages?

Mr BROWN: I do not know precisely in relation to temps versus permanents, but I think there are over 50 staff in that category of temporary employees and some of those have up to 20 years service. So it is a bit of a strange way to describe them: temporary employees of 20-years standing. I think the last I heard there were about eight people who have relocated to regional locations, there is somewhere between 30 and 44, depends on how you count them, relocating within Sydney—they do not really get a choice in terms of either relocate or lose their jobs; there is no option for a severance payment or redundancy.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr O'Brien in your opening address I think you mentioned the changes to the Government's excess employees policy. When was that decision made?

Mr O'BRIEN: It was made in July of last year to operate from 1 August last year. The change in the policy went from one where government employees affected by restructure or relocation proposals of the Government were managed to try and limit the impact on them. What that meant was that there was a 12-month period during which the employee had the opportunity to apply for other positions within the public service and would be given preference in interviewing for those positions. They were assigned case managers and there was a 12-month period where you could work through looking for other work within the department. So if your career was affected—as is the case with all of these people—you did not necessarily have to leave the private sector.

The changes that have occurred are very different now. It is still called the Managing Excess Employees policy but there is no management. You now get told you are excess, you are given two weeks to say yes or no to the voluntary redundancy package in the policy. If you say no, you get three months without the case management in which to try and obtain another job in the public sector. If you fail to find another job in the public sector, you do not get the voluntary redundancy entitlements; you get the State employment protection Act guarantees. So for long-term employees you are usually looking at half your entitlement.

For temporary employees, they used to be paid under the old policy the severance payments associated with a voluntary redundancy. The change to the policy has removed that, so they now only get the State employment protection Act again. The difference there being that if you are a permanent employee you had payments for years of service and notice periods, you also had access to retraining and you had job search leave and things like that. With the exception of the severance payments for years of service, those bells and whistles things did not apply to temporaries. Now they do not get those severance payments either. That was brought into being about 5½ weeks before the closure of Cronulla fisheries. We have asked that given the circumstances and given what we see as fundamentally a political decision rather than an operational decision, that consideration be given to implementing exit passages in accordance with what would have applied but the Government refuses to do that.

CHAIR: In the documents that have been tabled attachment No. 3 is a staff survey. It has just been noticed that that document contains a lot of personal details. Are you happy for that to be made public or would you rather have it marked confidential?

Mr O'BRIEN: Perhaps if the names could be—

CHAIR: There are no names on it. It has the age and a lot of personal details about the wife and family.

Mr O'BRIEN: Perhaps that should be confidential.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Professor Kennelly you spoke about your belief in decentralisation in terms of fisheries research. As the chief scientist at Cronulla fisheries do you currently support the decentralisation of the site by the Government?

Professor KENNELLY: My role for the department has been as a leader of science, a leader of fisheries research in particular but more broadly in terms of the Department of Primary Industries. I have constantly had this priority to get people working in regional areas where it is appropriate to do so. When I was chief scientist at the Department of Primary Industries, for example, we had many institutions all around the

State, and I travelled to just about all of them, where I had agriculture scientists working, mining scientists and forestry scientists and so on, to talk to them about their issues and to improve their lot if I could. As a chief scientist you have a certain leadership role in terms of maintaining and enhancing and doing all you can to improve the quality of the science that these people are doing, in terms of scientific publications and the international standing of the scientists—therefore the international standing of their science and the quality of their science and therefore their service to the public of New South Wales. That is the reason you have a chief scientist and that is my job—or that was my job and it still is for Fisheries staff. That has been my role and I am pretty proud of the fact that I have been able to do as much as I can in those areas.

In terms of regionalisation and getting jobs into country areas, I have learned a lot over the last 12 years of how to do it well and how to do it with a soft touch, if you like. What you need to do in these places is to identify particular people, particular scientists who, firstly, would not mind going to the location - but who are also go-getters, people who will form a team around themselves by attracting funding, attracting decent, quality staff and being able to produce good science for the particular field that they work in in terms of fisheries science. For example, in Narrandera I identified a particular staff member who at the time I think was working in Cronulla and got him to see if he wanted to relocate. He was okay with it. Then you get him in there and without much funding associated with it. It did not cost a lot of money to get these people relocated. It is just a straight relocation thing. But then encourage their work in the new location by giving them what they need. There were certainly cases over the last 12 years where I sacrificed funding that I had available to spend in Cronulla to devote to, say, Narrandera to build them a better shed or better resources or better facilities for their tanks and so on. The same with Port Stephens, Batemans Bay and Coffs Harbour.

That has been the way to do it, to find a winner, to find a particular person. There was another one at Coffs Harbour. I talked him into going to Coffs Harbour rather than Cronulla and he did so and he has formed a group there and it is all go. But you need to identify those people, those individuals. You cannot just do it as a blanket advertisement and hope for the best and hope you attract someone, because they are rare. Fishery science is not that common a job in Australia or anywhere in the world and good ones are sought after in North America, Europe and so on. So you need to identify the particular person and the particular job and the particular need and get them into those places. So that is what I have done there.

In terms of this particular thing with Cronulla, my priority with the whole decentralisation of the Cronulla thing is I have certain loyalties associated with the driving of science. It is fair to say that there were also a lot of mixed messages at the time of the announcement. I was certainly told by my immediate boss at the time of the announcement, on several occasions he said to me, "I tried my best to have this thing turned around and I hope you can get it turned around." So there were mixed messages. In one sense, yes, we want to close the place down but we also hope that you can try to fight to save the thing. So I had that sort of tension occurring to me personally.

I also had the need to operate under the best principles that I have as a scientist and as a human, I guess, in terms of being loyal to all principles of logic, objectivity and honesty for the staff who rely on me down there at Cronulla. I also had to be cognisant of the fact that I have many staff at Port Stephens and all these other locations and try to balance that up so that these people were not feeling disenfranchised. So I made a point, over the first few months of this decision occurring, of visiting each of those regional locations to make those people realise that this was not just about Cronulla and that these people were not being forgotten about in terms of the department, that we were still maintaining facilities there and we want to try to maintain their workload.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Do you believe you showed great leadership in this process?

Professor KENNELLY: I certainly tried to. It is up to my staff to say whether I am a decent leader or not. I have never had any complaints about me being a leader of science. Never to this day. I still have had no one say a bad word about my ability as a research leader. I also have a certain loyalty that is felt by sitting in this room in fact, by inheriting the mantra of being the director of Cronulla. The place was established by a guy called Harald Dannevig in 1895 and he was the founder of fisheries in Australia. I have inherited that mantle and I take that pretty seriously as something that is worthwhile trying to defend. So that has basically been my goal over the last 12 months, if you like. So it has been a bit of a struggle, lots of tensions and stuff from my bosses saying one thing and also saying another in some cases about how they want to try to turn it around but also behave yourself and that sort of thing. But then there is also the weight of 110 years of history, of the fact that I have this international reputation that is worthy of being true to.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Challenges.

Professor KENNELLY: So that is sort of the struggle I have had.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I assume you have been to the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS] at Mosman and you have seen the facilities. I am assuming that if you remain in your role as a senior scientist in fisheries research you would probably be relocated in Mosman if you agreed to take that position. How do you compare what is there with the job you are doing now and the research you are doing now and with all the decentralisation that you have talked about? What do you believe will be the advantages or disadvantages in Mosman?

Professor KENNELLY: Originally it was suggested that I did go to Mosman and lead the Sydney part of the operation, but a few months, maybe a few weeks after the decision, it was then said that I would be moving to Port Stephens. I cannot move to Port Stephens because of family reasons. My wife's father is very ill, which is a day-to-day thing. I have to go to the hospital after this. So I just cannot move out of Sydney. But I am familiar with the SIMS operation at Mosman. I am the Department of Primary Industries representative on their scientific advisory committee and have been since the beginning of the site there. So I know a lot about the site. I know what is there and I know the new developments that have occurred there over the past few years.

It is a good facility for academics doing particular types of research. It suffers a little bit by being a fairly significant distance geographically from the campuses at the University of New South Wales and Sydney university and also some of the associate universities, and associate members of SIMS are at Wollongong. The DPI is an associate member as well, but Wollongong university, for example—the Chowder Bay location is a little bit hard to get to. It does not have a train going out there. It does not have that sort of access and so on.

CHAIR: There is limited access.

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, and parking can be a bit of a hassle.

CHAIR: That is the Premier's criticism of Cronulla—limited access.

Professor KENNELLY: Cronulla does not have limited access. That is not a problem there.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: How do the students get to Cronulla after they get off the train?

Professor KENNELLY: There is a bus. There is a bus stop out the front. It is good; it has a new post and everything now. Mosman has a pretty good saltwater system. It does not have good access to the waterfront. There is a nice waterfront but you have to get permission off the Navy, which owns it. There are problems with the Navy giving access to that. At Cronulla you would have seen the big shark crane. We bring dead sharks up and wheel it around and cut them open and do all sorts of smelly things to them. It is also a fairly controversial thing about our work down there. We try to keep it out of the public eye as much as possible, bringing in big white pointer sharks off the beaches of Cronulla and Wattamolla and down the coast. We do not want the public necessarily seeing all these man eaters swimming around. It can scare people. So we try to be mindful of that. In SIMS there is a restaurant, a café and a dive shop. It is a very good restaurant but there are a lot of people sitting there. You do not want to be bringing sharks up there.

CHAIR: It is almost a tourist centre.

Professor KENNELLY: You cannot be bringing sharks up right there. It would end up in the papers. The other thing about the SIMS thing is that there are really good laboratories there. They have some good physiological laboratories but we do not do that sort of research. We do not do PC2 required laboratories and if we did we would use the ones at EMAI. We have just built \$53 million worth of state-of-the-art facilities.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: What is EMAI?

Professor KENNELLY: The Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute at Menangle. It is about an hour's drive from Cronulla, whereas Mosman on a good day can take an hour and a half. There are limitations there. There are also site limitations in terms of storage and being able to drive to the waterfront. You have to go down the old convict steps. So there are some issues about the Mosman facility.

CHAIR: And you would be tenants. You would be paying rent or costs?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes. I do not know what the costs are. The universities are not going to give it to you for free, if I know what universities do and I do. The one at Coffs Harbour, I negotiated the Southern Cross University deal that we have at Coffs Harbour and they feel like I have ripped them off and they charge us \$8,000 per office there per year. They feel that I have gone at them, which I do not think I did.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There has been a cost set for the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS] though.

Professor KENNELLY: I do not know what that is.

CHAIR: It is \$189,000 per annum for Mosman. So that is going to be part of the budget.

Professor KENNELLY: Cronulla's rent is free.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: To clarify something, following on from the question by the Hon. Marie Ficarra, are you proposing to transfer two SIMS at Mosman?

Professor KENNELLY: Personally?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes.

Professor KENNELLY: No. It was an option early on but then they changed it to Port Stephens for me, personally.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: So you are not going to Port Stephens and you are not going to SIMS? You have ruled both of those out?

Professor KENNELLY: I was not offered SIMS, it was removed. It was a quiet offer. They said, "We are thinking about putting you in SIMS". I said, "Well, I don't think we should shut the place". And later on it became Port Stephens but I cannot relocate from Sydney.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I would like to know, following from that, does that mean that you do not have a job?

CHAIR: Let Mr Clarke finish his question.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Mr O'Brien, to put it in context, how many of those employed at the Cronulla centre are actually members of your association?

Mr O'BRIEN: I am not going to disclose that because it is really not relevant. We represent anyone who requires representation. We do not have an entitlement to know who is not a member of the union. But I will give you a figure in percentage terms.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes, I am happy with that.

Mr O'BRIEN: We would have approximately 70 per cent of the membership.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: In the past, your association has advocated for the relocation of government departments to regional and rural areas. Do you agree with that?

Mr O'BRIEN: I do not advocate for relocation of any government position, unless there is a sound case for it. I am not sure if you are referring to something in particular. If you are, I am happy to—

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: As a general policy, do you support the idea of decentralisation?

Mr O'BRIEN: We support decentralisation where there are benefits to the community and to the taxpayers of New South Wales. For example, tomorrow I am going to spend all day in discussions with Forests NSW at level 47 of the MLC Centre, which has a fantastic view and a lot of senior public servants in it. In my view, an office-based job like that is something that could and should be relocated. I would think that it does not

make sense to take a small specialist employer—as I would describe Cronulla fisheries—from the southern extremities of the Sydney Metropolitan Area and move that to other locations.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: It depends on the circumstances.

Mr O'BRIEN: I think so, yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Have you tried to facilitate and assist staff from Cronulla who may want to relocate to other departments because they are having difficulty?

Mr O'BRIEN: We do not have the ability to facilitate those things. There is a provision, although it has been significantly watered down in the Managing Excess Employees policy. Prior to the change I would argue that the Public Service Association did a lot to facilitate the redeployment of people to other departments. There was an obligation on the Government under that policy—and that we would hold the Government to—to do everything in its power to redeploy public servants affected by changes like this before it started to look at other employees.

That has now changed. We no longer have the ability to force that sort of commitment from the Government. The emphasis in the new policy is now that the employee concerned must say, within two weeks of being made excess, whether or not they will accept the voluntary redundancy. If they refuse it—and if they do not answer they are deemed to refuse it—they have three months to find another permanent position. That is very different to the old system where, for example, we had a person who had been excess for three years but had only used one day of his retention period because he was acting in a position for someone on parental leave. All those things have gone now. We do not have the ability to assist. We would like the ability and we did have the ability but that was taken away, without any discussion with the association.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Professor Kennelly, you mentioned that you were chief Department of Primary Industries [DPI] scientist up until last year. Why are you no longer the chief scientist?

Professor KENNELLY: It happened about two weeks after the announcement to close Cronulla and I was told it was because of restructuring of the DPI executive. That was it.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is there still a chief scientist at the DPI?

Professor KENNELLY: No.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Not at all?

Professor KENNELLY: No. There is a chief scientific officer who looks after administrative issues. The role I had as chief scientist was mentoring and looking after the science quality and trying to look at the overall improvement in science quality in the agency. There is a chief scientific officer position, responsible for doing administrative things where we have to fill out surveys for the Federal Government on different issues and so on.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have any view on why that change in the process occurred? Do you think it was anything to do with the Cronulla process?

Professor KENNELLY: I have no objective information either way on that.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is your feeling about it?

Professor KENNELLY: I have to be objective.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are still the chief Fisheries scientific officer and in that position you have given us a few views already about the different areas in New South Wales. In the past, for instance, as chief scientific officer, were you consulted about the development of the new facilities at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, for example?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes, I was aware of it and I was on committees and so on that were getting briefings on it. Then I was involved on a committee of three—myself as the departmental person and two

independents—one from the University of Melbourne and the other from the Australian National University—to work on providing recommendations to the department on how to best use that facility, once built. We were concerned about the staffing levels needed to maintain proper and adequate use of that facility.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: That was something you were engaged in pretty early, to make sure that they met the scientific needs?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: As still being the chief Fisheries scientific officer, what consultation is being undertaken with you at the moment to ensure that the facilities which will be made available at Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens and SIMS are adequate?

Professor KENNELLY: I have not had anything to do with that.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Nothing at all?

Professor KENNELLY: Nothing.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What reassurance have you had that those facilities are going to be suitable?

Professor KENNELLY: I have not been given any reassurance that they will be. There has been a lot of talk about them being suitable but I have not actually seen any evidence of that.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So that the chief Fisheries scientist has not been part of that process?

Professor KENNELLY: No.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Moving on to research programs that you are currently undertaking, how many current long-term research programs will be transferring to new locations?

Professor KENNELLY: I will have to take that on notice. I know of a document we have recently produced for that. I can get my hands on it within a day or two.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have concerns about the future of any of those programs and whether they can continue?

Professor KENNELLY: That information is in that documentation. We went through every project and said: This is under threat because of this; this is not, because of this, and so on. There are a couple of pages that list all the projects.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I think that would be a useful document.

CHAIR: Where is that document?

Professor KENNELLY: One of my staff prepared it. It went through me to the executive director of Fisheries. I can certainly get it for you.

CHAIR: Can you provide it for us?

Professor KENNELLY: Yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Since the decision on Cronulla has been made, have there been any key performance indicators for research programs that are not being met?

Professor KENNELLY: That is in the document as well. There are some that have fallen through the cracks because of the current issues. But I am very concerned about the recent loss of our head crustacean scientist, who recently took redundancy. Also, we had a couple of younger scientists who we were mentoring to fill those roles as the head crustacean scientist got close to retirement. They also took other opportunities and

have recently left the department so I am quite concerned about our scientific advice associated with all crustaceans except for lobsters—we still have Geoff Liggins who is our great lobster scientist—but all our other crustacean fisheries, which are really quite substantial and are the most valuable in the State—king prawns and school prawns and so on and all our crab fisheries. We are going to fall down on that, I think, because we have lost some pretty significant expertise. Dr Steve Montgomery has recently announced his departure and he had 37 years of experience. We were bringing some younger scientists up through the grades to take on that role and they also left, so we are a bit cornered there.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is a substantial loss of knowledge.

Professor KENNELLY: That is the most important problematic issue: people cannot or will not relocate and therefore we are going to lose that expertise. You cannot replace 400 years of such specialist fisheries scientific expertise in a short time.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Some of the members of the Committee visited the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS] facility on Friday and it appeared to me at least that Cronulla staff who transfer there will be sharing lab space and going through a booking process to get lab space at that facility. Is that your understanding?

Professor KENNELLY: That is news to me. I would not say that that is ideal if that is the case.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What would be the problems with that?

Professor KENNELLY: Security is one thing. I am not sure if any of you remember university but sharing lab space with other students can be untidy and things can go missing. I am not saying people are going to knock stuff off but it is not ideal. When you walk away from a bench and leave your stuff there you want it to be there when you come back. You do not want someone to have moved it elsewhere so they can get access to the microscope. Sometimes we do not know when we are going to go into the field because of weather. A commercial fisherman may say he can go tomorrow and you return in the afternoon. You need to have that space. Sometimes we need space at Cronulla in the middle of the night when you come back in from being at sea and you cannot wait until the next day or until some booking arrangement says you can get access to that bench. I am really surprised that that is going to be the system there.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I have to say that that was my impression.

Professor KENNELLY: Okay.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr O'Brien, you mentioned in your opening statement that up to 32 positions will not be filled. Are you implying that those positions will remain unfilled or are they people who will not be able to go?

Mr O'BRIEN: A document has come to me that indicates there is a list of sites that will not necessarily receive their full complement of employees. We have also been told in negotiations in relation to employees who choose not to transfer their positions that whilst the principle is that they will go, the department will restructure according to who actually ends up in the new locations and that may mean that some positions are not filled. It is also very clear in the information that was obtained by various sources through the freedom of information process that a number of corporate service positions will not be filled. We were told that in our negotiations with the department. It is not unusual in a circumstance like this for the Government to take the relocation of an organisation or a workplace as an opportunity to restructure without necessarily restructuring, if that makes sense.

CHAIR: A reduction more than a restructure?

Mr O'BRIEN: Yes. It is a case of, "We didn't intend for this to happen but a lot of people wouldn't go so we have had to restructure." It is essentially a bit of forced redundancy by stealth and it would not be the first time it has been done. It was done by the previous Government too, I have to say, and the association opposed it then. Where we have had difficulty on these occasions is in getting any information about what proposed structures might exist at the new locations, which we have always been able to obtain in the past.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr Brown, as the staff representative on the working group have you been to all the meetings of the working group since the announcement was made?

Mr BROWN: No I have not. When the announcement was first made they did not have any staff representatives on the working group. A number of staff, including me, expressed concern about that and eventually it was agreed to have two staff representatives, and a colleague and I were elected by the staff to do that. We made a number of representations at the beginning about issues that were of concern to us such as temporary staffing and severance payment issues, transparency in the process—we were not seeing minutes of meetings or anything like that. After about four weeks of meetings we were removed from the working group. It was explained to us that the issues of concern to staff were slowing down the process and we needed to get moved into—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: How inconvenient.

Mr BROWN: Yes. That was how we took it as well. We were not allowed back onto the group until late January/early February. In the intervening period following our being removed from the committee in October-November all the decisions were made about who would be relocated in the Sydney region and who would go where. All those kinds of issues were worked out whilst we were not around to hear what was happening. We got invited back on in the February time frame.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When a person takes voluntary redundancies how long is it under the new public service arrangements before a person can reapply for a public sector position if one becomes available that they are interested in?

Mr O'BRIEN: In theory you can apply at any time you like, however if you received, say, 39 weeks severance pay and you got a new position within 13 weeks you would have to pay back 26 weeks of pay to the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So if your circumstances changed and you wanted to go to Port Stephens after taking voluntary redundancy you would have to pay back whatever the pro rata amount was?

Mr O'BRIEN: Yes, or if you were to win a job in another government department you would have to do the same.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has the member for Cronulla, Mr Speakman, been at any of the meetings you have been involved in?

Mr O'BRIEN: Not at any meetings of the department. From memory, he requested to address the staff and I have met with him in his office on one occasion but he has not been at any of the meetings I have attended with the department. I should say that the PSA's involvement with the department has been so limited in terms of the scope to which we are permitted to negotiate that it is not funny. I have never had a situation before where you are only allowed to talk about the change management plan, which we were not able to negotiate, and how staff were treated that were either made redundant or being transferred, which again we were not able to negotiate. In the past we have had circumstances where because of the uniqueness of the situation discretion has been exercised in favour of employees as a result of negotiations. It has been very clear that government policy is government policy and there is no room for negotiation. When I sat through the department's presentation I heard much talk of how they were trying to accommodate employees. The example given was a husband and wife that had been slated for different locations and were now going to the same location. One would have thought that careful planning would have dealt with that.

What they did not tell us about was the single mother with an autistic child who cannot relocate and will not relocate and will be unemployed as a result of this. There was no consideration for her. There are a number of other examples. Dr Kennelly has just given you an example of his own circumstances. There are a number of people who have genuine family issues who are not getting the opportunity to be considered in a manner other than that which was originally outlined. The association's ability to try to negotiate some better outcomes has not been limited by anything that we have or have not done; it has been limited by the position of the department, which is: this is the government policy; we will not change from it. To be told that long-term temporary employees who accept a transfer will not be given permanent employment and could face losing their job in a much tighter labour market than they are already in, with reduced redundancy, and that exercising some discretion in their favour would be tantamount to giving them an incentive not to relocate highlights the attitude

of the negotiations so far. Nobody wants to lose their job in all of this, but many people are being put in a position where they have no option.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When we toured the site people had tears in their eyes about this decision and the stress they have been put under in coming to a decision, which highlighted to me the issues around the change management plan. You just spoke about the plan and the association's lack of involvement. Is it the usual sort of change management plan or how does it differ from previous change management plans?

Mr O'BRIEN: The change management plans are a fairly new beast in the form that they take now. Previously—and it is still in our award—there was an obligation on the Government to consult with the union about any restructure or a change. It is specifically mentions unions in relation to change, the rationale behind that change and how that change is likely to on impact staff. That clause still exists in our award. It talks about consultative arrangements and there is a policy document that sits next to it. That seems to have been dismissed by the Government.

Consultation now effectively involves being told the decision. I have now gone through three occasions of this in the past 12 months with Fisheries, Grafton jail and now with the forest corporatisation. You get a phone call, usually the day before. In the case of Fisheries, I got a phone call from a delegate in Orange after the announcement was made. You are told that you need to be at a meeting and you are given the time you have to be there as the union official. If you cannot make it, they will not change the time. They tell you what the decision is, and they say, "That is the Government decision and it will not change." It is very different from what happened in the past. There would be a discussion.

The Labor Government decided to close down five agricultural stations and it made an announcement. The same issues that impact on the staff at Cronulla impacted on the staff of the agricultural stations. The only difference was that the Government could argue that there was an economic imperative in that it was going to unlock the value of the assets. We campaigned against that and in the end nobody had to take a redundancy, nobody was forced to relocate across the State, and The Nationals caucus joined me and Public Service Association members out the front of Parliament House protesting against the Government's decision. That all seems to have changed.

CHAIR: One thing I note from the chart you gave us is how many employees have been at Cronulla for a long time—20 years, 24 years, 26 years.

Mr O'BRIEN: That is correct.

CHAIR: It is a very stable workforce.

Mr O'BRIEN: It is. Some of the temporary staff have 20 years of service. Prior to the change in the managing excess employees policy, they would not have received the full voluntary redundancy severance entitlements. They do not get it now. We had an example of that under the previous policy. There were four long-term temporary employees working on the irrigation projects in the Riverina. The rice industry chose to finish those projects, and those employees, who had 18 and 17 years service, received the full redundancy entitlements with regard to severance pay. That is not going to happen for these people.

CHAIR: The Committee has tried to get the Government to put the closure on hold. However, as far as I am aware, we have received no response. If by a miracle we convince the Government to change its decision, would that be a major disruption? Is it possible, from your point of view Mr Kennelly, for the Cronulla centre to keep operating and to bring some of the staff back? For example, nobody has gone to the Sydney Institute of Marine Science; that is still vacant.

Professor KENNELLY: My method to establish how many people are there is the old phone list. At the time of the decision, there were about 150 people at Cronulla. That is based on the phone list, which is pretty accurate. As of this morning, 107 were still on site. Of the remainder, eight have moved to regional New South Wales, as they were meant to do, and the rest have taken other jobs in Sydney. It is certainly not too late. Two-thirds of the people are still there. I know that those who have other jobs would come back at the drop of a hat. It is not just about loyalty to the place; it is also about loyalty to the job. Fisheries science is a specialised field. People stay for 20 years or 25 years because of the nature of the beast.

We deal with animals that have generation cycles of between one and 25 years and sometimes 30 years. When you study them and you make changes in the way you manage them, via bag limits, size and so on, you need to study them for a long time to see whether the change has worked or whether you need to make more changes. Fisheries management does not work on electoral cycles of three or four-year periods; it is determined by the generation times of the animals that are being harvested. It depends on the species, but it can be a lengthy period of time. That is why people go into the job for life and the positions are so specialised.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Brown, in your submission you suggest that about half of the staff at the centre are temporary. You attached a letter to the director general about the staff's serious concerns about what was happening with the temporary staff. As we have heard today, some of them have worked at the centre for up to 20 years. What does that mean for the people who have worked for 20 years given that Mr O'Brien said that they would lose their severance pay? Could you tell a story or two about what this means for the temporary staff who have worked for, say, 20 years at the centre?

Mr BROWN: Yes. I referred to a couple of cases in that letter I wrote to the director general. One senior research scientist who had about 20 years of service had to leave the organisation a few months ago. If he had left in August last year or prior to or whenever the change in excess employees policy occurred, he would have had a redundancy payout to help him settle into a new career of about \$60,000 or \$70,000 more than ended up getting. For 20 years of service he received a severance payment equivalent to 16 weeks pay. Had stuck around, he would have got 40 weeks severance pay. Now he has to establish himself in a new career. A lady who has fortunately moved on to another government job had 16 years service.

She was working in our licensing area. Why she was a temporary employee in the first place beggar's belief. She was involved in commercial licensing; it was not a fixed-term research project or anything like that. She had been doing that job for 16 years. The people around her doing exactly the same job were permanent employees. Her payout was going to be half what those with 10 year of service were going to get. It is very unfair and very stressful for people. There are still people, including in that licensing section, who will be financially disadvantaged. The way we see it—and I think it is legitimate to see it this way—we have worked all these years under a certain set of conditions and they have been changed at five minutes to midnight. Just when we need them to kick in for us, they have been pulled out from underneath us. It is very unfair from the staff point of view.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Professor Kennelly, this Committee will be inspecting the Port Stephens site. We have heard that it is a very large and good facility. We have also been told it will be good for fisheries research to transfer their activities up there. What is your response to that?

Professor KENNELLY: All of the scientists at Port Stephens work under me in the same way that the people at Cronulla work. I think they do a really good job. I would not be doing my job if they were not. The facilities are good for their specific purpose. It was created as the brackish water fisheries research station for work on oysters. Strangely enough, the water quality at Cronulla was too good. It was oceanic.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Will you explain water quality and the different types of research—

Professor KENNELLY: When you work on wild harvest fisheries, you want to work in as close to pristine conditions as possible. When you have questions about growth rates, how a fish reacts to a tag or how its reproductive biology works and so on, you want to hold them in water quality that is as similar to nature as possible. You do not want to hold them in water that is not natural or what they are used to.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Controlled conditions.

Professor KENNELLY: Yes. The water at Port Stephens is brackish. Port Stephens is low-lying and within a mangrove area—you will drive through a mangrove to get to it. We understand that reports indicate that the site is flood prone and that it will have to be moved in 30 years because of the rising sea level. The water quality there is excellent for working on brackish water species, like Sydney rock oysters. To hold marine species, we need to treat the water strongly—it is called bruising the water. We need to treat the water so that we can hold marine species. By doing experiments on wild harvest species in water that has been treated that way, you are making an assumption; you are compromising the design of your experiment. If you have a bunch of controlled fish that you do nothing to, a bunch of fish that you tag in a certain way, and you put them in holding pens in water that is not pristine, you are making the assumption that the quality of the water is not having an interaction on the experimental treatment you have set up.

The broadest analogy would be that you can grow and keep and even breed giraffes at Taronga Zoo, but if you want to study what giraffes do in the wild, you will go to Africa. That is how you do it, so that is the difference. We have the Port Stephens site because it is really good for that sort of work and some of the work they do at Port Stephens cannot be done at Cronulla. It is the same for Narrandera. You would not do work on Macquarie perch or freshwater species at Cronulla; you would use the water out of the Murrumbidgee. The facilities at Port Stephens are good for what it is designed to do. This whole business has unearthed this issue about the rising sea level, and we will have to deal with that in 20 to 30 years. However, the quality of the place, the location and the staff are excellent and first rate. However, what they do there is not what we do at Cronulla. It is a different job, different water quality, different processes and so on.

Interestingly, I heard someone say—I am not sure who it was—that the geography at Cronulla is against us. Harald Dannevig chose that site because it is on a ridge. We have a massive advantage at Cronulla in that we can pump the water up to the holding tank at the top and gravity will feed it down on demand. Gravity is doing a hell of a lot of the work that pumps would normally do because of Dannevig's foresight in picking that site.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: What happens to those tanks? I know that the general managers of the council is concerned about the cost. What will happen to those tanks? Can they remain as is, or will they become polluted? Do they have to be removed? What will happen?

Professor KENNELLY: That is a challenge for David Harley. The aquaria, the pool and the area down the bottom are heritage listed. A lot of the buildings are heritage listed. I am not sure how a pool will be handled. You cannot simply turn off the aquarium pool pumps. That aquarium pool is unique in Australia: it is 110 years old and it has its own ecosystem. If you turn the pumps off, the water will leak out and it will become empty and stink. We believe the walls will collapse inwards because the water is holding the structure in place. It is a unique thing. It is flow-through. Port Stephens has a recirculation system and it is augmented by trucked-in water. They have to truck in water once or twice a day from the coast, whereas the Cronulla system has water flowing straight from the sea and back into the estuary.

CHAIR: It is a big plus for Cronulla then?

Professor KENNELLY: I think so, but not just because I am the director there. I am also in charge of these other places as well. I know the advantages of all these places.

CHAIR: You can compare them.

Professor KENNELLY: Cronulla has its clear advantages over the other sites. It is obvious.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr Brown or Professor Kennelly, are you aware of any parts of this move that could impose increased costs on the recreational fishing trusts funds?

Mr BROWN: From a general perspective, having our recreational management and research collocated at Cronulla makes it highly accessible for everybody across the State. If you move us anywhere other than where we are, it will be more expensive to organise those meetings for everyone other than the local people. Cronulla hosts a lot of internal meetings for staff from across the State as well.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Would elements of those future travel costs be met out of the recreational fishing trust fund rather than by the department?

Professor KENNELLY: When we apply for funds from the trust we do a proposal and it is costed according to travel time, travel days and so on. We would have to redo that if projects are moved somewhere else.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So the answer is possibly yes.

Professor KENNELLY: Probably. It is dearer to get to other places than it is to get to Cronulla because Cronulla is central to the State and there is an airport 30 minutes away. It is more problematic to get to Port Stephens if you are at Coffs Harbour. You have to drive and that is so many cents per kilometre, whereas you can get on a plane to get there from here. Yes, there will probably be some costs.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is your personal situation given that you are not accepting the offer to move to Port Stephens? Will you have a job at the end of this process?

Professor KENNELLY: They wanted my last day of duty to be 17 August—a couple of weeks ago. I indicated that out of respect for this process I was not willing to make any decision about a last day of duty until it was completed. I have indicated that my last day of duty will be 31 October, which is a week after the Committee hands down its report, unless there is some change and the decision is overturned. If not, I will be forced to exit.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you are leaving?

Professor KENNELLY: I will be forced to exit.

CHAIR: You cannot relocate?

Professor KENNELLY: I cannot relocate to Port Stephens.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: How many years of experience do you have as a fisheries scientist?

Professor KENNELLY: I have been with the department for 25 years.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So the department will experience a substantial loss of knowledge. What measures has it put in place to ensure that your corporate knowledge is retained?

Professor KENNELLY: Not much. I had two staff but one had to take the redundancy payment and go elsewhere because she was having a severe psychological reaction. She has now left. It has been left to my executive assistant, Lisa, to deal with the files. The Committee will hear from her later today. It is not only data from the 25 years that I have been there; some of this stuff goes back 40, 50 and 60 years. We have to work out what to do with all that. In terms of my knowledge, it goes. When you lose someone's brain you lose that information. That is how it works with expertise: If you lose an expert, you lose them. I will work for whoever wants to employ me.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr O'Brien, you mentioned earlier the difficulty in staff arranging meetings with the Minister. I understand there was a meeting between the Minister and three employees. How were those employees selected to go to that meeting?

Mr O'BRIEN: We found ourselves—that is, the association, its members and other staff—in the situation where we were continually directed to do something if we wanted to meet with the Minister, but every time we did it nothing eventuated. We got so frustrated that we nominated the last day before Parliament resumed in February to travel the Minister's electorate office in the hope that she would be there clearing up electorate matters. We made that decision after trying to get an idea of when the Minister would be in her office. Whenever it was mentioned that the meeting was about the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence we were told that we would need to put the request in writing.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I understand that you did that.

Mr O'BRIEN: I did not handle that aspect of it; it was handled by staff. The feeling was that because the association had asked so many times and been knocked back it would be better coming from a staff member. That is a little sad, but that is just how it is. On the way to Yass there was considerable media coverage of the lengths to which the staff were going to meet with the Minister. My understanding is that the following Tuesday evening after business hours three staff members received a phone call from Mr Geoff Allan, the Executive Director of Fisheries, advising them that the Minister wanted to speak with members of staff the following day; they were not compelled to attend but they would be required at 9 o'clock and if they decided that they were going to attend they were not to discuss the fact that they would be meeting with the Minister with any of their work colleagues. The staff members, as I understand it, chose to attend that meeting in fear that if they did not then the Minister would indicate that for all the talk about "no meeting", "no meeting" these people rejected the offer. They attended that meeting.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Were there three staff members?

Mr O'BRIEN: There were three of them. I understand that in that meeting they were simply told that the decision would stand. I will pass to Mr Brown in a minute as he was one of those who received a phone call. They were told the decision would stand—this was reported back to the staff in my presence—there was no desire on the part of the Minister to meeting with either the Public Service Association or myself and that she would like them to take back the message that the decision would stand and work with the department to effect the relocation. I will ask Mr Brown if he wants to add anything, but I hope the Committee understands if he is fearful of exposing what went on in that meeting.

Mr BROWN: I add that I actually resented the way that whole thing came about. I think we were put in a really difficult position. We were phoned late in the evening after work and told the meeting was on. We were sworn to secrecy about attending. We were not allowed to confide in our colleagues and I found that very difficult as a staff representative. Throughout this process I have tried very hard to meet with the staff and accurately reflect their opinions and stuff. We were given no notice so we all talked amongst ourselves on the phone that evening and tried to figure out should we go or should we not go.

As Shane said, we kind of felt like we were snookered; if we go the Minister will use it against us to say that she met with the staff and all the rest of it whereas we did not feel we were representatives because we had not had that endorsement from the staff. If we did not go we would be accused of not taking up the opportunity to meet. We thought it was a bit unfair in that respect. Then we did meet we made it very clear, okay, we are meeting, we are not here as staff representatives, we are here as the nominees of the Executive Director and then we basically engaged in a discussion about our views on what was going on.

My recollection is that basically the view we put was that the Minister was being very badly advised about the whole decision and that we were very keen for her to come down to Cronulla and inspect the facility, meet the staff and then hopefully become more informed about what we do down there and that sort of stuff.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

Professor LES CHRISTIDIS, Director, National Marine Science Centre, Coffs Harbour,

Dr WILL FIGUIERA, Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney, and President, Australian Marine Sciences Association,

Professor BRONWYN GILLANDERS, Professor at the University of Adelaide, President Australian Society for Fish Biology, and

Dr ALASTAIR GRIEVE, Director, Scientific and Environmental Services Pty Ltd, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Professor GILLANDERS: As President of the Australian Society for Fish Biology.

Dr GRIEVE: I speak in a private capacity before this inquiry.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Dr GRIEVE: Briefly, I want to stress that I am speaking in a private capacity as a scientist and as the owner of a small consulting business but my background includes 50 years' experience as a research scientist and scientific manager. Of those 50 years I spent 35 years in the New South Wales public service. My views on the closure of Cronulla are based on that experience which includes personal involvement in a significant number of other scientific staff relocations and restructuring. For example, I was a member of the fundamental review of programs in the New South Wales Department of Agriculture which led to the relocation of 500 staff to Orange.

I want to make the point as well that I am familiar with the work and achievements of most of the scientists employed in the New South Wales public service, including those employed in Fisheries through my previous role as Chair of the New South Wales Research Scientists Committee. I left that position in June of this year but I had 12 years on that committee that is responsible for evaluating and promoting the high calibre research scientists who are employed in the New South Wales public service. That has given me an extensive and detailed knowledge of the factors that affect the productivity of both individual research scientists and groups of research scientists employed by different agencies in the public sector.

It is quite clear over the past several years—not focusing just on this immediate issue—that departmental relocations and restructuring are a major factor in affecting the productivity and the morale of State public service scientists. On occasions those restructures and relocations have had positive outcomes—I have to say that—but in general they have been negative. I think that is a great lesson to us and something we need to draw on in considering this current issue. They generally lead to a significant loss of skills, work output and morale. The reasons for that have been amply covered by earlier witnesses before this inquiry so I do not propose to elaborate greatly on that. But I thought it would perhaps help the Committee in its deliberations if I gave the Committee a little more understanding of how scientists become effective scientists and what conditions are necessary to maintain them as productive scientists.

There is a tendency to view scientists as just other public servants, people who can be quickly and easily replaced—perhaps even more cheaply. While it is true that nobody is irreplaceable, it is also true as we have heard that experienced scientists are a repository of enormous knowledge and information, which has been acquired at great public and personal expense. To disregard that or to lose it arbitrarily would seem to be the height of folly. It takes many years before a graduate scientist and then a post graduate scientist becomes a really effective researcher. It does not just happen through their own very considerable personal efforts; it happens because there is sensitive management and mentoring and support by the agencies that employ them. New South Wales was one of the pre-eminent States in Australia to recognise that and instituted the classification for research scientists to retain those very people within the public sector nearly 50 years ago. Since then we have somewhat been resting on our laurels and somewhat coasting in acknowledging that and in acknowledging how important that is to providing a sound basis for public policy. That is really the role of having scientists in the public sector: to better inform the public policy positions that government decides to adopt.

The other point I want to make is that scientists operate, as we have heard, using specialised facilities. In many cases those facilities are developed over years and years of successive investments. They are not easily replaced and they are expensive to replace. Having them, as we do at Cronulla, is a very important part of our culture. I noted an earlier question about culture. I think we need to acknowledge that science is a very important part of our contemporary Australian culture. We do not well recognise that but anyone who travels the world will realise that other countries place a very high value on this through maintaining such institutions. I believe it would require a very compelling argument to set aside all of the culture that is contained at Cronulla.

Around the world the evidence is demonstrably clear, and it is adopted here by the Department of Primary Industries, that the most efficient way to run science is through medium to large size units, not through large numbers of distributed units. This is not an argument against regionalisation; it is a rational approach to how you manage regionalisation so that you get the best results all around. For example, the Department of Primary Industries, as we heard earlier, has been closing facilities. Whether it has been successful in closing those facilities or not, it has in any event centralised the staff to a smaller number of larger facilities. That is a very clear indication that that is what is important in managing scientific service delivery efficiently.

You need to have a combination of regional contact with clients, where clients are based regionally, and at the same time have centrally based facilities with which you support all of those regional locations. When I was employed by the Department of Agriculture I carried out a survey of the productivity of their scientists and I found that it was like chalk and cheese. Those who were located in large facilities were productive—hugely productive in some cases. The smaller locations were often much less productive and that is for very good reasons. It is not because the people are less capable but because they are not able to interact with their colleagues and they are not able to access the same facilities.

CHAIR: Thank you for that contribution. Do any of the other witnesses wish to make a statement?

Professor GILLANDERS: I want to make a small statement. I am here representing the Australian Society for Fish Biology, which has over 500 members, of which about 20 per cent are from New South Wales and about half of those are from the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, not necessarily just Cronulla. I just wanted to put it in that broader perspective as we are a national society representing everybody.

CHAIR: So I imagine that you would have been shocked when you heard the announcement about the centre being closed?

Professor GILLANDERS: Yes. I was overseas at the time and was in total shock and had emails coming from colleagues around the world who were horrified by the decision to close Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre.

CHAIR: Any comment from you gentlemen?

Dr FIGUEIRA: I guess I would probably make a similar point. I am here representing the Australian Marine Sciences Association, specifically the New South Wales branch. I am not speaking on behalf of the national membership, which is about 1,000 scientists and practitioners but the New South Wales branch has about 200 scientists who all interact quite a bit with our fisheries scientists and many of them are members from Cronulla but certainly we all interact with them quite a bit.

Professor CHRISTIDIS: I am here in the context of the National Marine Science Centre, which has had a 10-year association with fisheries scientists from DPI and they have been based at Coffs Harbour. So we have an intimate relationship. They have been using our facilities. We do joint research together. I should add that in 2010 Southern Cross University took over the National Marine Science Centre, which is when I started. In the 10 years that it has existed there have been about 182 peer review publications produced there; 45 per cent have appeared since 2010. So it is a centre that is on the move and that synergy between the university staff and the DPI staff has been one of the reasons why we have been moving forward.

Since 2010 the Vice-Chancellor allocated \$2 million to upgrade our flow-through seawater system, which is fantastic. We just finished all the work a couple of months ago. We had our 10 year and our opening ceremony last week and we have state-of-the-art facilities that allow you to have seawater in temperature controlled and light controlled rooms anywhere in the building, and we have just got a brand-new 30,000 litre brood stock tank. That is in a temperature controlled and light controlled facility.

CHAIR: So it would appear that the decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence has undervalued the quality of that centre, as if it just like any other place and we can shut it down. Do you think it is correct that it has been undervalued?

Professor GILLANDERS: I would say it has been completely undervalued. To replicate the facilities elsewhere would take considerable cost and also time. It is not like you can just move staff to other places and expect there to be suitable laboratory facilities, aquarium facilities, all the field equipment, for example, just right there.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Was the Australian Society for Fish Biology involved in a bid for Sydney to host the 2016 world fisheries congress?

Professor GILLANDERS: The Australian Society for Fish Biology had a bid in to host the world fisheries congress. Originally it was going to be through Sydney and it would have almost certainly won had it gone through Sydney. With the uncertainty over what was happening with the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, there was no support to continue with that bid so a bid was put in through Adelaide, which we lost and it went to Korea, largely because we were uncertain about what was happening. If we had gone with Adelaide from the start or continued with Sydney the thought was that we would have almost certainly won that bid to host the 2016 world fisheries congress.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What would that have meant? What is that congress, how many people come to it and what does it generally mean for a local economy?

Professor GILLANDERS: It is held every four years. As the name suggests, it is the world fisheries congress. It brings together upwards of 1,000 international fisheries scientists from around the world. It would bring in significant income in terms of people, if it was Sydney, for example, coming into Sydney but also the flow-on benefits of tourism, for example. It is run over five days. It is something that was in Brisbane in 1996 and we were keen to get it back to Australia in 2016. It has only ever once been in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear, based on conversations you have probably had with people organising the congress Sydney was at the top or close to certainty that we would have the world congress here?

Professor GILLANDERS: The World Council of Fisheries Societies, of which the Australian Society for Fish Biology is a member, seeks expressions of interest to host that conference. We indicated that Sydney was a potential bid for that conference very early on and they were keen for us to progress that, which we were doing. In about December last year it became apparent that there may not be certainty over the remaining staff being at Cronulla and the ability to host that and we were forced to withdraw it, at which point the World Council of Fisheries Societies got worried that there would be no competitive bid, because we could not instantly say that Adelaide could take over. Around Christmas time there are not a lot of people around. You need government support for these sorts of things. So the American executive officer of that group of fisheries bodies and the president of the society, who was from the United Kingdom, approached Korea to put in a bid as well. That meant that there was at least one strong bid. There were four bids that went up eventually, two of which were viewed as competitive, the one from Korea and the one from Australia. Korea would not have been approached or strongly encouraged to put in a bid for that had Sydney been putting in a bid for it.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you know whether the Minister, Katrina Hodgkinson, is aware of that situation?

Professor GILLANDERS: I am not sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You can ask you next week.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I will ask her on Monday. Professor Christidis, I noticed your submission appeared to be a joint submission with the Hon. Andrew Fraser. I found that quite a curious situation. Can you inform the Committee why you chose to do that submission with Andrew Fraser rather than do your own independent submission?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: We were asked to put in a submission. At the time I was away overseas and when I got back Andrew Fraser's office said they would like to put the submission jointly with us. We were not

fussed about it. What we could do was comment just on the research and the research potential and what the NMSC could have. So we put in our submission. We were not aware that they were going to go in jointly but it has not changed or altered anything. It does look strange.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: When you said you were asked to put in a submission, who asked you?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: I was told overseas that we were asked to put in a submission so I organised to put in the submission.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say "we were asked to put in a submission" who asked you to put in a submission?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: That I do not know because it was my PA sent me an email. I was in the Kai Islands in Indonesia at the time.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you think it was possibly Andrew Fraser's office?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: That I would not know.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Would you be able to find out for the Committee?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: Yes but we would have put in a submission anyway as soon as we heard there was submissions due because we had been working fairly closely with DPI scientists, as I said.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Your submission argues the case for DPI scientific staff to be relocated to Coffs Harbour, but I understand that it is Fisheries managers largely, not scientists, who are to be relocated to Coffs Harbour. What do you think about that?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: At the moment we have got the management of Commercial Fisheries there and their staff. We have got the NSW Recreational Fishing policy staff and Wild Fisheries research staff. We have the most productive scientist in Wild Fisheries—Matt Broadhurst—who has been based there for ten years. We have made it clear that at the moment we have a fair bit of office space so we are happy to house policy staff. Our preference is for research scientists because we have state-of-the-art laboratories and state-of-the-art facilities. We have nothing against policy staff but we are interested in research scientists because the mutual benefits between the research scientists and our staff far outweigh anything else.

CHAIR: You are probably the only witness on this panel who is happy with the closure.

Professor CHRISTIDIS: I am not happy with the closure but I can see that it can bring benefits and opportunities.

CHAIR: Looking at it from your own view—the Southern Cross University point of view?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: I am looking at it from the perspective of what is good for fisheries research in the region and how we can maximise the benefits from a joint venture. I worked for five years as a member of the Senior Executive Service in the NSW Public Service, as deputy director of the Australian Museum. Prior to that, I was a senior manager at Museum Victoria. So I have worked in two States under various governments and in the university sector and I can see strong positive synergies of linking State Government with the university sector.

When I was at the Australian Museum I spent a good deal of my time trying to forge stronger links with universities and now that I am with the university, I am interested in forging stronger links with State Governments. I can see that both sets of sectors have different challenges and different priorities. I think one of the important things that I have brought to the National Marine Science Centre is to see both sides and to say: How we can have a win-win situation? The Vice Chancellor is supportive of having a State Government scientist based there in so much as he sees it as a way of leveraging additional Federal funding to pour back into the State Government research. We are looking at a strategic benefit.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: You are saying that you have plenty of office space and state-of-the-art facilities and the potential to attract further government funding. You said you are there, ready to gear into the future. What sort of things is the university and the organisation looking at trying to target into the future?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: Just a bit of history: The National Marine Science Centre was set up from Federal funding 10 years ago and was jointly owned by the University of New England and Southern Cross University. In 2010 Southern Cross University bought out the University of New England, so it became a single university facility. \$2 million was injected into it in order to upgrade its research and seawater facilities. Going from a two-institution body to a single institution body has meant that there is a lot more capability and a lot more infrastructure than a single university could use. So part of our interest is to look at other partnerships.

We have already had a successful partnership with the Department of Primary Industries [DPI] scientists there. One of our major interests was looking at food security, through agriculture and sustainable fisheries. The degree is called Marine Science and Management and we are interested in how science can impact and inform policy and management. Those two streams are important to us, hence our partnership with Department of Primary Industries fisheries has been key. We are not interested in just doing blue sky research, we want to have practical outcomes. We have got strong links with the local fisheries and the local industry.

The other thing that sets us apart from other facilities is that the waters off Coffs Harbour are where the temperate waters and the subtropical waters intersect. So we have a wonderful mixing of species there. The southernmost limits of subtropical species and the northernmost limit of temperate species occur in Coffs Harbour. If there are climatic changes, for whatever reason, that is where you will pick those changes up. It is a fantastic area to look at the impact on fisheries in a changing environment.

We have a seawater system second to none. The water is pumped from Charlesworth Bay into the three floors of our building. On any of the floors one can turn on hot and cold water and also seawater. So we have state-of-the-art labs with seawater on tap. We have an aquarium that is open to the public, so we can showcase our research and that of our colleagues to the public. We have secondary and primary school groups and we teach graduate, undergraduate and post graduate studies. It is a fantastic centre for getting fisheries science, marine science and management out there to the community and for working with government.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: You mentioned there are commercial fisheries staff there from the Department of Primary Industries. Why would they be located in Coffs Harbour? Is that because it is where the majority of the commercial fisheries are?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: Coffs Harbour is one of the major commercial fisheries, so there are a lot of commercial fisheries working in the northern region. We have the managers and some of the staff there. We found a nice synergy because their staff volunteered to give guest lectures in the undergraduate courses. The graduates we produce often go on to get jobs in policy and in government, so it is nice having the research done and having the policy managers who implement it giving lectures to the cohort. We have 40 to 45 undergraduates every year completing their third year Marine Science and Management course there.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Dr Grieve, I would like to ask a couple of quick questions about your opening remarks. You said you worked at the Department of Primary Industry?

Dr GRIEVE: I used to work for the DPI, yes.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: When did you finish working there?

Dr GRIEVE: I finished in 2007. I was with Forestry at that stage.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: You were in forestry when you were working with the DPI. Was that the majority of your career?

Dr GRIEVE: No, the majority of my career was with the Department of Agriculture.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: You mentioned the staff survey that you did when you were at DPI. When was that?

Dr GRIEVE: That would have been in about 1992.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: So it is 20 years ago in relation to the relocation and the things you were talking about in the staff survey and the opinions of staff?

Dr GRIEVE: That is true, although I think the same sort of findings would likely hold today.

CHAIR: Professor Christidis, you are putting a case of either/or. Would you agree that the Cronulla Centre could continue and the Government simply give further support to your Science Centre at Coffs Harbour? It is not either/or. You do not have to close Cronulla to benefit you.

Professor CHRISTIDIS: Absolutely. As a scientist, I would be advocating more research centres everywhere—it is not either/or. All we are putting forward is that these are the opportunities and these are some positives that can actually happen from it. Part of my role in the various jobs I have had is to turn anything into an opportunity and focus on the positives but it is not conditional on anything closing.

CHAIR: Your centre is obviously doing good work.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Doctor Figueira, your role with the university and also with the researches you represent would have a strong association with the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS]. Considering the recent upgrades and the money that has been spent there, did you want to make some comment about the ability for SIMS to be able to continue filling in the research role that it may be required to fill in the future?

Dr FIGUEIRA: I am actively involved in SIMS and spend a fair amount of time out there. I think there probably is some capacity and from a SIMS point of view there probably would be some benefits to having staff out there. It really gets at this critical mass issue that Dr Grieve mentioned, that throughout the world you will find that scientists are always striving for this critical mass of people to get things done. In the SIMS case, that is certainly one benefit. There could possibly be space limitations out there but as I am not in the loop, I do not want to speak to that now. Many of these people are my colleagues and I would be happy to see them there or at Cronulla.

There is a core issue that we should not overlook and I think the Chair hit it on the head by asking the question: Has it been undervalued? I think the issue is that it has not been valued at all, so we do not have any idea. There are definitely opportunities. There is an opportunity at the National Marine Science Centre where they do great stuff. I have been there and it is an incredible facility. There is no doubt that putting people up there will get good stuff done. The question is, once you subtract all the negatives, will more good stuff get done by doing that than by investing in some of that stuff at the Cronulla site where staff is already situated? That is what we tried to address. One of the key points of our submission was that this has not been thought through. As an objective scientist I like to think I would entertain any option if it is to the benefit of marine science and the community more broadly, but I do not think that is clear. It might be; there might be areas where it is and areas where it is not.

CHAIR: Your argument is that it is a political decision, not a scientific decision.

Dr FIGUEIRA: That is how it looked to me. I was just as shocked as Bronwyn when this happened. I found out from my colleagues who were asking me and I thought, "Certainly they've got it wrong. Obviously something has happened over the internet as it crossed the ocean basins and things got confused." It turned out to be correct. That is the key and that is what worries us, AMSA, going forward. We hope there would be some solution other than completely closing the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. If it has happened this way so far, what will happen next is even more worrisome. From our perspective and that of people I know in the community it is really chaotic at the moment. Nobody knows what is going on. It just seems like everyone is being fragmented or leaving.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I believe fisheries agencies in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia have relocated. Has the Australian Society for Fish Biology expressed an opinion about those relocations? Is this what your association normally does? Has it done this in the past?

Professor GILLANDERS: We do not usually advocate for one thing or another. In this case with the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre there was such strong support from our members that we should write a submission that we have done so. In the other places I think you will find the staff have all been moved as opposed to being fractured and moved all over the place. They have gone as a cohort. We do not normally

advocate, as I mentioned, so we did not have any involvement that I am aware of in the Victorian, Queensland and Western Australian situations.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Do you have any information or an opinion on how those relocations have fared over time in terms of fisheries science and research? Have they been badly affected or have there been some positives?

Professor GILLANDERS: In relation to Victoria, they have certainly gone downhill. Their capabilities in the area of fisheries science have probably decreased over time and they are tending to work more collaboratively with the South Australians. I am also told that there is potential for Queensland to move out of some of its fisheries research as well, so really of the three places you mentioned they key place for fisheries research would be in Western Australia. I have not heard negatives from that State in relation to what they have done.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Dr Figueira, your submission refers to the universities' capacities being stretched almost to breaking point, but after listening to Professor Christidis it sounds like their association with that university is more than capable of expansion. Are you putting that in the context only of the universities in the Sydney basin? Can you clarify that aspect of your submission?

Dr FIGUEIRA: I am glad you asked that; it is one thing I wanted to follow up. One of the points of our submission was that there are a lot of synergies that come out of interactions with universities, both intellectual and raw money. The best estimate I got from Cronulla was that there is about \$1.25 million in leveraged funds that we have gotten from the Australian Research Council [ARC] or through ARC relations. I know that does not sound like a whole lot of money in the context of a government budget but that is actually quite a massive amount of money for doing fish biology research, given what we are used to playing with. I have one of these linkage grants with the centre. Our point was that you will definitely have those opportunities at Coffs Harbour but the number of opportunities will generally come down to the available pool of people with which to have them.

It is a network. There are four major universities in Sydney and there are Newcastle and Wollongong in greater Sydney, so there are a lot of scientists who interact. I interact—we are all busy people—largely through our students and sometimes through our post-doctorates. It gets logistically challenging if I am trying to run a program in Port Stephens. That is not to say we never do this but we will do it a lot more when it is close to home. That is the point of that phrase "stretching to breaking point". Certainly some of those opportunities will dry up for Sydney-based scientists. That is not to say there will not be any or that they will not find new ones or work with scientists at the National Marine Science Centre. I have projects that are quite relevant to work up there because of the tropical transition zone. Again, it is a question of whether anyone has thought about what we are going to get versus what we are going to lose. That is another one of those areas.

CHAIR: It could have a long-term impact on students going to fisheries as a scientific subject?

Dr FIGUEIRA: It could. It depends on the level to which other areas are able to fill that gap. If the National Marine Science Centre in Coffs Harbour has enough interest from students to meet the same level of interest that the six universities in the greater Sydney area had then there will not be a loss. If they do not, there will be a loss. It is not quite that simple.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What impact has the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre had on New South Wales's international reputation with regard to research? Is it positive or negative?

Dr FIGUEIRA: It is one of befuddlement. People are wondering why anyone would do such a thing especially coming on the heels of retraction of marine park zoning and all the other things that have happened lately. Our international colleagues have been a little curious as to what is going on with marine science in New South Wales. That has been my impression. That is why we get emails asking what is going on. It does not reflect positively; that would be my answer.

Professor GILLANDERS: That is pretty much what I would say. It also has potential to impact negatively in the future as well. Sydney is a transport hub. You can come through Sydney and pop off to Cronulla quite easily on your way to somewhere else. It is much harder to do that when you have to go to Nowra or other places along the coast, even Port Stephens. To go to a meeting there takes a couple of days if you are coming from interstate or overseas whereas you can get to Sydney and back in a day.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Australian Marine Science Association [AMSA] submission talks about where the PhD students are drawn from and the fact that many of them become Department of Primary Industries scientists because of its national and international reputation. It states:

The movement of staff away from the highest density of post-graduate students in the state will certainly reduce these training opportunities.

Can you explain that statement?

Dr FIGUEIRA: That is from some of our members who collaborate with Fisheries largely through students and many of their students then wind up getting jobs and moving through the ranks. You will find some of the chief scientists at the Cronulla centre and in fisheries broadly have come from many of the Sydney universities, some from the building I am in. Again, it is to a degree a matter of logistical challenges. That is not to say that they could not interact with fisheries agencies, do PhD projects and get jobs when those places are somewhere else but the likelihood is quite a bit lower. When we are given \$1,500 a year for an honours student and \$2,000 to support research for a PhD student it is pretty hard to do any kind of project that is far away unless it is externally funded, often by a linkage grant with that agency. It gets hard and that is the sentiment of AMSA's submission: it is going to get harder and that is why things will dry up. There will be fewer and fewer people making that effort to try to get their students interacting directly with scientists far away.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On page 3 of the AMSA submission it states:

... the financial costs of this action will certainly result in less science upon which to base management decisions about marine resources in NSW.

We heard some testimony earlier today that internationally Western societies had moved towards stakeholder-based management regimes as opposed to scientific-based management regimes but in the United States they have turned away from that and are moving back to scientific-based management regimes. That statement in your submission would indicate you are clearly concerned we are moving towards a stakeholder-base management process as opposed to science-based.

Dr FIGUEIRA: That is not necessarily my personal opinion. I do tend to agree with that. I have been in other Parliamentary inquiries—not in this room—where in fact the call is for more transparent science-based management in the marine parks and everything else. It is the stakeholders who are effectively calling for that, blaming one side versus the other. There is a lot of finger-pointing. At the end of the day it seems that is the message. Both sides are saying, "Let us have more transparent science-based management." You need scientists and science for that to happen.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In the submission from the Australian Society for Fish Biology, it is talking about Cronulla fisheries and it says:

Many of the staff are internationally recognised leaders in fisheries research and management. Those with PhD qualifications have, for example, undertaken education and research training of 7+ years ... which in many cases is irreplaceable.

Professor Gillanders, could you talk through what that means for people with PhD qualifications internationally? There are international students; is that right?

Professor GILLANDERS: What we are saying, you do not have staff who have just come through an undergraduate degree of three years. In many cases, they have done an undergraduate degree of three years and an honours degree of another year, a PhD degree of another three years, at least, and these are minimum amounts. A lot of students nowadays will take time out to get some work experience. It might be working at Cronulla, or something like that, before they come back and do a PhD. We are just saying the minimum years of university education of many of the staff at Cronulla is at least seven years, so it is significant. Then if you put on top of that the amount of time that a number of them have been employed at Cronulla—and I heard Steve Kennelly mention that he had been there for 25 years—you do not find those skills again overnight. It takes years and years of training and building up the expertise and the ability to engage with stakeholders at the level that those people can do it. That is where we are coming from.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Of those PhD projects being conducted at Cronulla, when it is closed, which ones are Cronulla-specific because of the water that you could not do anywhere else?

Dr FIGUEIRA: I do not have students personally doing those, but anything to do with the sea pens. I have had a lot of students using the aged growth facility. That is an example of infrastructure that could be replicated somewhere else, so that is good news there, but if we lose the expertise—I do a lot of that stuff and it takes an amount of knowledge to get your head around that. We send students there because those guys can run them through and advise quickly how to age fish, whereas it takes me much longer because I am not nearly as good as them.

Those projects will depend on logistic proximity for those projects to continue. I do have one student on a linkage grant who is working on recreational fishing. That will become more challenging, mainly because personnel will be lost, but also there was going to be some field components and field surveys to do with that. It is a little unclear what will happen.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Professor Christidis, has your organisation had specific negotiations with the department to say what facilities they will require at your centre?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: We have had discussions even before the announcement of things happening at Cronulla, because we have always had the Department of Primary Industries scientists there. We have been in discussion beforehand about how we could form stronger links, which is one of the reasons why we have come up with our four key research areas. One of them is sustainable fisheries and that is intimately linked with the Department of Primary Industries. We have got a fairly good idea of what is required. We have been up front, saying, yes, we can provide those facilities because they fit nicely within our strategic vision.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Out of this current process with the closure at Cronulla, has there been specific negotiation about the number of people based permanently at your facility?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: We have stayed out of that process. Our attitude is it is a government process; it is a Department of Primary Industries process. Our position is this is what we can provide. This is what we can offer.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: At this stage you are not aware of any additional body coming to use the research facilities at your centre?

Professor CHRISTIDIS: Apart from the staff that are already based there, we have got no inkling—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is a nice centre; I have seen it.

Professor CHRISTIDIS: We are not a neutral observer, but we have facilities, we have opportunities, we are very keen, we are very pro, but we will see how it pans out and, whatever happens, there will always be plans B, C, D.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We have touched on this a bit, but one of the things that seems to be a real concern is that there does appear there will be a significant loss of experienced scientific knowledge as this process goes through. Would any of you like to comment on how that will impact on long-term research projects in New South Wales in Fisheries. Dr Grieve?

CHAIR: I will add a similar question: how does this limit the Minister's ability to meet the goals that they are supposed to be enforcing under the Fisheries Management Act?

Dr GRIEVE: I cannot comment on that aspect of it. As far as the programs are concerned, most programs are intimately connected with the expertise of the senior investigator. They are often a critical part of obtaining funding for that particular program, and losing them and then having to recruit and train someone equivalent inevitably creates a gap, and sometimes that gap leads to the project failing.

Professor GILLANDERS: In our submission, we also indicate there is potential to impact on the Minister's responsibilities, and we base that on the assumption that research capability will be lost, but at present when we put in our submission, we were of the understanding that at least 18 staff had already left the department and only seven had moved to regional locations. If you assume a similar loss ratio of staff for the remaining staff, that suggests there will be a difficulty in meeting requirements of the Fisheries Management Act of New South Wales.

Dr FIGUEIRA: It is an enormous amount of work to meet those requirements, to assess the stocks in such a data-poor environment and to conduct the research necessary to do so. They are already on the back foot: there is limited funding and people are working very hard. There certainly would be a short-term impact.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for attending as witnesses, particularly your excellent submissions. They are very helpful for the committee. We thank you for that work and for your attendance.

(The witnesses withdrew)

KENNETH THURLOW, Chief Executive Officer, ECOfishers NSW, and

JOHN BURGESS, Executive Officer, Australian National Sportfishing Association Ltd, and

ROBERT AUDSLEY, Volunteer Leader, Southern Sydney, NSW Fishcare Volunteer Program, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would any one of you like to make an opening statement?

Mr AUDSLEY: Firstly, I would like to thank the panel for this opportunity to state the Fishcare case. I will provide a bit of information on myself while I am here. I retired in 2000 and, being an avid recreational fisherman, I sought a means of getting kids outdoors and putting back into fishing some of the pleasures I had got out of it over the last 60 years. I approached Cronulla fisheries and became the first saltwater Fishcare volunteer recruited in New South Wales. I joined this excellent program in 2001 and to date have accrued about 5,000 hours of voluntary service. In 2006 the Australian Recreational and Sport Fishing Industry Confederation Inc. [Recfish] awarded me the inaugural Fishcare Volunteer of Australia Award from about 1,200 Fishcare volunteers across Australia. Since 2003 I have been elected volunteer leader for the southern Sydney region every year at our annual general meeting [AGM].

I currently seek and coordinate activities and events for 28 active volunteers for the southern Sydney region, many of whom have accrued well over 1,000 hours of service to Fishcare. These activities include: taking groups from local high schools every week on their Fishing for Sport excursions; attending primary schools over six-weekly sessions to impart the Get Hooked It's Fun to Fish Program; running fishing clinics during school holidays and on the final weeks of the Get Hooked program; putting Cub-Scouts packs through their fishing badges; giving Rock-Fishing Safety talks to various ethnic community groups; giving rules and regulations talks to amateur fishing clubs; attending boat shows, Easter shows, camping and caravan shows, Ocean Watch days, school fêtes; and a multitude of other public events with our information trailer "Bluey" to inform the public about recreational fishing in New South Wales.

We run specialised fishing days for kids with disabilities, Quality Kids and wayward and deprived kids groups. We recently ran an Adult Fishing Clinic at Cronulla for homeless men from the Mathew Talbot Hostel. We also assist Fisheries staff in the Sydney Harbour dioxin and Sydney Harbour surveys and ferry wharves information boat runs. The list includes only some of the multitude of activities we are involved in, and they are all done on a voluntary basis. The vast majority of these activities are carried out in the Greater Sydney Region as this is where 60 per cent of New South Wales recreational fisherfolk live. Many of our activities take place within the Sutherland shire and around the Cronulla area.

To carry out these activities, we Fishcare volunteers need to interact with several Fisheries staff on a regular basis and many others on an ad-hoc basis. Currently all the staff members are based at Cronulla in the recreational division and are easily reachable. We also have a storeroom full of equipment and informational material at Cronulla which we need to access, use and maintain weekly, such as rods, reels, kits, terminal tackle, pamphlets, booklets, handouts, et cetera. We also have dedicated parking areas for "Bluey" and the two boats that we use on a regular basis. We have been told that all these staff, who are essential to our activities and goals, are to be relocated to Newington in the NSW Food Authority complex. We have been told that this complex has limited access hours during week days and no access on weekends. The site does not have any storage facilities such as we require.

Currently volunteers travel to the Cronulla site two to three times a week to collect materials and equipment as well as to meet with staff from the Recreational Fisheries Education Team. We also need to access equipment out of hours and on weekends, such as when we picked up "Bluey" at 0700 at Cronulla on a Sunday morning recently, towed him to Bondi to attend the Bondi Festival where we handed out information and answered questions from over 350 visitors on the day. At the end of the day, we towed "Bluey" back to Cronulla, unpacked him, and headed for home at about 5.30 p.m. This would not have been possible if the trailer had been located in another area in Sydney.

I have canvassed all of my volunteers and not one of them is prepared to travel in heavy traffic halfway across Sydney for one-to-two hours and then repeat the journey to return equipment or materials. Most of the southern Sydney region volunteers live in the Sutherland shire, St George or eastern suburbs areas, and have intimated to me that they will either leave the Fishcare program or switch to the Illawarra Fishcare group, if the

move to Newington comes about. Graham Phillis is the leader for the northern Sydney region and he is in a similar predicament with his 22 volunteers. Most of our volunteers are still working full-time jobs and as such can spare time only on weekends to devote to the program; hence a site that is only accessible during weekday work times would be untenable.

Therefore if the Fishcare volunteers are not able to conveniently access Fisheries staff and our equipment and trailers, then all the functions I have described would come to a grinding halt in the Greater Sydney area. I believe that the recreational fishing trusts, who currently fully support these programs, would probably withdraw their funds. If that occurs in then thousands of kids will be deprived of partaking in what is the most popular pastime in Australia. I am sorry if I am sounding like a doomsday prophet, but it is the truth of the matter—an aspect that obviously was not considered when the closure of Cronulla was first proposed.

In closing, may I hereby state that neither I nor any other Fishcare volunteer was contacted or consulted about the Minister's intent to decimate Cronulla fisheries until May 2012, which was seven months after I had sent several letters and emails to Minister Hodgkinson and other State members on the matter. I can provide a list of statistics as part of my submission.

CHAIR: Mr Burgess?

Mr BURGESS: Thank you, Chairman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak before you. I would like to elaborate later on, if I can, on some of the issues contained in my submission only because of the fact that I wrote it in July and a number of events have occurred post that time that need elaboration. By way of background, I have been involved with recreation fishing for 35 years as a volunteer. I am the executive officer of the Australian National Sportfishing Association, which is one of the largest peak bodies in Australia and certainly one of the largest peak bodies in New South Wales. I have held that position for 10 years. It is a purely voluntary position.

I am on the board of the Australian Recreational and Sport Fishing Industry Confederation Inc. [Recfish], which is the nationally recognised peak recreational body. I sit on the board of the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation [ARFF], which is a joint venture between Recfish, and the recreational fishing industry, and the tackle association, who make their living out of recreational fishing. I am an International Game Fishing Association representative in Australia. I also sit on the advisory council on Recreational Fishing [ACoRF] for New South Wales. I also sit on the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust. When I have a spare minute, I actually do get to fish.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I was wondering when you would.

Mr BURGESS: I have mentioned just some roles. I thought I would give you an idea. It is a part-time job, if I could use that term: it probably consumes about 60 hours a week. I am not an isolated case. There are many people like me—some of whom are here today—who give up an enormous amount of their time trying to do the right thing by recreational fishing because we feel that we have an obligation to put something back into the community from which we relish so much enjoyment and participation.

By way of background, I am a chartered accountant by profession. I have worked all my life in the finance industry. I have a considerable background in terms of decentralisation of development. For five years I managed part of the country industry assistance scheme, which is known as the Cappie-Woods scheme, so I know a fair bit about what that is all about. I am also well aware of the many perils that are involved in that particular scheme and the fact that it never really worked that well during the period of my stewardship and it probably still does not work too well today. In terms of my professional background, I have also been seconded many times to the Premier's Department under both Labor governments and Coalition governments in terms of my role in strategic planning and also in terms of basically putting together infrastructure financing—something that is pretty dear to the mind of the State Government at the moment under the private-public partnership scheme. I have a good background in commerce and industry generally. I try to bring those talents across here to what I do in terms of recreational fishing.

I was at Cronulla last week as part of the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust Expenditure Committee when I was called about attending this hearing. We were addressing a five-year strategic plan for the trust funds and the various projects we have under our stewardship as part of the funding program. We raise about \$13 million a year for the licence fund. We generally keep \$10 million for the saltwater trust and \$3 million for the freshwater trust. So we cover all those aspects. One of the major areas of investment is scientific research.

We undertake a plethora of research projects. One of the concerns about the five-year plan is where we will be not in five years but in 12 months or 24 months. A number of the current projects of scientific significance are in limbo. The staff that we had working on those projects either have left or will leave. A number of major projects have not been started. One of them—a statewide survey—is of critical importance to the interests of recreational fishers and fishers generally. We are rolling out those surveys across Australia. It is 11 years since a decent national survey of recreational fishing was conducted. Unfortunately, the staff assigned to undertake those surveys will be leaving. We are gravely concerned about a vast number of projects.

As I said, I worked with the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence for 35 years. I saw a similar thing happen in the 1980s, again in the quest for decentralisation and development. A decision was made to rationalise the operations at Cronulla and the local area. We decentralised much of the research and other administrative activities of NSW Fisheries and the Department of Primary Industries to regional areas. That was an abysmal failure. Some of the best scientific talent in commercial and recreational fishing was located at Cronulla, but many of the scientists left. It has taken us nearly 30 years to rebuild that professional expertise. It is insane to think that, having finally recovered our position, it will now be cast asunder. I heard today that 31 out of 138, or 23 per cent, of the people working at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence are prepared to stay on. That is an absolute insult to the intelligence of the people of this State and recreational and commercial fishers generally. Where will they go? Some say that they will go to universities and to other facilities that may be able to provide that level of science. I have grave concerns about whether those organisations will be prepared to take on the projects that we have under our control.

Members should also be concerned because this is your fishery. It is not only a recreational fishery; it is also a commercial fishery and we must focus on both. We need the very best talent available. I cannot believe that these people will be cast aside. Professor Les Christidis from the National Marine Science Centre at Coffs Harbour gave evidence earlier. I have been to the centre and I acknowledge that it does research, but it is very limited. In fact, the trust fund has rejected a number of proposals from the centre because they did not add sufficient value to the quality of commercial and recreational fishing. I think it would be fair to say that the professor was perhaps padding his own nest to create an opportunity to enhance that research centre. I am not saying it does no good, but other places do much better—and the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence certainly does. It is superior to any fisheries research centre in this country and it must be preserved.

My submission asks why this course of action is being embarked upon. It astounds me. I cannot comprehend it. We have a remarkable facility and some of the best researchers in the country, and they will be cast aside. What will the department do with the property? It has great development potential. I would not mind living there. I could put my boat out the back and live there happily. That will not be an easy issue to resolve. It has a number of limitations. I would hate to think that it would become a wasteland. This Government and previous governments have identified wonderful assets around the harbour—and Strickland House is a classic example—but we do not know what to do with them. Security guards should be there to ensure that it is not vandalised. Someone asked about the tanks and ponds. If they are not maintained they will fall apart, and if they do not they will be a risk to anyone in the area. We are required to fence our swimming pools. I would not want pools like that in my backyard. Kids should not be exposed to unnecessary risk.

Mr THURLOW: I acknowledge the untiring efforts of Angeline Chung and Ian Young in getting me here from the bush. They should be highly commended. New South Wales recreational fishers support and applaud the relocation of some of the expertise at Cronulla. It is already enhancing and expediting service delivery to New South Wales recreational fishers. We do not believe any loss of scientific expertise will impact negatively upon sustainable fisheries management. ECOfishers NSW recommends the retention of some key personnel geographically close to the Minister, her office and staff. We also acknowledge that there will be impacts on some staff and their families. However, these impacts are no different from those faced by tens of thousands of other New South Wales public servants who face relocation and transfer annually. The impacts are not terminal nor insurmountable. As has been pointed out already today, they often have beneficial outcomes. The single issue that ECOfishers NSW identifies in relation to impacts upon the heritage values is the issue of ongoing maintenance of the Cronulla site. This issue is largely irrelevant to New South Wales recreational fishers. I am happy to take questions.

CHAIR: Mr Audsley, your opening statement contains a number of very valuable figures. Would you like to table that statement so that it becomes part of the evidence?

Mr AUDSLEY: Yes. They are the figures we submit to the recreational fishing trust each year so that it will grant us money to do the things we do.

CHAIR: Over the past few years the figures add up to 26,700 students going through the different programs. Are you saying that all those programs will cease if Cronulla is closed?

Mr AUDSLEY: That is New South Wales. Yes, 40 per cent to 50 per cent are in the greater Sydney area. We have 330 Fishcare volunteers across New South Wales. Of them, 28 are in the southern area of Sydney, 22 are in the northern area, eight are at Long Reef and three are in the Nepean area. Those figures are not there. The greater Sydney group is the one that does the most work per capita.

CHAIR: Do you believe that they had that information when the decision was made to close the Cronulla centre? Did they know the level of school and student involvement?

Mr AUDSLEY: No. I do not think it was even considered.

CHAIR: It cannot be transferred to Coffs Harbour or anywhere else?

Mr AUDSLEY: No.

CHAIR: So all those programs will come to an end if the Cronulla centre closes?

Mr AUDSLEY: Perhaps. I have a calendar of events for last year. If the staff move to Newington and the Fishcare volunteers desert en masse, of the 118 events held in greater Sydney—for example, the international boat show, or taking a group of kids fishing—75 would be put in jeopardy. Only 27 would definitely go ahead.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Burgess, at the previous public hearing we heard from the executive director of NSW Fisheries, Dr Geoff Allen, who stated that although the majority of fishers live within the Sydney area they conduct most of their fishing away from the Sydney basin area, on the north and south coasts. Do you agree with that statement?

Mr BURGESS: I totally disagree with that statement. I made a pledge to fish at least one day a week, to justify having a boat. I do travel down the South Coast and on the North Coast but that would account probably for about five or six trips for me over the course of a calendar year. That is basically five days out of 50, 52 days of the year. I think I am reflective. I am one of the founding members of the largest sports fishing club in New South Wales. I can assure you I have great difficulty these days trying to get members to travel on faraway trips, to travel to the South Coast and the North Coast. There is a great deal of disinterest in doing that because of the cost of travel these days, fuel, it just overwhelms it. The type of camaraderie that was once very prevalent in recreational fishing is not there today, I am sorry to say.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What do you think will be the impact on what you do and what your members do in recreational fishing of the recreational research licensing and management staff being so fragmented to Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens, Newington, Mosman and Nowra?

Mr BURGESS: For someone like me personally, I think that is going to put me under a considerable degree of pressure as to whether I continue to do what I do. I sit on the trust fund and I sit on, I think, seven or eight recreational licence trusts, special project advisory committees, and a couple that are funded by the Commonwealth Government as well and managed by New South Wales Fisheries. I would say never a month goes by when I do not spend at least three days at Cronulla. I do not get paid for that; I am happy to give up my time to do that, and there are many people like me. I just do not know whether I will be able to travel up to Coffs Harbour or somewhere like that or down to Eden or down the South Coast to be able to do those activities.

CHAIR: So there are facilities at Cronulla where you can have these trust meetings?

Mr BURGESS: There are. I heard one of the previous speakers say it is so essential in relation to the airport for people coming in and flying out. Accommodation is readily available in the Cronulla precinct. There are facilities there, there are ample rooms. It works very well. Likewise, on many occasions when we are dealing with fishery scientists, those fishery scientists are being supported by scientists from the various universities in and around Sydney, and that adds value to that equation, because they can be made available at short notice to travel to Cronulla to add value to those committees. Again, I hazard a guess that that time may not be so readily available if they have to give up a day or two days to travel to distant locations.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Thurlow, in your opening statement you said that you were speaking on behalf of recreational fishers. Who are your constituents, when you say you are speaking on behalf of recreational fishers? Are you representing recreational fishers across the entire State?

Mr THURLOW: Yes. We have them on the Queensland border, on the Victorian border, west of the ranges. We have 20,000 members, 6,000 in my hometown of Byron Bay and 6,000 around Coffs Harbour. We have members all over the State.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Burgess, you also said in your submission that you were representing recreational fishers and you seem to have a different opinion to Mr Thurlow?

Mr BURGESS: Absolutely.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Would you care to comment on that?

Mr BURGESS: We regard ourselves as being a very legitimate recreational peak body. We have been around 50 years and we are the second-largest probably behind the Game Fishing Association of Australia and Game Fishing Association of New South Wales. The fact is we are a professional body and we are part of all the national peak body groups. We are involved at a Commonwealth level and a State level. No disrespect to my colleague Mr Thurlow but his claims to have 20,000 members I find quite spurious. His organisation does not have a legitimacy as the organisation I represent.

CHAIR: The Premier has put in writing the reasons for relocating the centre—which means to close the centre—were limited access, constrained modernisation and expansion capacity. You were regularly out there. Would you say there is any truth in those three reasons?

Mr BURGESS: No, I cannot see the logic behind those rationales. There is plenty of space there. The buildings by and large are single-level buildings. The scientific facility there is a two-level building and, I might add, that was subject to expenditure of about \$3 million only about seven years ago to bring those scientific facilities up to world-class standard. I attended that opening when Minister Macdonald was the Minister. There is still a fair degree of vacant land available. The only problem one would experience in travelling to Cronulla is that it is hard to park a car there. At any one time there are probably 100 cars parked in the car park which belong to the staff. If that area was to be utilised in a better way and you have aboveground and below ground car parking and there is more than adequate space there to greatly expand that facility.

CHAIR: There is no limitation on the access to the centre?

Mr BURGESS: There is no limitation on access. It is quite a unique location at the end of the street. It is a headland surrounded by water on basically three sides. You have ocean on the eastern side, Main Bar to the south and going into the back of Cronulla Basin on the other side. It has a combination of rock shelf, deepwater and an estuary available to it. It covers a broad spectrum of what you are looking to do in managing a fishery and fisheries research. I heard someone say earlier about the conditions at Port Stephens. It is a brackish research station. It is not appropriate for the work we are going to take in at Cronulla.

CHAIR: It would appear the Premier has been poorly advised or badly advised?

Mr BURGESS: I would suggest that might be the case.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Mr Audsley, thank you, number one, for the great work you and your fellow volunteers do in educating our young people and not so young people. I have in front of me a letter from the Minister to you back in May, reassuring you that key recreational and educational services will continue and will have a presence in Sydney. Are you upset that instead of being in Cronulla you are going to be placed in other areas, Newington and other areas in Sydney? Is this what is upsetting?

Mr AUDSLEY: We have been told that the education team that we deal with are to be relocated at Newington in the NSW Food Authority building. Newington is accessible between 8.00 in the morning and 5.00 in the afternoon, weekdays only. Most of our work is done on weekends. None of my volunteers who run two weekly sessions every week of the school year at Cronulla is going to travel from southern Sydney, from the Sutherland shire, to Newington and back again. I work part time as an exam invigilator and it takes me an hour

and a half to get to Olympic Park and an hour and a half to two hours to get back home again. None of my people will do that.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are most of your volunteers based in the shire or close to the shire?

Mr AUDSLEY: Yes, based in the shire—Sutherland shire, St George and eastern suburbs. That is the southern Sydney group. The northern Sydney group range from probably around the Middle Harbour area up to the northern suburbs of Sydney.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Would it be feasible to try to negotiate some other area for the volunteers to be placed in?

Mr AUDSLEY: I have put a submission in the local paper, the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*. There was an ad put in inviting submissions. It was put in Tuesday 26 June and it gave until Friday 29 June to put a submission in—three days—which I thought was abysmal. I put a submission into that and requested whoever the consultant is who was looking at that—and it turns out to be Mr David Harley. I have had two phone conversations with him. He is quite amenable to our needs. I put in two proposals. One, that we retain a Fishcare presence at Cronulla, keep the education team there. Most of our money and funds come out of the Recreational Fishing Trust, and of the licence money. The State Government does not give us anything. That was one proposal, and that we set aside an area down there where we could perhaps build a storage shed, or if the closure of Cronulla were to go ahead, where we could store our equipment. Currently we have got equipment in Kennards at Taren Point, and in another area, and the Recreational Fishing Trust pays for those storage areas. The second proposal was that we hire a warehouse in the Taren Point-Caringbah-Kurnell area with enough floor space for us to put Bluey, the information trailer, and the boats in, and have storage around it and with a mezzanine office in it. I went into local real estate agents and asked about it. We can get one for in between \$600 and \$1,200 a week.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Something can be negotiated?

Mr AUDSLEY: If the closure of Cronulla was set in concrete and was to go ahead, that is the least we would want out of it.

CHAIR: Will the trust finance it?

Mr BURGESS: That is another matter, Mr Chair. Not only do these people need to have their equipment and infrastructure located close to Cronulla but also when these programs are being run one of the most important parts of the program is hands-on delivery, taking these kids down to Burraneer Bay and other places to give them first-hand experience of fishing. That is the reward that people like my colleague here enjoy and I enjoy and, more importantly, that is the major reward that the kids that we go back and teach get at the end of the day, practical experience. Gunnamatta Bay is the perfect location to do that. There is nothing anywhere in metropolitan Sydney that offers that degree of safety for people to be able to fish and actually to go there and fish and have the prospect of actually catching a fish. There is no point taking them somewhere where they cannot catch a fish and you cannot do it safely.

Mr THURLOW: I would like to add something to that. What we are seeing is what recreational fishers voted against at the last election. The fisheries business in New South Wales is seen as Sydney centric. This Bluey the Groper and the trailer and the facilities that belong to all New South Wales fishermen have never been to the far north coast of New South Wales. It has never been to Coffs Harbour yet it is owned by all the recreational fishers in New South Wales. This Sydney centric thing—all the decisions are located at Cronulla, all the decisions are made, the ACoRF meetings, which are under review too, I might add, take place in Sydney, the trust meetings take place in Sydney. All of that is being reviewed and we are looking at regional meetings and different strategies.

Fishermen voted for change at the last election, and these are some of the issues that we are hearing about here today from my colleagues that they voted to change. While we have this Sydney centric thing about NSW Fisheries, we are starting to have a NSW Fisheries imprimatur established in the bush. People are finding out there are people representing them that they have never been able to vote for, they have never been able to elect. They are ministerially appointed and they are making decisions that affect all of us that we cannot make a contribution about. The dissemination that has started already is working wonders in the bush. The Recreational Fisheries Manager had a 30 or 40 minute commute in peak hour traffic in Sydney. He is now in Coffs Harbour

and rides a bike to work and loves it. He works in the office of the National Marine Science Centre and has one wall in his office as an aquarium. He is as happy as a pig in the proverbial and he is delivering better outcomes for New South Wales recreational fishers, and it is all the more expedient. We are loving it.

Mr AUDSLEY: I beg to differ with Mr Thurlow. There are something like five Blueys stationed across the State. He obviously has not seen the one that is stationed at Coffs Harbour.

Mr THURLOW: Never heard of it. It has never been out of the shed.

Mr AUDSLEY: You should open your eyes. There is another one at Newcastle, one at Illawarra and several more out in the west.

Mr BURGESS: I want to make an observation. In terms of the composition of ACoRF and the Saltwater Trust, there are five members on ACoRF who come from the Northern Rivers area and there are about five members who also sit on the Recreational Saltwater Trust expense committee who also come from that area. From my point of view, that area is very well represented: in fact, more represented than metropolitan Sydney and the southern coast of New South Wales. I think Mr Thurlow needs to do his homework.

Mr THURLOW: Gentlemen, we have never been able to elect any representative. That is what recreational fishers want to do.

Mr BURGESS: Put your name down and nominate.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Without putting fuel onto the fire between some of the agencies, how many members have face-to-face contact at Cronulla or is all the interaction done either online or through bait shops et cetera to purchase licences?

Mr THURLOW: I was a regular visitor to Cronulla at great expense to ECOfishers. They used to run a Thursday seminar and I was a regular attendee.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: How many of your members, not yourself personally, attended Cronulla?

Mr THURLOW: No, it is too remote.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Could their services be provided anywhere else?

Mr THURLOW: Yes. They did not attend Cronulla; it is seen as too remote. They are really looking forward to the same services being provided at Coffs Harbour, Batemans Bay, Nowra and so on.

Mr BURGESS: We have had meetings of the Trust Fund at Coffs Harbour, in terms of ACoRF, in terms of managing with the grey nurse shark management plans. We have had meetings in Merimbula down the South Coast.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Not meetings of boards et cetera but I mean actual recreational fishers.

Mr BURGESS: The majority of the ordinary recreational fisher, I would imagine, and there is something of the order of 1.2 million, maybe two million in New South Wales, would have very little direct interlude with Cronulla fisheries per se. Their contact is basically through their elected representatives in those areas on ACoRF or through the trust fund.

Mr THURLOW: They are not elected.

Mr BURGESS: Everybody can nominate. You put down your name and put your hat in the ring—

Mr THURLOW: You are not elected.

Mr BURGESS: You are and your role is determined by the appropriate Minister at the time. Sure, I would love to think we had a properly structured peak recreational body in New South Wales where we did have a self-elected process and access to funding out of the Saltwater Trust. That has been one of my goals and

objectives for probably more than a decade and we will probably get there one day. But for the moment we have to deal with what we have in front of us and it does work well enough.

Mr AUDSLEY: Recreational fishers tend to interact with us Fishcare volunteers more so than the two peak bodies. In the past five years we have interacted with 248,500 of them.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Is that on your sheet?

Mr AUDSLEY: Yes, that is the sum total of the average number of Fishcare volunteers, hours and contacts made. That is people we have handed information to or answered questions from. The typical question is: What is the legal size for a bream? What is the bag limit on bream? We are out at boat ramps. We are out at public events the whole time.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr Burgess, at last week's ACoRF meeting at Cronulla was there discussion of whether the move from Cronulla would impose additional costs on the Recreational Fishing Trust Fund? If so, will you provide some information on that?

Mr BURGESS: There was no actual official discussion in terms of what was happening at Cronulla at the trust fund meeting. I can assure you we were there for two days and that was the topic of considerable informal discussion and debate amongst the members present.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is it your view that these changes will lead to additional money being required from the trust funds for travel, for example?

Mr BURGESS: It certainly will lead to an additional cost factor because of the locations, depending where they are going to be, but using Coffs Harbour as the location—Coffs Harbour may be easier than some locations, at least there are readily available flights to get between most regional centres and Coffs Harbour. But for those people who have to travel from other regional areas in the south, for example, Merimbula or Eden, to get to Sydney and then Sydney to wherever it will be. That is one of the reasons why we do not have that many regional meetings of the trust, because not only does it cost a lot more to do that but it means that someone like me and others—and many people of the trust are still in full-time employment—do not have to just give up one day but two or three days for travel to get to these locations. Time is scarce. We cannot afford that luxury.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you consider Newington as decentralisation?

Mr AUDSLEY: No, under no stretch of the imagination.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you see any negative symbolism, I guess, in moving Fishcare headquarters to an area where we actually recommend people do not eat the fish they catch?

Mr AUDSLEY: None whatsoever.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is a bit odd, is it not? Mr Thurlow you said earlier that this move is already enhancing the service. I assume you mean the service to fishermen? Will you provide an example of how it enhances the service?

Mr THURLOW: We have a recreational fisheries manager whose name is Bryan van der Walt. He has been in Sydney for his entire career. In December last year he took the option to relocate to Coffs Harbour. The one million recreational fishers across New South Wales, by and large, had never met and did not know Bryan van der Walt. The fishers from Coffs Harbour, the mid North Coast and far North Coast can now put a face to the name. Instead of using me to do their liaison they are picking up the phone and calling Bryan themselves. They have a New South Wales Fisheries imprimatur established in the bush.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Surely they can pick up the phone and talk to him wherever he is in the State?

Mr THURLOW: Cronulla is seen as Sydney concentric. It is so remote. Why would you be involved in an STD call to Sydney? They just do not do it.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I live in the Monaro which is a bit further away.

Mr THURLOW: Sydney people and bush people fish differently and think differently. We have half the State in subtropical waters. Most of the research has been done at Cronulla in temperate waters with temperate species. We have been hanging out for some subtropical research on species such as Mangrove Jack and Cobia for years but we cannot get any. Most of the research is based on temperate species that live in temperate water. Half the State is subtropical. The convergence is about Coffs Harbour. We are looking and expecting greater research facilities now using the—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: We have just heard in previous evidence that there are no researchers going to Coffs Harbour.

Mr THURLOW: I did not say that.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: No, not your evidence, previous to this.

Mr THURLOW: I said some key personnel should be retained geographically close to the Minister's office. We would welcome and relish the opportunity to have some science and expertise relocated to Coffs Harbour.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You have been a fairly long-term critic of the scientific work that is done at Cronulla in terms of marine parks work and bag limits and things like that.

Mr THURLOW: No.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are you supporting this because you do not agree with what has been produced?

Mr THURLOW: No, not at all. I have never been a critic of bag limits or the science at Cronulla. In fact, I have worked closely with Steve Kennelly for the last 25 years. I think he is an outstanding scientist and I continue to work very closely with him.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You agree it is a shame he has been lost?

Mr THURLOW: He is not lost yet. He is on duty until 31 October. I will be liaising with him during the week. I am hoping out of this we can come to some compromise where key staff like Steve Kennelly are retained.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When you say "we", who do you mean?

Mr THURLOW: Recreational fishers, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You stated, "We are looking at change": Who is the "we" specifically?

Mr THURLOW: Recreational fishers.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are speaking on behalf of all recreational fishers?

Mr THURLOW: The recreational fishers that are affiliated with ECOfishers NSW—20,000 of us across the State.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When you talk about "we" it sounds like you are party to a process of change which we do not know about yet. Who have you been talking to?

Mr THURLOW: We voted for change.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is "we" you and the Government?

Mr THURLOW: "We" are the recreational fishers. We voted for change, we were unhappy—

CHAIR: That is a percentage of the 1.2 million, your membership of 20,000?

Mr THURLOW: We were unhappy with the way the previous Government was going and what was being done and we had been unhappy for a number of years—including under the stewardship of Minister McDonald—so we voted for change.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When you were giving evidence a few minutes ago you mentioned an elected body is coming.

Mr THURLOW: Yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What plans are there for that?

Mr THURLOW: There is a review of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing [ACoRF]. The composition of the trust is under the microscope. What recreational fishers across the State want is the right to democratically elect their representatives, not have them appointed by the Minister which has the taint of being a political appointment. Fishers desperately want to elect their representatives.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What would you base that election on: the organisations or people who hold a fishing licence?

Mr THURLOW: It will be open to all recreational licence holders and we have already had discussions with Aboriginal land councils about appointees from them. Every recreational licence holder will have the right to fill in and complete a ballot paper.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Have you been given some information that this is what will come out of the review or is this what you would like to see come out of the review?

Mr THURLOW: This is what we proposed to your Government under Minister McDonald and we proposed it to the current Government.

CHAIR: It will be like the NRMA election?

Mr THURLOW: Yes. The State is divided into regions and we have suggested that the New South Wales Electoral Commission run the operation and we can pay for it out of our licence fee funds. It will be a fair and square, dinky-di, democratic and truly representative election—that is what fishermen want.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When you say it is coming, you are hoping it is coming?

Mr THURLOW: Yes.

CHAIR: It is your submission?

Mr THURLOW: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you for attending the hearing. You have given us some interesting information.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

PUBLIC FORUM

CHAIR: On behalf of the Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre I welcome you all to tonight's public forum on the inquiry into the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence. It is pleasing to see so many of you here tonight and the Committee thanks you for giving up your time to participate in this parliamentary process. The Committee was established in June 2012 to examine various aspects of the decision to relocate the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence, including the impact the decision would have on the research being carried out at the centre and its effect on the staff and their families who cannot move to other areas of New South Wales. The Committee will also review the costs and benefits of the decision and the potential loss of scientific expertise held by staff unable to relocate. There will be one further hearing on Monday 10 September, which the Minister has now agreed to attend to answer questions. At that hearing the Committee will also hear evidence from other organisations and individuals. Details of the hearing are available on the Committee's website or by contacting the Committee secretariat.

This forum is a very important part of the Committee's inquiry. We know there is a high level of concern about the decision to relocate the functions of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence. With that in mind, today is about hearing directly from those affected by the decision. The Committee is hoping to learn how it has affected you and your families, as well as other impacts of the closure. Before the forum begins I will make some comments about procedural matters. Speakers were allowed to register in advance for tonight's forum. The register of speakers for tonight is now full. Those of you who have registered to speak will be called to the lectern in turn. You will have five minutes to address the Committee. A bell will ring after four minutes to let you know that you are nearing the end of your time. Another bell will ring at five minutes—an axe will fall.

In order to be fair to other speakers, the Committee will be strict in enforcing the five minute time limit. If a speaker is unable to finish his or her speech then the speaker can request to incorporate the remainder of his or her speech into the transcript of proceedings—assuming the speaker has a written statement—and the part that has not been read will be included in the record of tonight's proceedings. What is said today is being recorded. That recording will later be transcribed and will become part of the public record. What a speaker tells the Committee tonight will help us to understand the issues and how people feel. It will also assist the Committee in the preparation of its report and its recommendations. The transcript will be made publicly available and posted on the Committee's website. I remind speakers that the freedom afforded to witnesses by parliamentary privilege is not intended to provide an opportunity to make adverse reflections about specific individuals. Speakers are asked to avoid making critical comments about specific individuals; instead speakers should speak about the general issues of concern and how it affects him or her and the closure of the centre.

The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of the *Guidelines for the Broadcast of Proceedings* are available from the table by the door. In accordance with the guidelines the media can film Committee members and speakers but people in the audience should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, the media must take responsibility for what it publishes or the interpretation it places on anything that is said before the Committee. Under standing orders of the Legislative Council any documents presented to the Committee that have not yet been tabled in Parliament may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any member of any such Committee or by any other person. I understand that two of the participants who had previously registered to speak are unable to be here tonight and the Committee has agreed to incorporate into *Hansard* the statements of Laura Seymour and Robert Harris.

Robert Harris

Thank you for allowing me to speak to the forum regarding the announcement to close Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence.

As with the majority of people in this room, including members of the Upper House Enquiry, our primary role is that of service to the public. We are Public Servants and we have responsibility to the people of New South Wales as the core of our tenure.

It has been almost a year since the announcement was made to close Cronulla Fisheries, signed off by Minister Katrina Hodgkinson and Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner. We are all aware that the announcement was made on 8 September 2011.

Minister Hodgkinson was sworn into the Ministry on 3 April 2011. Her Ministries were Primary Industries and Small Business—two portfolios that are indeed complex and important to the overall business community of New South Wales.

I would have thought that a newly sworn in Minister, only in the role for a matter of five months, not being the former Shadow Minister of either, and needing to get a full grasp of her portfolios, would have far more important matters under consideration such as the Murray-Darling and water rights, mining in agricultural areas, problems and issues within small business and not the closure of a facility and de-centralising positions into regional areas.

Being a member of the Cabinet, I would have also assumed that the reported parlous state of the New South Wales economy would also have been of prime importance - not the closure of a world recognised facility at a great cost to the NSW community, both now and on-going.

Along with two other staff members, I met with the Minister, Director General Richard Sheldrake and members of the Minister's office. At that time, we informed the Minister and her staff that in the opinion of those at Cronulla and majority of other Fisheries staff in separate locations, the decision to close Cronulla was poorly made and any advice that had been received in the making of that decision was greatly flawed.

Two of the people, external to the Department, who gave advice to the Minister, as named in Hansard on 12 October 2011 and as stated in Hansard gave great support as stated by the Minister, Graeme Byrnes, a commercial fisherman and member of the previous SIAC (Seafood Industry Advisory Council)—a government appointee and the Professional

At no time did I give formal notification that I was not intending to re-locate to Nowra, however I did informally intimate in general conversation that I would not be re-locating.

Imagine my surprise (and later indignation) when an officer on the Cronulla site (whose position was slated to move to Orange), was appointed to the role of Manager, Fisheries Business Services at a Clerk grade 11/12 level.

At no time was I consulted with, and though I concede that there is no reason for executive to do so, but given the circumstances one would have thought that this may have occurred. I voiced my concerns regarding the appointment and apparent lack of thought for my position and later received an apology by the Director, Recreational and Indigenous Fisheries agreeing that the process had been handled less that satisfactorily in relation to myself. Please note that I have absolutely no animosity towards that officer, or anybody else for that matter.

At that time, I felt that I was not valued by the senior executive and made the decision that I would look for alternative employment and was successful in securing a position in the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. With deference to this area, I am struggling emotionally, mentally and physically with this move and I have requested consideration to be placed back into my previous role or into a position that I may assist in the commercial licensing area of operations.

Since the announcement five of the team members (out of ten within the commercial licensing team) have opted to resign or accept other positions in Sydney. Indications are that all but one in the general licensing team will be able to move to Nowra and one person within the catch records area to Coffs Harbour. This is a great loss of valuable expertise and will ultimately leave to delivering a much poorer service to the commercial fishing industry of New South Wales.

I strongly believe that my service to the people of New South Wales and the commercial fishing industry would be greatly advantaged by me returning and working in my previous role. While no one is irreplaceable, when you lose the knowledge of 9 team members out of ten in one area on a whim and poor decision of a Minister, the service to the public of New South Wales is greatly diminished.

I hope and pray that this decision is overturned and that should this occur, I would be more than happy to return to my previous role.

Thanking you all.

Laura Seymour

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my personal account and views of the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence.

My name is Laura Seymour, I am a Fisheries Management Officer within the Fisheries Business Services unit at Cronulla. I am a Temporary Full-time 3/4 employee with 6 years of dedicated service.

I would like to have been here tonight to read my statement. However, my husband had insisted I take a break from the mental anguish and emotional turmoil my employer is putting me through.

It is almost 12 months since it was announced that my workplace would be closed and that my job would be moved 142 km away from my home. The reasons given by the Government still baffle me. I hope that this Inquiry helps to uncover the truth.

I cannot move to Nowra to continue my career in Fisheries. My husband and I have considered many options, but our marriage and family unit is our priority. I am 52 years old, my husband is a Senior Fire fighter with Fire & Rescue NSW, my daughter is at school in year 12 and my son in year 10. My family needs both parents and I need my job. I have responsibilities.

I pride myself on being an honest, reliable and a very capable employee. All the qualities required of a public servant. I have 6 years of personal, good solid working relationships built up with the stakeholders in Fisheries. Where did I go wrong? I am being punished. Apparently I have no value to Fisheries as my senior managers have failed to approach me to discuss my personal circumstances. They have not encouraged me to relocate. 44 staff from the Cronulla site have had offers to transfer within the Sydney catchment, I have not!

In October/November last year my entire unit sat down with Kevin Cooper, (Relocation Officer) to discuss our placement options. We desperately tried to retain our jobs by negotiating a move to Wollongong instead of Nowra as we believed that as a team we could all manage the travel. Taren Point and Sutherland were also brought into the mix but we were advised that the Minister would only concede a maximum of 7 jobs to be retained in the Sydney catchment, those whose projects would be deemed to fail if they were relocated. This maximum gradually grew and now stands at 44 according to June 2012 data.

My entire unit has been completely ignored and neglected, collateral damage. Of the 11 staff members in Fisheries Business Services only 1 person is relocating to Nowra, the remaining 10 (including me) are treated as detritus. No favours here! Due to a lack of transparency and total disregard of EEO policy and fairness, some staff get promoted and placed in the destination of choice, nepotism has reared its ugly head!

This has been an incredibly unproductive year. The daily distractions at work are enormous and detrimental to my professional focus and general wellbeing. On what is almost a weekly basis there are teary farewells. Directors and Managers sit back and watch as experienced and knowledgeable employees leave. To date, 6 staff in my unit have left and Management have stood by and watched as the staff remaining have their workloads escalated.

As a long term temporary employee I am frustrated beyond what I can bear. I meet all the criteria under section 31 of the Public Sector Employment and management Act 2002, for becoming a permanent employee as do many temporary staff on site. But that recognition is ignored by my employer. To add insult to injury, positions have been advertised as Permanent in the new Nowra location.

Because this decision was made without a Business Plan, an Approved Budget and Risk Assessment, senior management and the department heads were seriously unprepared to meet the required level of service and information to staff. I have been deceived by department heads, fed incorrect information relating to severance, witnessed months of changed destinations and arrangements, and all while trying to make sense of the whole thing and expected to maintain my commitment to the organisation.

Misinformation from management recently led me to vent my annoyance in a response email which I included all staff on site. This led to a reprimand by 2 Directors and 1 Senior Manager, berating me for not adhering to email protocol.

Currently, it appears that there are too many captains and not enough sailors. Work is piling up because the sailors have been forced to abandon the sinking ship and the captains don't do that kind of work. Our captains are here to oversee a smooth closure and relocation. This is anything but smooth sailing. It is an emotional Hurricane Katrina!

I would like to thank those involved in this Upper House Inquiry, especially Rev. Fred Nile who took the time to listen and recognise a serious injustice.

I'm sure the end result of this Inquiry will see the decision to close Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence as a bad one. The closure will go ahead nonetheless and the bureaucratic bungling inherent within the process of the closure will move to the next train wreck, leaving me within the wreckage behind. My main hope is that in the next train wreck, others may be treated more humanely than I have been.

Thank you for listening Laura Seymour

CHAIR: I welcome Dr Geoff Liggins to the lectern, the first speaker this evening.

Dr LIGGINS: Thank you for the opportunity to talk at this forum tonight. I am a fisheries scientist of some 20-years standing at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence. My main responsibility concerns the rock lobster fishery—several of my research team are here in the audience tonight. We are very proud of the fact that over the past 10 years we have recovered the lobster fishery from being on its knees in the early to mid-1990s. In making this fishery sustainable again we have simultaneously over the past six years increased the value at which lobster shares trade among commercial fishermen by a factor of 4½ times. This fishery is on the up. It is a winning combination of researchers, scientists, managers and industry. The Committee will have received in the Save Cronulla Fisheries submission a copy of a letter from the key rock lobster fishermen opposing the closure of Cronulla.

I am also a keen recreational fisher and I am a family man—I have an 8-year-old son. In actual fact the Committee is probably expecting me to speak to it tonight from the point of view of a scientist; I am actually going to speak from the point of view of the community. There are many other scientists who will speak to the Committee tonight, as the Committee heard earlier today, about issues of water quality, loss of expertise and loss of knowledge. From the evidence I have heard presented to the inquiry so far I think there has been an extremely convincing case. I also want to say upfront that on the surface it appears that I am advantaged by the move. I am scheduled to go over to the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS] at Mosman. I live in the inner west and it will actually be a much quicker commute for me. On the surface I would appear to be a winner, but I vehemently oppose the closure and the relocation of staff for the following reasons.

I have lodged a submission with the Committee. In that submission I said I believed the actions taken by the Minister and the department showed disregard and disrespect to fishery stakeholders in the New South Wales community in general. My submission was probably quite boring; it was all about process. It was about

Treasury guidelines and about my understanding of finance administration guidelines. I made the assertion that those guidelines should have been followed in a business case according to Treasury and Department of Finance and Service guidelines. Let me explain why from a community point of view I believe this matter of process, which I will speak about tonight, is so important.

For the big-ticket issues in New South Wales: law and order, health, education and transport, a member of the community who is trying to be aware of government decision-making has a good shot at being well informed through the prominent presence of discussions of these issues in the media. But there are whole lot of things that the New South Wales Government and the departments that support it are responsible for that the general community cannot be familiar with. The general community, including me, on all these issues takes it as a matter of trust that the Government in its governance, decision-making and appraisal of different options by senior bureaucrats in its departments does well to deliver positive results for us in the community. We cannot be across every issue. I would contend that the issue to do with closing Cronulla and its relocation for many people in the community is one such issue. That is why I mined into the processes around this in a little bit more detail.

We know from evidence in front of the inquiry already that there has not been any business case presented. There has not been any economic appraisal done for Treasury, despite Treasury asking or assuming that such work was done—we heard about that in the Committee's first session two Mondays ago. I am particularly concerned at several statements that were made in the first session of evidence—namely, the lack of familiarity by two senior departmental bureaucrats: Dr Allan and Dr Sheldrake, with the guidelines that supposedly they were to follow—which are defined very clearly by the Department of Finance and Services—and their lack of familiarity with this Sinclair Knight Merz study done in 1998 which, along with the evidence supplied in the Save Cronulla Fisheries submission, is the closest thing that we and this Committee has to an argument about the pros and cons of closing Cronulla.

It is actually an insult to the staff, I believe, that they were not familiar with Sinclair Knight Merz because they clearly had not read the Save Cronulla Fisheries submission or several other submissions that were put in to the inquiry where this was mentioned, so whether or not they were derelict in their duty in not doing the appropriate backgrounding before they recommended the decision to close Cronulla, they had not even bothered to look through the submissions or make themselves aware of background issues before fronting this inquiry. Similarly, two senior bureaucrats also mentioned— [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Table the rest.

Dr GEOFF LIGGINS: It is covered in the submission that I have already lodged with you.

Ms JACKIE GERRARD: Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to address you. I believe passionately that Cronulla fisheries should be saved, especially the science research area, for many, many reasons. My first job as a 16-year-old many years ago was as a university student at CSIRO based at Cronulla. I worked with such luminaries in the science world as Dr Geoffrey Kesteven, John McIntosh, David Tranter, Baughan Wisely, David Rochford and Ian Munro. Through these scientists working together they produced the earliest science for Australia as well as New South Wales in fisheries knowledge.

Ian Munro went to the local fish shop and bought a pound of prawns, pulled them to pieces, learnt their aetiology, their anatomy, then went and joined up with a company and helped to start the Gulf prawn industry. That company is still running. He learnt, along with the other scientists, on that site what could be done by working together cooperatively. It is essential to help keep the scientists together so that the State's fisheries resources are kept sustainable and healthy.

Then of course there is a very important gentleman who was at Cronulla until CSIRO move to Hobart. His name is Dr Keith Sainsbury. He is one of only two Australians to have been created a laureate and receive the Japan Prize, the highest prize in science. He still works internationally, nationally and in New South Wales as an expert in fisheries management and most importantly he helps in our annual assessment process for determining the New South Wales take of the highly prized abalone and lobster fisheries.

As for my own story, I went off and had a family, had children, did all those things that you do, and I returned and was able to get a position at Fisheries in 1999. I worked in commercial fisheries management and along with managing the electoral process for the members of the fisheries committees and running the advisory groups like ACoRF and ACCF—some of you will know those names—I was able to be involved tremendously

with the stakeholders. That was just an amazing job. I then moved into a role in our policy department and that is the role that I am in at the moment but it is only temporary.

I love the job that I am doing because I have been supporting the Council of Australian Governments ministerial council process for the Minister for Primary Industries in New South Wales for almost three years now. Unfortunately this role, along with lots of other positions, will probably not continue so I made inquiries. After being told that I was not involved in the change management process, it was suddenly admitted, "Oh, well yes, you are because your permanent that is substantive position is in commercial fisheries." Okay, commercial fisheries is being moved to Coffs Harbour. What am I going to do?

Then I was told even though I have an establishment list from human resources in Orange that my position was not in commercial fisheries anymore, it is now in recreational and indigenous fisheries. They are going to Nowra. What am I supposed to do? I cannot make a decision. I do not know what my future holds. I have a family that desperately needs me to be close. For confidential reasons because this is a public forum I cannot go into it, but I run a family and a job and I am a primary carer and this all has to work in together and at the moment I am forced to look at the situation of having to retire.

I do not want to retire. Fisheries was my first job; it is my last job. I want to work for a couple of years and continue in what I am doing and I cannot. The other thing is that I am also a trained peer support counsellor in Fisheries. This means that I confidentially am able to help defuse situations where people are upset. I cannot do that anymore; I am in the same situation. There was one woman and I am so pleased I had clean tissues in my pocket because her job was announced in the first change meeting. It was going to go to Parramatta, which was ultimately quite a good option for her because her husband works in that area. Five months later, "No, you're going to Nowra". She broke down; she sobbed. She had to leave the meeting within half an hour. Three months after that, "Oh no, your position is being moved to Orange."

How can you deal with people like this? We feel like we are a pack of cards; they can deal out cards any way they like and that is where you land. It is nothing to do with people; it is all to do with funding or lack of funding and it is not helping families. Sutherland shire has enough problems with the loss of jobs at the moment. We don't need to lose anymore. Thank you.

Dr KEVIN ROWLING: I, too, would like to thank the Committee for taking the time to inquire into the reasons behind the decision to close Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. This is by far the worst decision I have seen in my 36 years as a fisheries scientist made by a Minister responsible for Fisheries and I wonder what the basis of the advice was. I am still wondering. I do not know.

As a working scientist I am well aware that any recommendations I make for management action must be based on sound research and commonsense. It has been extremely disappointing to me to find that the executive of the Department of Primary Industries does not believe in this principle. There is no sensible basis for the decision to close the Cronulla centre. After announcing the decision the Minister for Primary Industries wrote in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

This Government is making decisions based on real consultation and good science.

This statement is demonstrably incorrect in relation to the decision to close the State's foremost fisheries research station at Cronulla. There was no significant consultation with any of the interested stakeholder groups prior to the decision being taken and there was certainly no science behind the decision or has there been in its implementation over the past year. It is a debacle, I'm afraid. The Minister has frequently said that the decision was taken under the Government's decade of decentralisation policy but that decade of decentralisation is not a policy at all; it is merely an election platform.

If you look on the New South Wales Government website you will find hundreds of well-explained policies and they have objectives and ways of measuring if those objectives are being met. You will not find a decade of decentralisation because it is not a real policy; it does not have any clear objectives and it certainly has not got any way of measuring whether it is going to be a success. I would suggest that the department actually does not know why they are closing Cronulla and they have got no way of determining whether it will be a success or an abject failure.

The department has recently released its strategic plan for 2012-15. It is based on the four core values of the New South Wales public service—integrity, trust, service and accountability. The decision to close the Cronulla research facility fails miserably in regard to all of these core values yet the department continues to tell

us it is a good decision and it is being implemented fairly and effectively, with the highest regard to the needs of the employees. You only have to read some of the staff submissions to this inquiry to see that there is something seriously wrong with the department's interpretation.

One of the terrible outcomes of the closure of Cronulla will be the loss of our ability to assess hundreds of species of fish in New South Wales coastal waters. This is being done annually by pooling the knowledge and the expertise of about 15 Fisheries scientists all based at Cronulla. Nine of these scientists will have left the department by December because they are unable to transfer to other locations. I am one of them. Because of the huge loss of expertise, the monitoring and assessment of our coastal fish stocks will no longer be viable. On a personal note, I will be leaving the department in December, as I said. Without any consultation and for no good reason that I am aware of, my position is being transferred to Port Stephens.

I no longer have any confidence that the executive of DPI or Fisheries is making sound decisions based on good science. I am happy to leave because I am so upset with the way this is being implemented, and I think the general staff feel the same way.

In closing, I would like to publicly praise the Cronulla staff for their professionalism and their dedication to their duties in the face of indifference by the senior staff of the department. Expressions of genuine concern by the staff have been described as "futile" by an arrogant Minister. Despite this, the Cronulla staff have continued to uphold those core public service values I mentioned previously and they have my great admiration. Thank you.

Mr GRAHAM PHILLIP: First, may I thank you for letting me speak at this forum. I am a leader of Middle Harbour Fishcare and I have had over 5,000 hours of volunteer work and it is all based around Cronulla. I live at Chatswood but I joined the organisation because I saw it was a fair one and it was working well, and it will only work well if it is at Cronulla. We have a lot of volunteers in that area who go in there frequently and help out with school sports. They go and pick up gear, they go and repair gear and they take it back there. If they are sent over to Newington the staff will not travel. The volunteers will be unable to travel. Some of them do work; some are self-retirees. Unfortunately, the mileage that you have to put in, there is no recompense for money so they will not travel to do that.

When we are at Cronulla we use Gunnamatta Bay as our main source of doing children's clinics. Sometimes we can put 700 children through in a week. We get hook programs, teaching children how to fish and what to do and educating them in the correct manner. To enable us to do this we have volunteers who come in and help. However, sometimes volunteers are not enough and we have to call on staff from Cronulla to come and give us a hand. That is 10 minutes drive from there and they can come in and service and help us out for an hour here or an hour there. If they are at Coffs Harbour, Newington, Nowra or Taylors Beach we cannot ring them up and say, "Can you come down in 10 minutes and give us an hour and then go back?" We will not have their support.

It means either the fishing clinics will have to curtailed or the number of children that are taught to do the correct way of fishing will have to be stopped. I do not want to see that because I see that as a very important part of Fishcare and the fisheries authority to teach children how to fish correctly and how to catch and release and the correct way of handling fish. Hopefully we teach the children, if we are able to continue, who can then go and tell their parents and the parents have then learned the correct manner of fishing, and it goes right down the line. We have a lot of volunteers who go into Cronulla to do maintenance. We go in there three or four times a month and offer to do maintenance and to get gear ready for fishing clinics. This Thursday we have been asked to go in and put 400 kits together for the clinics we are running in the school holidays. To be able to do that we travel down there.

But one of the most important parts about this, in the lunch periods when we are having a break and having something to eat we get experts from Cronulla to come in and sit around with us and have lunch but they give us knowledge. They pass on knowledge to us. All the people there are getting one lot of knowledge from one person. We can then take it out into the field and pass it onto the children and to other fishermen. If Cronulla goes and the person who is giving this knowledge, Phil Bolton, goes to Coffs Harbour on circle hooks, for example, how will we learn anything more about circle hooks? Over the phone? On email or on document? He can sit down and show us practically and it is passed on correctly to us.

The most important part about Fishcare is children. If we do not have Cronulla as our central point we will be unable to continue with our service to the community. Our community is helping there. We are helping

children a lot. A lot of volunteers offer to take gear home and maintain gear at home. A lot of volunteers do not have the facilities in the area to do this. We do a lot of work with the scouts around that area. We always have storage. If we do not have Bluey—everyone keeps referring to Bluey; it is a beautiful trailer that we take all around New South Wales. There are five of them in New South Wales. I have just come back from Queensland where we towed one up there for a conference to show other States what Fishcare can do out of Cronulla. We got very high praise for that.

We would not be able to do that if we could not get access to Bluey at certain hours. When we go onto the harbour we work with maritime and we make sure the wharves are all clean for safety reasons. That can mean three o'clock in the morning sometimes for the volunteers. It is no good having the boat available at 10 o'clock. The fishermen are gone, everyone has gone. So we have to have access to these facilities at all times, and Cronulla is a very safe place to go at night or in the morning. We have a lot of education officers who are females and they must have security.

Dr MATT IVES: I am a fisheries modelling and assessment scientist at Cronulla. I have a background in economics and environmental management. I am one of the people who came through the program that you heard the scientists talk about. I came through the University of New South Wales. I had a background in economics and computer programming—a bit of a weird mix—but then it was a perfect fit for me to go into an ARC-funded project where I worked with fisheries on modelling and stock assessment. They were looking for a modelling and stock assessment person and they had been for some time, so it ended up being a very good fit for them for me to go through that program and end up working with them. I took a bit of a pay cut to do the PhD but I am more than happy and I absolutely love my job. One of the reasons why I have been part of this fight against this decision is because I am very passionate about what we do and about the staff who do it.

With an economics background I cannot help but look at this from an economics point of view. If you add up the recreational and commercial fishing and the tourism value of this asset that we manage on behalf of the public, it is worth over \$1 billion a year to this State. That means if we lose all this expertise and we risk just a 10 per cent decline in that asset, that is \$100 million a year of value lost to this State. That comes in the form of fishermen wasting time and money trying to talk to licensing staff who do not understand what they doing, talking to managers about their policy and regulations. The stock assessment work that we do that I am involved in, the lack of data that will happen when we lose our scientists and so forth are all different things that are going to happen that will mean we will have less value out of this resource that we manage.

That to me is not being said in any of this—and it definitely would have come out in an economic analysis if that was done. You can definitely do an economic analysis about something that has future benefits to regional locations or future costs. It is a very simple thing. It is a cost-benefit analysis and I have done it in the past and I would be more than happy to help with one in the future. The loss of expertise in my area in stock assessment, we have a very good process that we run that is an expert-based process, as you have heard, and we have a number of different scientists who work on that who we will lose. So we do not have that coverage on our stock assessment program. The department officials have told you that we can replace that staff with the 40 odd fisheries that we have, which are mostly aquaculture and ecosystem-based fisheries experts.

As you all know, everyone in the medical profession has a background in medical science, but I do not think that anyone here would want a podiatrist doing open heart surgery on them. It is a very similar situation in fisheries. Wild fisheries is a very specific expertise and the only way to get an aquaculture scientist to do as good a job as a wild fisheries scientist is for them to spend several years working as a wild fisheries scientist. But I am not just talking about the loss of expertise in research; we are going to lose expertise from every part of our department. There is commercial and recreational licensing and management. Just the commercial licensing arm is going to lose 10 of its 11 people, and a lot of them have over 20 years experience. You will hear from some of those people.

For the executives to claim that we are going to be able to maintain services with this kind of loss is like claiming that if you take the teacher out of a classroom and replace them with one of the students, by the end of the year those students in the class are going to do just as well. It is ludicrous. There is no way you are going to be able to maintain services with that loss of expertise, and the people that we are responsible for—the stakeholders, the fishers, the citizens of New South Wales—are going to feel that. That is the real tragedy here and that is the cost that has not been costed in this decision.

I am very grateful that we have had this inquiry. I think it is horrible negligence that this department did not do the due diligence that we all have to do in our jobs, and this decision is going to have a more far-

reaching impact on the management of fish stocks in this State than anything that we have to do in our jobs, and yet we are required to do the analysis before we make any decisions. So I think it is a real travesty of justice that this decision has no business case or economic analysis behind it. I thank God that we have a political system, that I have learnt a hell of a lot more about through this whole process, that actually has a House of review so that these high-level bureaucratic decisions that are made have the oversight they obviously need, because there is some real injustice going on here.

Mr LAURIE DERWENT: I am also grateful to the committee for allowing us to address you on such an important issue. I am the only fisheries compliance representative based at Cronulla. In my written submission I said that my family had connections with the industries going back to 1935. It actually goes back to 1885 and we now have over 127 years' continuous connection with the fisheries industries. This includes my time with the department of over 34 years in city and rural country roles, including at Narrandera and Nowra and places. With that background I feel qualified to say this is not the time to be squandering opportunities to better manage our fisheries resources. I do not like to be negative in my submissions; I would like to come up with a nice simple solution to this. But I cannot let the department's written submission to the committee go without challenge.

The executive summary refers to the success of the move of the Department of Agriculture from Sydney to Orange in the early 1990s. Dr Sheldrake, who signed off on that submission, was involved in the move but he forgot that the department's name at the time was the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The attempt to move Fisheries at the time to Orange was a dismal failure. I was there. Some of the key sections of licensing and commercial fisheries policy roles just never moved and those that did move to Orange were moved back to Sydney at a significant cost to the Government and delays in services. So why do we make the same mistakes? I also have to ask: If the move to Orange was so successful why is there a Sydney office maintained for many key head office roles and why are so many passengers on the planes from Orange to Sydney departmental employees?

The department's submission states: "The decentralisation of the Cronulla centre will ensure Fisheries employees can be more strategically and closely aligned with the industries they serve". The submission goes on to say that "the commercial fishing industry is mainly located at Clarence River and Coffs Harbour". So why move the commercial fisheries administration unit to Nowra? In a meeting with Mark Patterson, the department's director general, he categorically denied that locating researchers, policies, administrative officers in different parts of the State would reduce efficient provision of services. Having commercial fisheries administration at Nowra but the catch records and policy group at Coffs Harbour is just another example of silo management problems that this decision is creating.

With 34 years of working with people in the department, several years based at Cronulla, and working very closely with our clients, I can say that the intranet, the internet, emails, phones, faxes just are not up to the communications we achieve at Cronulla. I can walk down a hall and I can get answers to questions. I can get expert witnesses to give us statements in prosecutions that are very valuable to maintaining our resources. The department's consultation before the submission, you have heard enough about that I think. The department's submission also states that employees who have relocated previously from Sydney Fish Markets to Port Stephens are overwhelmingly positive about the impact that the transfers have had on them. The decision to move to Port Stephens—that is the aquaculture policy and administration—was only made after consulting staff. I was there; I was part of that decision. I could not go to Port Stephens. About half the policy officers who did move already had existing ties to Port Stephens. Only one who was engaged in the aquaculture administration moved, so they had to hire people at Port Stephens to learn the role, and he subsequently left the agency.

The future of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre and how we meet the challenges of managing fisheries resources should be based on well-established planning and risk management principles. The people of New South Wales will ultimately pay the price of a bad decision. They deserve better and it is not too late to correct the mistake.

Dr DOUGLAS ROTHERHAM: I was a senior research scientist at the Cronulla centre. After more than eight years of dedicated service I left the centre on 18 May 2012. I appreciate the opportunity to speak this evening about my personal experience with the so-called decentralisation. At university I had a burning ambition to work as a scientist at the Cronulla centre and I achieved this in 2004 and went on to enjoy a productive and successful career. By 2011, at the age of 35, I was promoted to senior research scientist after recommendation by the New South Wales Research Scientists Classification Committee, which is an independent peer review process.

Much of my work focused on the design and implementation of fishery independent research surveys in estuaries of New South Wales and examining the costs and benefits of different sources of data for improving assessment and management. This novel research was supported at a Federal level by two large and consecutive grants from the Australian Research and Development Corporation totalling more than \$1.6 million. Unfortunately, the decentralisation forced me to abandon this work before completion as I was unable and unwilling to relocate to Port Stephens. It is now extremely unlikely that this work will be finished. Much of the intellectual property required to complete the crucial component of the research lies with me and external project collaborators, and the capacity of the department has been obliterated.

So not only have I lost my career but the last seven years of my life would seem to be a complete waste of time. This was a devastating and heartbreaking realisation and it is something that I still struggle with now. It should not have ended this way. Shortly after the announcement of the decision, our research leader, Professor Charles Gray, made initial inquiries with the University of Wollongong about the possibility of a small group of staff, which included me, being housed on campus. The business case was strong and the university was keen to commence dialogue. I was relieved at the prospect of returning to my alma mater rather than having to uproot my family to a different regional location.

In February 2012 I received a letter outlining that it was the department's intention to indeed transfer my position to the University of Wollongong. I believe, however, that the department did not engage in genuine and meaningful negotiations with the university. By comparison, much focus was placed on securing a deal with the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS], which was bizarre given that SIMS is located in Sydney and this decision was supposed to be about decentralisation to regional areas. The University of Wollongong is a regional university.

In April 2012, more than six months after the announcement of the decision, it was painfully obvious to me that the department had no genuine long-term commitment to the University of Wollongong, which has since been proven correct. In fact, the subtext and tone of the language from the executive strongly indicated that Port Stephens was the only location where one could expect any sort of career longevity. The uncertainty and obfuscation was having a major detrimental impact on my psychological health and the wellbeing of my family. I have two children; one in the formative years of high school. In order to gain security and some certainty, I asked for my position to be transferred to Port Stephens. Nevertheless, after much deliberation, my wife and I decided not to relocate. Our family support network is in Sydney, our parents are retired and we simply could not take their grandkids away.

Within 24 hours of informing the department that I could not relocate, I was declared excess—the fastest bureaucracy I have ever witnessed. At the very least, I expected a phone call from the director, Dr Geoff Allan, asking me to reconsider my decision to relocate or perhaps to discuss the possibility of remaining at a Sydney location, such as the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS], to finish the project and meet the Department's commitments to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation [FRDC]. After all, I was more than halfway through completing a \$600,000 research grant. I believe the failure of the director to contact me and discuss potential solutions demonstrates gross negligence and incompetence and also raises serious questions about the transparency and equity of the process used to determine which particular staff went to specific locations.

My experience also supports the widely held belief that closing the Cronulla centre was not about decentralisation at all; it was about cutting jobs. Despite claims to the contrary by the Minister, this decentralisation has been carried out with blatant and reckless disregard for staff, stakeholders and the publicly owned fisheries resources of New South Wales.

Professor CHARLES GRAY: I thank you for giving me this opportunity. I am the research leader of the Wild Fisheries Unit. This unit is based at Cronulla, with a specialist technology group at Coffs Harbour. This group was strategically located at Coffs Harbour. This is often done as professor Kennelly pointed out earlier on. Picking up on one aspect raised earlier by Mr Thurlow, we are undertaking a project on mangrove drag in subtropical waters at the moment. This is being carried out in partnership with scientists and students at Coffs Harbour.

The Cronulla group is primarily charged with providing biological research and carrying out surveys to determine the status of the wild fisheries resources of New South Wales and the recreational and commercial fisheries that harvest them. The research capacity of this latter group is particularly compromised due to the

closure of the Cronulla facility. There are problems associated with fracturing the unit into small groups across five or six locations throughout the State and with the complete lack of strategic planning surrounding this. Unfortunately, we are losing several very talented people who are not being replaced—Doug Rotherham is one.

There has been no consistency in how the department has gone about relocating staff and functional work groups. Although Doug stole most of my thunder on this issue, I will give an example. Like many others, I was told that I could not stay in Sydney following the closure of the centre. However, at the time the manager of the relocation team, Mr Kevin Cooper, provided a viable alternative for some of us. That alternative was to relocate a small group of five to six scientists at the University of Wollongong because of potential synergies there. In particular, Dr Sheldrake desired to have researchers co-located at universities as he stated when he previously spoke to the inquiry.

I was personally given the green light to contact the University of Wollongong and to develop partnerships. I did this over a three month period, based on a strong fishery survey team of myself, three scientists and a senior technician. I received strong support from senior staff and from three departments at the university: Mathematics, Science and Law.

In January to February, like Doug, I received a letter stating that I would be relocated to the University of Wollongong. Although we were provided with those letters, senior bureaucrats within the department never actually negotiated with the university. I have never been given an official explanation as to why this is the case and neither has the departmental working group. The only notification we received informing us that we could not go to the University of Wollongong was when a few of us who were left received our letters in June-July of this year, stating that we were being sent to other locations. For more than six months my colleagues and I believed that we would be relocated to the university but nothing happened—it just faded away.

This is not how a professional organisation should operate. As Doug pointed out, this caused many families, including mine, a lot of grief. I do not see how this opportunity differed from any of the other departments' co-locations, including that proposed at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science or at the National Marine Science Centre. My reasoning suggests that this group of scientists was not wanted. I have no problems with regionalisation or restructuring per se, but if it is to be done, it must be done in a proper manner. If the relocation were truly about regionalisation and not about downsizing, the departmental priorities should have been ascertained. It should have been decided as to where we want to be in the next five to 10 years and the best teams should have been placed in the best locations in order to get there.

Staff should have been told where they fitted in and the situation explained to them in a truthful manner up front. This should include all aspects of fisheries, not just research. What is happening is, they are shaking the tree by closing an institutional facility under the guise of regionalisation, seeing what falls out and picking up the pieces and saying, "We will go from there". It is bad for science; it is bad for fisheries; it is bad for the environment and our aquatic resources; it is bad for the staff; it is bad for the recreational and commercial fishing industries; and most of all, it is bad for the Public Service and the public of New South Wales. They deserve better.

Ms LISA LEAN: Thank you for this opportunity. My current job at Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre [CFRC] is the acting executive officer to the director of Fisheries Research, Steve Kennelly. This decision affects me, simply because I will have no job. Unfortunately, I have no choice in being able to move. My husband is a shift worker and is a specialist in his profession, which does not enable him to move around the State to country areas. This announcement effectively places me on the unemployment line. I cannot apply for jobs presently because I applied for an extension from a September finish date to end in December, the reason being to try and work around my husband's shift work and son's school hours. I have consistently been checking the Public Service's job website and have not found anything that suits my need to work around my family situation. This, in a nutshell, also shows how much my current job means to me and how it will impact on our family once it is taken away.

My child is enrolled in an exceptionally good public school that we had to apply to as we are classed as being out of area. This school has a good reputation and has given us peace of mind, to be able to send him there. Losing my job will mean losing the flexibility and convenience of living close to my work. I will lose the short commuting time to my son's school in his first years of primary school—children like him will one day be this country's future.

Losing my job will also greatly affect my family by losing our second income which assists in paying our mortgage and bills. We are like any family who struggle to meet the massive expenditure outlay for upkeep due to mortgages and the continuous increase in the cost of utilities and petrol prices.

I understand that I can apply for other positions within the public sector but—quite frankly—this decision has destroyed my faith in my employer. I feel the decision to decentralise the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre has been ineptly made with no transparent Business Plan in place before the closure was announced. Surely, if there had been some consultation and compromise afforded to the employees, the mess we are now experiencing would not have occurred. Decentralisation is fine but we are talking about an industry that already has existing regionalised offices in this State.

Not only has this decision greatly affected my working situation but it has placed me in a position of having to process a massive volume of work since the departure of the executive officer from our office. Morale has significantly declined and I have endured great emotional upheaval in dealing with the emotional frailties of staff as a result of the decentralisation.

During the early stages of this decision we were informed of the department's intentions as to our different departure schedules for each unit located at Cronulla. We were given the destinations, should staff wish to transfer and we were informed that we could take a redundancy or severance payout. Several Gantt charts were devised. These have consistently confused employees as to where they can expect to be transferred which shows a clear lack of business planning prior to the announcement to close CFRC. The transfer destinations went from three—Coffs Harbour, Nowra and Port Stephens—to choosing from a dozen different locations, including many in Sydney. If Sydney is a preferred location, why should we be moving? Last time I looked, the Sutherland shire was pretty decentralised compared to Elizabeth Street, the MLC Centre and Mosman. The current Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre has the entire existing infrastructure in place and is not currently costing the taxpayer anything except routine maintenance. Now it will cost the taxpayer big dollars due to the fact the Government has had to lease or buy new facilities and build new infrastructure in the proposed areas they are transferring staff to.

Our office applied for an extension to change our termination date from September 2012 to the end of December 2012. This was rejected due to working for the Director of Fisheries Research who I feel has been greatly victimised. With this application I was advised to not align myself with the director and apply separately with the executive officer at the time for the extension we required, and this was processed successfully. The decision to terminate the director three months prior to myself greatly affects our office and the knowledge capsule for science research that we are meant to retain.

The importance of having my boss present until the last days is the difference between keeping the scientific knowledge that has accumulated during the past 100 years or seeing it being completely lost. Our office has scientific knowledge that spans decades and it has fallen to me in my substantive position as a clerk 1/2 with no scientific background or degree to sort files that contain scientific research, outputs, project collaborations and industry committee meetings and somehow make decisions about whether these should be kept or destroyed. I find that this shows up just how ludicrous the business plan is in retaining scientific research for the future of fisheries as a whole. The end result from this is that my workplace has been completely destroyed and I am constantly enduring unwanted stress physically, emotionally and financially.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your evidence.

Dr STEVE MONTGOMERY: I thank you, Mr Chair, for the chance to address you tonight. I am a scientist of some 37 years who left the department on 2 August because of this decision. What grossly annoys me is the same thing as has been echoed in this room by people with a lot of experience in New South Wales fisheries. To me this decision to relocate staff or decentralise staff just will not work. The New South Wales fisheries agency has always worked most effectively when it has been centralised so that we get synergies between different disciplines within the agency, and impromptu discussions as Laurie spoke about when walking down the hallway or being able to schedule meetings in a small time frame. Modern communications does not get over this. That is more or less exemplified by the current situation with the amount of travelling being done by senior managers who have been relocated to country areas.

Also we have the fact that in the early 1990s New South Wales agriculture made a failed attempt to decentralise New South Wales Fisheries and within two years it was re-centralised back to Sydney. As you have heard here tonight, the guidelines of the Office of Premier and Cabinet have not been followed with this

relocation. There has been no clear organisational chart given to staff at the initial announcement with how everything will work with restructuring, et cetera. When you consider the implications for closing the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre where there is heritage buildings, there are Indigenous middens on that land, that includes different departments besides the Department of Primary Industries [DPI] and under those guidelines of the Cabinet office that needs to go to Cabinet and needs to be considered by the Government. I think that any government of both persuasions if they had been given a business case for this relocation would not have approved it.

The New South Wales DPI is in a clear position to provide a comprehensive business case. They have data on the costs of relocating to Orange. That included fisheries and relocating other agencies throughout New South Wales. They have information on both the costs and the benefits of doing all that. They also have the experience and the reasons of why a decentralised NSW Fisheries did not work and the Government should know about that when making their decision. It just beggars belief that you can relocate over 100 staff, lease facilities, build new facilities and have a total cost of under a million dollars. The whole business plan should have been scrutinised by Treasury.

Also we have heard about the loss of corporate knowledge. The main group of scientists down at Cronulla fisheries are the stock assessment scientists. Over the next five or so years the Minister for DPI under several pieces of legislation both New South Wales and Commonwealth is going to have to report on the sustainability of our fisheries resources and, as you have heard, a substantial amount of that expertise is not going to be there.

Also let me move on and say that the department's handling of staff, as you have heard here tonight, has been absolutely terrible. Justice Bauer in his decision in 1986 in the transfer of New South Wales Fisheries from Kent Street to Cronulla based a lot of his decision on the fact that the New South Wales Government was the sole employer of stock assessment scientists in New South Wales. So when the department says, "We are moving you", scientists have one of three options. They can move with their position to the country, they have to move interstate if they want to pursue the same career, or they look for a new career as Doug has said. That does not just impose upon that person. It imposes upon their families where both people have careers and suddenly you are going home and you are talking to your partner about whether you change your career, she changes her career or you break relationships. [*Time expired. Remainder of statement incorporated into Hansard at the request of the Committee*].

The Department was asking staff to make these decisions within a one year time frame. Quite inconsiderate when one considers that when CSIRO Division Fisheries and Oceanography was relocated from Cronulla to Hobart, staff were given 3 years warning and facilities were completed before staff were moved. When CSIRO closed its fisheries laboratories in Cleveland (a suburb of Brisbane, QLD) and relocated staff to the Scientific Precinct at Bogo Road in another suburb of Brisbane, staff were again only relocated once facilities were completed, some 3 years after the announcement. Similarly when Queensland DPI closed their fisheries laboratory at Deception Bay and relocated staff to the Science Precinct, staff were given around 2 year's notice. Here in NSW staff at the CFRC have been given less than 1 year's notice to relocate.

In summary, I doubt whether any NSW government would have approved this relocation considering the issues I have outlined.

If it was not for this relocation I would have worked for NSW Fisheries for another 5 years and factored in a transition of corporate knowledge and expertise to junior staff over that time.

As a tax-payer and person with considerable insight into the functioning of NSW Fisheries I am not convinced that this relocation is not a waste of tax payer's money. It will result in a loss of service delivery to stakeholders and the NSW government as much stock assessment expertise will be lost and there will be a loss of synergies between disciplines within NSW Fisheries.

CHAIR: Thank you for your statement.

Ms DONNA TUGNETT: I have been employed at Cronulla fisheries for 12 years. I work in the fisheries business services section, which processes stakeholders' business transactions. My written submission outlines how this relocation will affect my section and the commercial fishing industry, so today I would like to talk about the treatment of temporary staff through this process and lack of decent advice to help guide us. Like the majority of my workmates in this section I am a long-term temporary staff member. I meet all the criteria under section 31 of the Public Sector Employment and Management Act to be made permanent; however, for years we have been told that because our salary comes from stakeholders' fees and charges, not through government funding, this cannot be done. It has been continuously argued that the funding for my position is extremely stable as fees and charges will always be payable by the commercial fishers.

Positions in my section are being advertised to Cronulla staff for relocation to Nowra. The first position not to be filled has now been advertised to all internal applicants, not just Cronulla staff. They will be doing the same work as me and walking straight into a new job, not as a temporary staff member but as a permanent staff member. Obviously they recognise the funding for our position is stable and, quite simply, it can be done Apart from the location nothing has changed. We just cannot understand why we are treated differently from the people who will take our jobs at Nowra.

At one of the early meetings it was made clear that temporary staff will be looked after. We were told that if we could not relocate we would be given a severance pay, which would just be under the redundancy for a permanent staff member. Soon after this meeting it was discovered that this was not the case whatsoever. The severance pay for me which was going to be capped at 35 weeks was now to be capped at 16 weeks. Advice in regards to severance payments has changed numerous times. Our contact person advised me in April that severances were completely different to redundancies. I was not required to pay a severance back should I obtain another position in the New South Wales public service. "You should be right", was their response.

After further prompting I received written confirmation of this. His email stated, "I have had advice from the NSW Public Service Commission that temporary staff who are paid severance would not be required to pay it back if they got another job within NSW Public Service within the period covered by the payment." Due to this advice, I started applying for other State government jobs. Due to personal circumstances, I could not afford a drop in pay. As there were not many positions at my current pay grade I started to apply for lower grade positions under the assumption that the severance payout will compensate the drop in pay temporarily.

By July this advice had changed. When a fellow temporary officer was successful in gaining another position within Trade and Investment she was not offered a severance as it was considered a transfer. I emailed the contact person to question this. At the time I was waiting to hear back for a position within Trade and Investment. The written response was no, I would not receive a severance pay as the position was part of Trade and Investment. Of course this upset me. Following this I started to concentrate on applying for positions outside Trade and Investment.

After 11 months of fighting to stop the closure, after farewelling many experienced staff and friends, after watching every person who sits down my end of the office leave one by one and now doing the work of multiple people, after watching my manager leave, after witnessing the stress and tears of fellow workmates as well as dealing with my own, another email was circulated to the Cronulla site. The advice had changed yet again. The email read: "If you are paid a severance payment, you cannot be re-employed in any capacity in the NSW Public Sector within the period that the severance payment covers, without repaying the balance of the severance payment." By this stage I was so upset and disheartened I replied to the email quoting previous written information provided. I said that it should not have taken 11 months to clarify this issue. My response went to all sites.

I was phoned by the contact person on two occasions the following day. I received further misleading advice. A few days later, I was called to a conference room to discuss my email response with a senior manager. Once there I discovered a second male senior manager was there. The door was locked behind me and the Executive Director of Fisheries was called to speak to me on phone hook-up. At no time was I advised that I could have a support person and I was not provided the opportunity to prepare. I was extremely intimidated and I began to cry. I was embarrassed and uncomfortable in the room with these two senior male managers. I was told my email was a form of bullying. I was provided the opportunity to discuss my side but I was very emotional throughout the entire discussion and very underprepared. Following this meeting I went to see my doctor. Due to lack of sleep, high stress, being extremely emotional, anxious and simply exhausted from this whole process I am currently on leave.

In addition to receiving misleading or incorrect advice, I have forwarded numerous emails to the contact person regarding various issues, which have simply not been responded to. I have expressed my concerns regarding the poor circulation of information. The entire process has been extremely hard to deal with. Leaving a job I love and trying to find a job of similar pay has been hard. Overall I am quite disappointed.

Mr DEAN HAYES: My employment started with the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, as it was known then, in 1985. My first 24 years were based here in the central business district and the majority of that time was spent with the standalone Agriculture department. In February 2009 I was transferred to the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute by the Director General, Dr Richard Sheldrake. After my 24 years in the CBD,

Dr Sheldrake gave me only seven working days notice before I had to relocate to that institute, which is based at Menangle, south of Camden. Menangle is 80 kilometres from the CBD and is still part of the greater Sydney area when it comes to the public service, but if you were to play football in Camden you would be part of the country competition.

I have only ever been a lowly graded clerk and on this day when I was transferred the Primary Industries Executive Director, Mr Phil Anquetil, when handing me my transfer letter signed by the director general told me that I had no qualifications and that I was always missing and this was why I was being transferred. I am sure a lot worse has been said about me since then. I had known Mr Anquetil for over 20 years when this happened and for a large part of that period he had been my boss, including at the time of transfer. I never received any prior warning nor was I consulted as set out in the public service handbook where it states that an employee can only be transferred by the director general once consulted.

I was naturally having trouble handling the way in which I had been dealt with by the administration of the department and during an appointment with my doctor several weeks after travelling the 60 kilometres each way per day to Menangle from home my doctor provided me with a medical report stressing that it was too far for me to travel as a sufferer of severe scoliosis. In that report my doctor strongly advised the department that I should not be travelling more than 30 kilometres to my place of employment. The department acted fairly quickly on that medical report and by the end of March 2009 Dr Sheldrake transferred me to Cronulla, a location that is less than 30 kilometres for me to travel. It is almost 3½ years since I was sent to Cronulla fisheries and during this time I have had extended periods of leave from work for various reasons.

In my first 24 years of employment I had a good attendance record and enjoyed being part of the department but as a result of the manner in which I was transferred and treated by the administration of the department in 2009 it has all disappeared. The treatment from 2009 has had a permanent and long-lasting effect on my life. It is exactly the same administration from 2009 that caused me a problem that is now responsible for so much heartache at Cronulla. The only difference is that we have had a change of Minister with Government but we still have the same administration running the department.

With the closure of Cronulla I was originally down to end up at Port Stephens but I was able to have my location changed to Nowra, which is the closest thing to a Sydney location that is available to me. My home life situation is that I live at the home of my parents who are both aged in their mid seventies. They both rely on me on a daily basis for help so they are able to stay living in their home of 41 years. So what I am faced with is this: Do I commute the 150 kilometres each way per day so my parents can stay in their home, which completely goes against my doctor's advice on travel for me with scoliosis? The other option is: Do we split up as a family with my parents going into retirement-style living and me moving down Nowra way and living like a hermit? Or do we all move down Nowra way, which I definitely do not see as an option. This would move them away from other family members and friends and the doctors at St George Hospital that they both depend on greatly as they both have health issues. This would also take them away from the area that they have become accustomed to all their life.

A large percentage of staff at my level at Cronulla have already moved on to other positions in the public service because of the closure. This would be the obvious thing for me to do or try to do. Unfortunately because of the way I have been basically thrown out by the administration of the department who have completely disassociated themselves from me, I have lost my first 24 years of employment, and all that I have been left with for any future employment is a fairly scratchy 3½ years at Cronulla to show. It has of course taken me a long time to settle in at Cronulla and since being back at work consistently from April this year I have watched talent, potential talent and experience walk out the gates on a weekly basis due to the closure. It has taken me a while to realise that the staff at Cronulla are a tremendous bunch and they do not deserve what the administration is doing to them. Fisheries suffered enough in 1991 when they got caught up in the Agriculture to Orange relocation, which took many years to rebuild. What is happening now to Fisheries appears to be far worse and it has already created many problems that may take a much longer time to rebuild than the Orange situation caused.

I was not present at today's hearing to hear what was said but after reading the transcripts from 6 August I find it hard to believe that the Hon. Niall Blair thought the department was being generous in giving Cronulla staff 12 to 18 months notice on relocating. I would like to know what he is comparing that to or what experience he has with government relocations. Agriculture had just short of 2½ years with the move to Orange and Minerals staff had four years notice to move to Maitland. Would he have preferred Cronulla staff to have received Dr Sheldrake's seven days notice that I received in 2009? The final insult in all of this is that when staff

have written to the Premier about the Minister's decision they have received replies advising that their letters have been forwarded to the Minister as it comes under her portfolio. We then receive a letter with the Minister's signature on it that has been drafted by people from within our own department that have read all about our personal situations. Thank you all.

Mr MATT FOWLER: I would like to thank you all again for your time and say that it has been a while since we as staff have felt empowered and this whole process makes us feel empowered. I would like to address the impact that the relocation has had on my family personally and also how it will affect the stakeholders I deal with as an administrator of our commercial fisheries. I was lucky enough last April to become a father for the first time so I have a 16-month old now. We also are very lucky that all of the grandparents are within 15 minutes drive. We all live in southern Sydney. In addition, my wife is working part-time so we are blessed enough to have family members mind my daughter, which builds relationship bonds between them and in addition does not cost us anything, so it is a real win-win and keeps our family bonds stronger. If we move to Nowra not only will my wife lose her job and all the support we have, particularly if we are sick and need grandparents to help us, but she would have to find alternate work and then of course child care.

We are also heavily involved in our local church community, Kingsway Community Church at Caringbah. My wife's job, as I previously mentioned, is coordinator of a young women's refuge, which is a part of this church's activities. She is extremely passionate about her job and it does a lot of good in our community. To move to Nowra would take her from that and you cannot compensate for that sort of role especially with the bonds we have in that church community, of which I have been a member for 12 years. We have recently built a duplex in Sutherland. I have worked in Cronulla for 10 years now and my wife in Caringbah so we felt we would invest in Sutherland shire and build something from scratch with good friends of ours so we have great friends as neighbours. Moving to Nowra means we will probably have to sell this after all the hard work we have done getting it together. For these reasons, I have no intention of relocating with my position to Nowra. I would also like to add that this year has been one of the most stressful of my life. At a time when I should just be enjoying fatherhood and all the good things that go along with that, I find myself most nights going to sleep wondering how the mortgage will get paid come January.

My personal opinion on the matter, before I move onto our stakeholders, is that while the department knew that 80 per cent of our staff live in southern Sydney and 60 per cent of them live in the shire, and that the community bonds are very entrenched, again as previously mentioned it was more a job-cutting exercise. It was under the guise of decentralisation to cut costs, cut services, knowing that most people would not move because they were very close to their current employment.

In regards to our stakeholders, as I have mentioned, I have been in Fisheries business services for 10 years. I am currently the acting manager there. Until June this year we had 10 staff with a combined experience of 80 years. Come January, when the Nowra move happens, our staff will have a combined experience of one year. We will have one staff move out of 10. That staff member has basically signed on because they have agreed to go to Nowra. The position actually spelled out "Nowra" when it was advertised several months ago.

The obvious impact of this is the dramatic cut in our service delivery to our commercial fishers. There has been a long and complicated history in commercial administration. It is something that you cannot learn in months, or even a couple of years, to be frank. We need experienced people in that team to be able to meet the needs of our commercial fishing industry. Again, alluding to the commercial fishers, we talk to them on a daily basis. I have dozens of phone calls a day. They are very adamant in their outrage towards this decision. They are completely against it. I do not know if I have had one positive conversation where they have supported the move. They all are particularly distressed about the relationships and rapport they have built up with our staff and ask questions like, "Who am I going to be dealing with in Nowra?" "Who am I going to ask questions?", and that sort of nature.

Finally, I would just like to end with probably the two most common phrases I get from family and friends—people who vote in New South Wales—regarding this. When I talk about the relocation of Cronulla, the first thing they all say is, "That doesn't make sense", and then they sort of shake their head. The second thing they usually say is, "What an absolute waste of money." It generally leaves them, as people who perhaps have not directly invested in fishing in any form in our State, quite angry. I agree with them on both counts. I thank you for your time.

Dr JOHN STEWART: Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you all today. Today I am representing both my wife and I, as we both work at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. I am a senior research scientist and I work mainly on the fisheries stock assessments, while my wife, Dr Veronica Silberschneider, is a well-respected scientist who currently manages the commercial ocean trap and line fishery. We both love our jobs and we are very good at what we do. As a married couple, who both have quite specialised careers, we represent a unique situation regarding the impact that this decision has on families. You need to know that the State Government is the only employer of our quite specialised professions and that the decision to close Cronulla is forcing people like us to choose between their careers and their families. This is clearly callous, if nothing else.

I have been saddened, shocked and disappointed in the decision to totally close Cronulla fisheries. In fact, I am very, very angry about it. I am angry that what is purely a politically driven, ill-informed, wasteful and clearly bad decision has been made that threatens the careers of both my wife and me. It therefore threatens my entire family's income and so directly threatens the security, lifestyle and upbringing that we want for our children. The whole situation is outrageous. I am also very angry that closing the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre would devastate the State's ability to assess and manage its fisheries resources.

We are very proud of our resource assessment program. It is incredibly cost effective and it is envied by the other States in Australia. We are able to assess the status of most of our fish stocks every year through an expert panel type of workshop. The success of this approach is clearly related to the expertise of the panel. If the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is closed, we will lose a critical number of experts. Please believe me when I tell you that expertise in New South Wales fisheries assessments is not available elsewhere. It is not in the universities—and I know because I collaborate with the best academic fisheries people in the State—nor does it exist elsewhere in the Department of Primary Industries.

Cronulla fisheries has always been where resource assessment is done. It will take many years—probably decades—to replace the lost expertise if this closure is allowed to happen. When my colleague, who runs the resource assessment program, is forced to leave the department later this year, I have been told that I will be taking over this important role. Under normal circumstances, I would be very proud to take on such a role, as it is "the" most important thing that New South Wales Fisheries does to ensure its sustainable fisheries. Yet, if this closure goes ahead, and we lose most of our expertise, then I cannot see how the Government can fulfil its legislative requirement to adequately assess the status of its fisheries resources. The only solution I can see is that we revert to a model used in some other States where only a couple of species are assessed each year. This would clearly be unacceptable.

In addition, please be aware of the large and quite controversial reforms to commercial fishing that the Government has just announced. These reforms involve using forms of quota to manage most of our exploited species. Such a management model will require improved fisheries assessments if it is going to ensure sustainable fisheries, not diminished assessments. Unfortunately, I cannot see a way out of this mess that the Government is making for itself if the decision to close Cronulla fisheries is not overturned.

Finally, it is quite clear to me that there is some hidden and vindictive agenda aimed at shutting down Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre at any cost. We still have no idea why the considerable number of staff, who have been identified as needing to remain in the Sydney area to do their jobs, cannot stay at Cronulla. We clearly have the best facilities and we pay no rent. The closure is clearly a senseless and wasteful decision.

I beg you to please do what you all can to have this awful decision overturned for the good of the people of New South Wales, for sustainable fisheries, and, finally, for the welfare of my family. Thank you very much.

Mr DAVID BARKER: My name is David Barker and I have worked at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre for over 24 years. Throughout this time I have been directly involved with all aspects of the development of the aquaria facility and also been involved with all the research projects that have made use of this world-class facility. Between 1993 and 2003, I managed the aquaria while working as an aquaculture technician within the marine fish breeding team, which is located at Port Stephens. From this experience, I have a sound perception of the Port Stephens facilities and its functions.

I believe I have the greatest understanding of the Cronulla aquaria and its value to the department and the community. I recall past research projects that have been successfully undertaken at Cronulla, which could not be done at Port Stephens or any other research facility. For example, the initial disease-resistant Sydney rock

oyster strains were successfully reproduced at the Cronulla aquaria due to its location and its high-quality water supply. Presently, the Cronulla aquaria facility hosts several research projects that cannot be done at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS] or Port Stephens.

I firmly believe that future research projects will be disadvantaged by this closure. In addition to this, the construction of new wild fisheries aquaria at Port Stephens will be made at a significant cost to taxpayers. I have not heard one compelling argument that can justify the closure of the Cronulla aquaria, or how it could possibly be of any benefit to any of its stakeholders. Over the past 24 years, I have heard nothing but praise for the research done at Cronulla aquaria and how valuable this facility is to the department. However, since the announcement of the closure, it has been unjustifiably criticised.

As I have said, I am fully aware of the modern hatchery facilities at Port Stephens. Without any criticism of these facilities, I can assure the Committee that much of the research and the aquaria facilities available at Cronulla cannot be replicated at Port Stephens, and that the closure of the historic aquaria will be a great loss to the department and all stakeholders associated with their use.

One of my greatest concerns is the loss to the Sydney-based university students from no fewer than six different faculties that presently use the Cronulla aquaria for collaborative and external-based aquatic research experiments. I have heard the executive of Fisheries state that the Port Stephens Fisheries Research Centre has a great relationship with several universities within proximity to Port Stephens and hosts many students. I do not undervalue this relationship, but it cannot compare or mitigate the fact that the students from those six Sydney-based universities will be disadvantaged, and they cannot logistically use Port Stephens, and many experiments cannot be done at the limited aquaria available at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science [SIMS].

I believe the Minister for Primary Industries was given extremely poor advice regarding the decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. It is now public knowledge that the Government has not followed the correct procedures in determining if the closure was of benefit to the stakeholders, the community or the department itself. We now see the department's senior bureaucrats trying to justify the closure and dismiss the detrimental impacts this decision will have on all stakeholders, the environment and the department's ability to manage and ensure sustainable wild fisheries in New South Wales.

I struggle to understand how the executive of primary industries could choose to advise the Minister to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre without first carefully examining all of the associated impacts, risks and costs, and provide stakeholders with a detailed cost-benefit analysis and specific plans with regards to suitable relocation alternatives. What I find even more difficult to understand is how the executive of primary industries could make this decision to close the section within his own department that directly affects his own staff and his department's performance without careful planning, consultation and the cost-benefit analysis.

Both the Minister and the executive for primary industries have acknowledged that the staff at Cronulla have made a valiant effort to have this closure reversed. So far they have not acknowledged the issues that have been raised by staff, the scientific community or the general public. I do not believe the Minister or the executive for primary industries would have anticipated the campaign that staff and local community groups have made to try and stop this closure. Nor do I believe that they appreciate or understand that the staff at Cronulla have not just run this campaign because they fear change or losing their jobs. They have driven this campaign because they were extremely passionate about their work and their responsibility to ensure the long-term sustainability of wild fisheries in New South Wales.

The scientific staff at Cronulla are aware that the decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre will massively impact on their ability to make recommendations to management to provide sustainable fisheries. If the executive for primary industries shared this passion and commitment to the department's core objectives he could not have made such a reckless decision. I ask the Minister for primary industries to carefully reconsider this decision and consider the long-term impacts it will create. If this closure goes ahead, then she may likely be directly responsible for the mismanagement of this State's wild fisheries resources. I would like to thank the Committee for your time and consideration of this serious issue.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr VICTOR PEDDEMORS: Good evening. My name is Vic Peddemors. Thanks very much for your time. I have addressed some of the issues around your terms of reference already in my submission so I am not going to harp on about that. What I would like to do is reiterate how important Cronulla Fisheries Research

Centre is so far as the site is concerned to my particular field of research, which is shark research. You are all aware, I am sure, sharks are big news both in the media and also around the world as a fishery issue. Sharks are overfished pretty much everywhere you go with the exception in Australia where we are fortunate that we have good fisheries management and a good scientific basis on which to manage our fish stocks, particularly of sharks.

Cronulla is unique in that it allows us to access large animals from the shark meshing program, for example, where we can bring them straight from a deep-water jetty back to the freezer. Some of you have been to the site. You have seen the facilities and you have had the delicate aroma of the shark freezer up your nostrils. You will realise this is a unique site to be able to do that work, to be able to dissect large animals, to string them up, get the weights, et cetera. That has never been done before. That facility is not available anywhere else in Australia. It is incredibly important from my perspective as a shark biologist to maintain that site.

The problem that I have is that without substantial cost to the Government, you are not going to replicate those facilities somewhere else. The option of moving, for example, to the Sydney Institute of Marine Studies—I have been fortunate enough to at least be earmarked for Sydney—is not a good location because of that pungent aroma I was alluding to earlier. There are huge costs associated for some of the onsite restaurants there and I am not sure how they would deal with the aroma of sharks up their clients' nostrils.

One of the other issues that the earlier speaker Mr David Barker spoke about is the unique facility of the aquarium. I have raised this in my submission to you, but I think we are in a new era of shark research and shark management. Some of you may be aware and may have heard of our research working with magnets, for example, to reduce the impact of fishing activities on elasmobranchs, on sharks, particularly on endangered species like grey nurse sharks, et cetera. That work would not be possible in any other facility in Australia other than in the aquarium at Cronulla. The reason is it is built out of sandstone, it has got no reinforcing in it and it is what we know as the Faraday effect. Basically, the steel reinforcing causes complications in the magnetic or electrical waves that emanate from the source, whether it be a magnet or whether it be an electric shock repelling device. In turn, that has an effect on the specialised organs—the ampullae of Lorenzini—in the shark's snout. It reiterates how critical it is that we do not lose these facilities, not only for my research, but for my research of Australian researchers trying to reduce the negative impacts of fishing operations on highly susceptible animals like sharks. I can assure you that around the world very few captive facilities exist. As I said earlier, there are none in Australia where this work can happen.

In addition to that, I would like to reiterate the fact that without shark research attached to the shark meshing program, the shark meshing program is going to be under more scrutiny than it already is. The shark meshing program is administered under a joint management agreement between the Department of the Environment and Heritage and our own department. Both the scientific committees of those two sectors have reiterated how important it is to be conducting research on the shark meshing program. Moving the facilities elsewhere, particularly if it is out of Sydney, would jeopardise the opportunities to do that research and would jeopardise the bather safety program of New South Wales. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr DENIS REID: Thank you very much for this opportunity to present my case. I worked at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre as a scientist for 38 years since 1974. The first 10 years was with the CSIRO and then with the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries. I have been retired for the past four years but I still go there most days, acting as an honorary associate, mentoring the younger scientists and working with other scientists on scientific papers.

I would like to concentrate mainly on the heritage value of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre and the importance of maintaining these for future generations. Firstly, the Cronulla site represents a unique and extremely important part of Australia's marine research and education heritage. As we have heard, it generally acknowledges the first marine investigation establishment in Australia. Its founder, Norwegian Harald Dannevig, is widely regarded as the most important figure in the early development of the Australian fishing industry.

A number of buildings on the site have been listed on the New South Wales heritage register. The work of the most prominent figures in the development of oceanography, fisheries assessment and fish taxonomy in Australia also contributed to the worldwide recognition of the Cronulla laboratories.

The Cronulla site is also extremely valuable in terms of the indigenous heritage. That is evident in the three identified middens which have been listed in the National Parks and Wildlife Services Aboriginal sites register and which are protected under that Act. The area of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre was originally Geawegal country for thousands of years prior to European settlement. As a coastal group, fishing was the main method of food gathering of the Geawegal people so the association of the site with the history of fishery resources use spans many, many centuries.

Secondly, I would like to talk about the significance of the marine laboratories to education in marine science. The laboratories have been an important resource for tertiary marine science education since their inception. Firstly, courses to train people for the fishing industry were a very important educational resource in the post-war years when the CSIRO was at that site. There have been numerous international conferences in fisheries and oceanography from the 1960s up to now. There are currently a number of graduate students using the facilities, both the lab and the pool, for their masters and PhD projects.

I would like briefly to discuss one or two of my experiences compared to the current relocation of the Department of Primary Industries. I was working with the CSIRO at the time of its relocation to Tasmania in 1984. The CSIRO move, in contrast to the current one, was properly planned, and costed from the time of the first suggestions of a relocation until the laboratories in Hobart were fully operational three to four years later. Staff were moved only when the facilities were complete. They were involved in the design of the new facilities and, most importantly of all, they were treated with respect the whole time.

The current Department of Primary Industries relocation has been an absolute total contrast right from the first announcement. One year after the announcement there have been very few facilities ready for relocated staff. There has been no professional planning or costing in the Department of Primary Industries move. The CSIRO move provided a good model of how such a move could be successfully handled. The Department of Primary Industries move has been such an amateurish bungle that the motives for the move are in serious question.

The second, very brief, example I will give is last year I was in Norway where I visited a laboratory in southern Norway. The founder of this laboratory was the father of the person who founded the Cronulla laboratory, so it is basically the father laboratory to ours. In 2011 a new state-of-the-art laboratory was added at a cost of \$10 million. The old buildings were retained and operated very effectively. That laboratory has a similar number of scientific staff as the Cronulla laboratory. Norway has a population of five million; New South Wales seven million. The contrast in treatment of the Norwegian and Cronulla laboratories as precious scientific resources for the future is very stark indeed.

In conclusion, I would say the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is recognised as the birthplace of marine science in Australia. Marine scientists from around the world were stunned at the news of the closure decision. The research centre is unique in Australia. The site was handed over from the Commonwealth to the New South Wales Government in 1984 in good faith that the site and buildings would continue to be used for research purposes. The loss of the site on the basis of short-term political considerations would represent an unforgivable attack on the heritage values of this historically very significant site.

Ms TRACEY McVEA: I am one of the 150 staff affected by this decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. My job has been moved to Port Stephens and I am here today to tell you about my personal journey—what I have seen and what I have endured for the last year. I am a professional with a science degree and I have devoted my entire 27-year career working at the centre. For the last 11 years or so I have been the executive officer to the chief scientist there. I work hard. I am loyal. I am honest and I am very passionate about my job and the sustainability of our fisheries.

I am not able to move from Sydney. I have been put through nine agonising months trying to make sense of this ridiculous situation, never really believing that such a thoughtless decision would ever have legs to stand on. In the end I felt I had no option than to give up my much-loved career. I left the department on 4 June for a lesser paid and much less rewarding job where I felt my skills and expertise are just being wasted. This whole experience has been extremely traumatic for me. As an only child with ageing parents who live in Sydney, is it unreasonable that I choose to live here so I can give them my support, love and companionship? My mum has bone marrow cancer. She needs ongoing treatment. She is on chemo for seven days every three weeks at Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital. If I move to Port Stephens it would rob me of my family and my ability to provide the care and support which they so deserve.

In my position as executive officer, you would expect I would hear something in the lead-up to such a major announcement. Yet, there were no warning signs. There was no consultation with staff. There were no feasibility studies, there were no inspections of the facilities—there was absolutely nothing. Just two hours after the announcement was made I was dragged in to take the minutes at that first working group meeting. It was horrible. All this group was intent on doing was shutting down the centre and shifting out the staff, me included. Yet, there were no terms of reference, no change management plan, no risk analysis, no communication plan, there was nothing. How could they forge ahead and shut down a centre of excellence without even questioning the validity of this stupid decision? Since day one this whole debacle has been managed ad hoc. Staff have been expected to make decisions about relocating to offices that did not even exist. Dodgy deals were being made. Information was being slowly fed to us and the advice provided by human resources was often misleading.

This decision has had a very real negative impact on my wellbeing. I have been depressed. I have cried most days. I find it difficult to sleep. I have just lost trust, confidence and my overall zest for life. I have never felt like this before. There is just so much despair and grief. It is like my heart and soul have been ripped from me. This long-awaited inquiry is the first sign of light at the end of this very dark tunnel. I have seen my colleagues breakdown sobbing and becoming withdrawn. I felt the awkwardness of researchers in other parts of the department, including those in our already well-served regional centres like Narrandera and Port Stephens. I have listened to the lies and the deceptions from the Government and senior bureaucrats. I have been told by the department to make selfish choices, whatever that is supposed to mean. I have been deceived. I have seen my supervisor belittled and bullied. I have seen the original three relocation sites become 14, including other sites in Sydney like Mosman, Newington and Parramatta for goodness sake.

I have seen the utter waste of taxpayer dollars and I have tried hard to understand how this closure will benefit regional New South Wales. There is no logic, there is no plan, and there is no way that this decentralisation will work effectively. I ask this inquiry to consider whether closing the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre is ethical, moral or even feasible and whether sacrificing the lives of 150 staff and their families will in any way benefit regional communities. If this closure is only about decentralisation, please ask yourselves whether our families and our communities here in Sydney are any less important than those in regional New South Wales.

Mr ROBERT WILLIAMS: I am a retired research scientist. I worked at Cronulla for a long time. In my 35 years of experience I did not study fish, I did not study crustaceans, I did not study molluscs. Rather, my area of interest and area of expertise is in the habitats in which these creatures live. I will return to that in a moment or two. I begin by saying I find nothing inherently wrong with the concept of decentralisation of public resources. Government-sponsored mass migration of civil servants finds its inspiration in Canberra and Brasilia. When I first came to Australia in 1971 plans were reported in the media for the Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange growth centres. Decentralisation when done competently can offer many advantages.

Recently though the media sensed some regularities in the plan for the decentralisation of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. Thankfully, this inquiry can help us find a way through a maze of uncertainty surrounding that plan. In my 35 years as a public servant I saw firsthand how the bureaucratic machine operates. I offer you the following chronology. The New South Wales Coalition campaigned with a platform of decentralisation. The Coalition won the election and the Deputy Premier sought approval to implement the decentralisation policy. The Premier gave the approval and by the process of delegation the Minister for Primary Industries was told to proceed. The newly appointed Minister, completely unfamiliar with the workings of a government department of over 3,700 staff, must seek advice and, in a formal sense, that advice would come in the first instance from the director general of the Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, who, also newly arrived in his position and also bereft of detail on legislation, policy, staffing 130 site locations and countless other matters, needed to turn to a subordinate with relevant knowledge.

We come now to a memo of 20 May 2011 that arrived in the hands of the director general of the Department of Primary Industries—a memo the genesis of which is still unclear. In a biological context, it might be suggested that it arose due to spontaneous generation in the bureaucracy. My working experience strongly suggests otherwise. Rather, I submit that verbal instructions were issued for that memo. However, who set the framework for its content? More specifically, and reliant on my expertise, who ignored the relevant State Government policy dealing with the rise in the level of the sea measured over the past century at Fort Denison and continuing to rise—a policy defined and refined over several years by experts to assist the residents of New South Wales to adjust with minimum future investment to the rise in the level of the ocean? I suggest that any major investment in the Port Stephens site therefore must be undertaken with caution. Was the ignoring of the sea level policy an error of omission? If it was, the competency of the individuals setting the brief must be called

into question. Or was it an error of commission? If so, what was the motive? I would be happy to be corrected in any of my suppositions. In any case, the Minister was caught on that and other relocation issues and needed and continues to need a defensive strategy generated by staff.

If it is the intention of the democratic process to entrust the wellbeing and betterment of the community to a select few—that is, the parliamentarians and their bureaucratic servants—in this matter of public policy for the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence we now find that there is circumstantial evidence that aspects of accountability are at stake about how the decision on decentralisation was made. As our world becomes more complex in terms of the increase in population, sharing of resources, waste management and climate change, there is an ever greater need to be competent stewards of the natural environment on which we all depend.

Before I wish the Committee well in its further deliberations, I add one small postscript. I wish to make an observation for some creatures who have an interest in these proceedings but who cannot speak for themselves or attend this session. Duly appointed Fisheries Ministers and, from time to time when the entity known as NSW Fisheries was absorbed within larger agencies, directors general have shown an awareness of the need to carefully manage the commercial harvest of our fish. Belatedly these Ministers and directors have come to recognise other circumstances. *[Time expired. Remainder of statement incorporated into Hansard at the request of the Committee].*

Belatedly, these ministers and directors, usually when subjected to a barrage of correspondence, come to realise the strength of the recreational fishing lobby. Unfortunately, they usually show little recognition of another mandate set out in the Fisheries Management Act, i.e., to manage the **habitats** in which fish, crustaceans, molluscs live. No habit = no fish.

CHAIR: Mr Williams' submission was a good one with which to conclude this public forum. I thank the 19 people who participated and those who came to observe. It is not always easy to make a presentation here in Parliament House. The Committee thanks everyone for their effort in doing so in a very calm and measured way. The material was well presented and the statements were well prepared. They will be a great help to the Committee in preparing its report and making its recommendations. You are invited to the Committee's next public hearing, which will be conducted on Monday 10 September and during which the Minister will be questioned.

(Public forum concluded)

(The Committee adjourned at 7.13 p.m.)