

Additional comments from Senator Barnaby Joyce, Leader of the Nationals in the Senate, on behalf of the National Party.

In brief, the caveats this legislation places on fishing are excessive and onerous and the development in the applications of the terms of fishing and the precautionary principle have become, as such, unacceptable to many that live in the North Queensland area. We are now defining not only the act of fishing as an offence but also the consideration of the act as an offence. This step in law is a dangerous one in all facets, but is particularly peculiar when applied to something as generally minor as fishing.

I believe the definition of fishing proposed in Schedule 6 item 9 of the bill creates a dangerous precedent, and warrants the pursuit of mitigating amendments.

Furthermore, I believe there are issues with the definition and application of the precautionary principle as stated in Schedule 1 item 12 of the bill. Although in other areas of conservation this may be custom and practice, it has proved an unnecessary vagary in the recreational and commercial fishing community. The precautionary principle should not take precedence over valid environmental studies and socioeconomic impact studies. Noting that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is one of the most studied areas of ocean in the world it would be reasonable to expect that there should not be an excessive requirement for a precautionary principle in an area where so much has already been tabulated.

I share the concerns of many submitters, such as the Queensland Game Fishing Association, who wrote:

As an organisation committed to the collection, dissemination and analysis of scientific information as the basis of sound marine resource conservation and management we are distressed by what appears to be a disturbing trend by organisations and governments to institute management and zoning arrangements based more on political pressure, lobbying and public perception rather than science. Unfortunately the precautionary principle is often used in place of committing sufficient resources, without scientific bias, to obtaining the required information to enable proper management.

The Great Barrier Reef must be acknowledged to have multiple usages as a conservation area, a resource and a recreational venue.

The process over time is that this is becoming more of a conservation area. The lifestyles and livelihoods of those who live adjacent to the park have been unduly curtailed.

This remains an ongoing concern for the National party and our advocacy for a more balanced approach will continue.

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