

**NICK DAMETTO**

**Member for Hinchinbrook**

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## MEDIA RELEASE

8/11/2018

### VMS regs another blow for boaties

HINCHINBROOK MP Nick Dametto fears maritime commercial operators will walk away from their businesses under proposed draconian regulations that will force the use of tracking systems on all vessels.

Mr Dametto blasted proposed amendments to regulations that support vessel tracking under the existing Fisheries Act 1994. The amendments would make it compulsory to have a vessel monitoring system (VMS) installed on net, crab and line commercial fishing boats by January 1, 2019 and the remainder of the commercial fishing fleet, including licensed charter operators, by January 1, 2020.

“I currently hold a coxswain grade 1 NC licence and understand the pressure operators are facing out on the water,” he said.

“Anything that hinders smaller vessel operators out there from carrying out their day-to-day duties as a small business owner needs to be addressed. We shouldn’t be viewing our smaller operators in the same light as the larger commercial fishing and trawling operations.

“That’s why I am calling for a quota cut-off for the need to install a VMS unit. This would be quite beneficial in reducing financial pressures for the smaller operators and would reduce the amount of people needing to own and operate a VMS.

“I don’t agree that game fishing and tourism operations should need to carry and use VMS, they should be excluded from this regulation. Most game and fishing tour operators promote catch and release and when they take home a catch it’s no greater than a recreational fisherman.”

The separate Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill 2018, which is yet to be debated in parliament, will make it an offence to not have approved vessel tracking equipment installed and working properly and an offence to interfere with the operation of a VMS. The maximum penalty for each of these offences is 1000 penalty units or about \$130,550.

Mr Dametto said the enforcement of VMS on smaller vessels and the penalties for not complying were “outrageous”.

“I believe this government is trying to actively kill off our fishing and charter industry. This is just another case of instilling big brother “eye in the sky” type monitoring aimed at watching our every move,” he said.

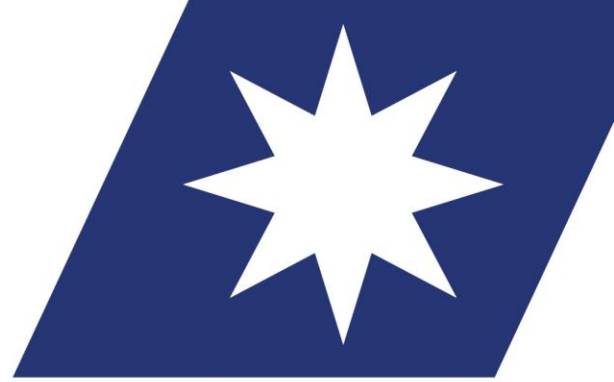
“These are hard-working mum and dad operators who are already struggling to make ends meet. To have them lumped together with large-scale commercial fishing boats is an absolute injustice.”

Parliament’s State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee has recommended the Bill be passed.

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“To think that we’re monitoring tourism operators the same way we’re looking to monitor commercial fishing operations is ludicrous and a waste of taxpayer dollars as we are funding the initial subsidised units. VMS is just another inconvenience for operators already under increasing pressure from government and financial struggles,” Mr Dametto said.

“Once again, the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee’s process has failed to listen to people affected and the introduction of these regulations mirrors the way the committee treated primary producers when pleading their case about vegetation management legislation. This is a lazy, one-size-fits-all approach.”

Crackajack Sportfishing Adventures owner-operator Todd Eveleigh, who runs guided fishing tours from Lucinda and Cardwell, said the proposed VMS regulations was another unnecessary burden for his business to carry.

“It costs twice as much to run fishing tours up here due to the fact you’ve got world heritage listed national parks, which you have to pay fees for, as well as to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority,” he said.

“The VMS is a monthly fee and we also pay public liability insurance for our business to meet the National Parks and GBRMPA requirements. As well as these fees, there is the new AMSA levy the government has also put on us. The expenses are just going through the roof.”

Mr Eveleigh said his business was far different to the large commercial trawlers operating in the area.

“We are a tourism-based business catering for small groups of sports fisherman and are mainly catch-and-release sport fishing but now we’ll have to have the same VMS that a super trawler or a commercial fishing boat does who are making money on their big catches,” he said.

“It’s like the Queensland Government doesn’t want small operators. They just want to have big operators and not small businesses so all the little towns like Ingham, the Burdekin, Cardwell and Innisfail and so on, which have tourism-based businesses, will be squeezed out.

“The government is saying if the VMS is faulty, we’re not allowed to operate. So for people who are flying from all over the world and Australia to go fishing with us around Hinchinbrook Island, and are unable to go due to a faulty VMS, who will pay us the cost of the lost day, not to mention compensating these people who have outlaid lots of money and travelled a long way to miss their day’s fishing because we are not allowed to take them out.”

Mr Eveleigh also expressed concerns about his business’ select fishing spots being compromised with a VMS.

“For all the areas we’ve spent thousands of dollars to find over the years, the government is going to make us pay them to give them that information. Now people pay us to get that information and understand how to fish and where to go,” he said.

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“If that becomes general knowledge, that is our livelihood gone.”

—ENDS—

*Photo caption:*

*Crackajack Sportfishing Adventures owner-operator Todd Eveleigh and Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto are both against proposed new government regulations that would force tracking systems on all vessels.*

**Media Enquiries**

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