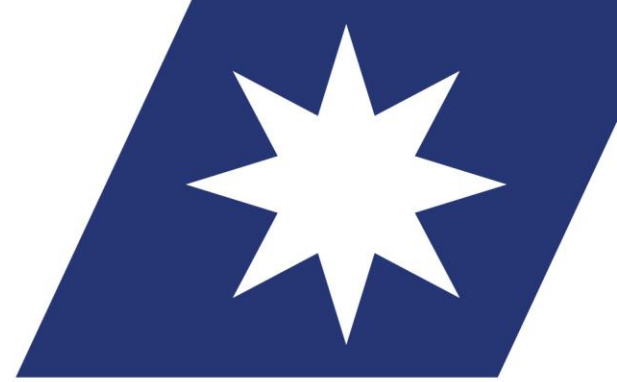


NICK DAMETTO

Member for Hinchinbrook



MEDIA RELEASE

15/11/2018

Labor abandons commercial boat owners

LABOR has scuttled efforts by Katter's Australian Party (KAP) MPs to debate a draconian regulation which will enforce the use of tracking systems on fishing vessels, abandoning commercial boat owners across Queensland.

The State Government quietly passed the Fisheries (Vessel Tracking) Amendment Regulation 2018 last Friday, which will require all crab, line and net fishers to have vessel tracking technology installed and operational by January 1 next year.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will also make it compulsory to have vessel tracking installed on the remainder of the commercial fishing fleet, including licensed charter operators, by January 1, 2020.

Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto gave notice of a disallowance motion in parliament this morning and then attempted to seek leave of the house to move a motion without notice in order to debate his disallowance motion of the regulation, which amends the existing Fisheries Regulation 2008.

But his efforts were torpedoed by Labor who used their numbers to deny Mr Dametto leave of the house to debate the disallowance motion, which will now have to be debated during the next sitting week of parliament in February, well after the amendment regulation has been implemented.

"The actions of Labor in parliament today were an absolute disgrace," Mr Dametto said.

"Here was a golden opportunity to debate these unfair and draconian regulations on commercial boat owners and Labor have decided they don't care.

"Once again, they have abandoned thousands of hardworking Queenslanders for the sake of inner-city green votes."

Hill MP Shane Knuth said he was absolutely gutted there had been no democracy in the process of implementing the amendment regulation.

"This has been smashed through. This is worse than what I have seen in the Newman era of government in not giving commercial fishermen an opportunity to have concerns addressed that will impact their financial viability," he said.

"There are many questions that need to be addressed. Where fishermen could travel through green zones to reach their fishing destinations, these vessel tracking monitors will now consider them guilty while travelling through and trying to deliver their business.

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“Years of trial and error in finding special fishing locations will now be handed over to the department and other organisations and run the risk of being shared with other institutions and environmental groups to destroy the fishing industry.

“The minister recently said on ABC Radio that there would be opportunity for debate. The only debate we’ll have is our disallowance motion that the government has now pushed out to February – after fishermen are already forced to use a Vessel Management System.

“At a public meeting I attended, more than half of the fishermen said they would shut their doors when the VMS regulation is passed. The reality is more cost to fishermen and less fish available, which means more demand on consumers and higher prices for local produce. This opens the door wide for imported seafood.

“The government seems to be intent on making imported food our only option.”

Mr Dametto said the government should “not be viewing our smaller operators in the same light as the larger commercial fishing and trawling operations”.

“That’s why I’m 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 Vessel Management System,” he said.

“I don’t agree that game fishing and tourism operations should need to carry and use VMS and 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 Vessel Management System (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.

“VMS is just another inconvenience for operators already under increasing pressure from government and financial struggles,” Mr Dametto said.

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“Labor has continued a worrying record of stifling industry and development across Queensland, whether it’s their destructive vegetation management laws or parts of the latest Mineral and Energy Resources Bill.

“Only Katter’s Australian Party is willing to stand up for the rights of everyday Queenslanders.”

—ENDS—

Photo captions:

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 commercial fishing vessels.

Hill MP Shane Knuth at a public meeting to discuss the vessel tracking regulation in Innisfail last week with host Attila Feher-Holan and fisherman Rodney Timms.

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