

SOUTH COAST MARINE PARK

Statement

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.08 pm]: I rise to make a statement about the ongoing train wreck that is the planning process for the south coast marine park. From its inception, it has been dogged by controversy after controversy. There have been allegations of the government allowing a United States-based environmental lobby group to exert its influence over the process to the exclusion of local communities. Key stockholders such as local governments, commercial and recreational fishers and businesses have expressed very real concerns that the consultation process has been rushed and skewed towards delivering a predetermined outcome and that they have not been listened to during this process.

I have raised a number of questions about the lack of scientific methodology and research data being used by the government to validate its desire to lock away thousands of square kilometres in sanctuary zones. In response, the Minister for Environment actually admitted that the Labor government's own report stated as much. Concerns also have been expressed about the government walking back from its commitment to undertake a comprehensive socio-economic impact assessment. Despite calling for tenders for that assessment, the government decided not to proceed and to instead go ahead with a rudimentary desktop study. All that means nothing to a government that embarks on consultation simply as a means of checking a box—something that members on this side of the chamber have talked about ad nauseam for a very long time. We saw this with the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation and we will probably see it play out with the firearms reforms as well.

What is very interesting with the south coast marine park is that the process is so broken, the government's own agencies are now breaking ranks. Documents obtained under freedom of information tell a very disturbing story—that is, despite its role as a marine planning partner, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, the fisheries department, has levelled extraordinary criticism at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions about its management of this planning process. I will quote extensively from a document obtained under freedom of information headed “Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions: Comment and Response Register”, and beneath that, “Marine planning partner: Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development”. These comments are all made by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. It states —

Noting inadequate time was provided for DPIRD to properly analyse and provide well-considered feedback on a marine park of such size and complexity, this rushed approach poses serious risks to the planning and outcomes of the South Coast Marine Park.

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Based on the draft zoning scheme it does not appear that DBCA have adopted a pragmatic approach to the zoning of the proposed South Coast Marine Park ... which actively avoids the establishment of sanctuary zones (and consequent loss of access) over key identified fishing ground. It is our view that the required level of pragmatism should not be difficult for DBCA to apply noting DBCA has consistently advised there is no minimum percentage or target amount of high protection or sanctuary zone that it is working to in designing the SCMP.

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The current draft candidate areas for sanctuary zoning does not meet the priority that Government and the CRC are placing on fishing and commitment to minimising the impact on fishing. The viability of a number of these small South Coast fisheries, and individual fishers' businesses, are currently at risk. The current draft zoning scheme will likely result in the loss of several South Coast fisheries and impact on the livelihood of numerous fishers.

The potential loss of South Coast fisheries and loss of individual fishers' livelihoods will have a broader impact to local economy including the supply of local sustainable fish to local regional communities; cafes and restaurants; fish and chip shops; fish wholesale outlets; processing factories; bait, ice, tackle shops; boat maintenance businesses; boat building businesses; caravan parks and campgrounds ... It will also have direct impacts on local jobs in the fishing industry including fishers, licence holders and deck hands.

As a consequence of this, some fishing families will be forced to close down their businesses and leave town to seek employment elsewhere as a result.

It is DPIRDs view that these impacts are not in the community's best interests and that the impacts can be largely avoided or minimised if DBCA are genuinely serious about doing that in designing the zoning scheme for the SCMP.

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The mental health of fishers has been raised numerous times by CRC members, SAG Chairs and DPIRD as a key issue of concern arising from the SCMP process, the rushed timeframes for planning and consultation of the SCMP and the impact of the SCMP on fishing and fishers. At a CRC meeting in March 2022, a short but very confronting video was played by a CRC member highlighting the long-term impact fishing closures can have on the mental health of commercial fishers.

Noting the current draft candidate areas will likely see the loss of some South Coast fisheries and individual fishers' livelihoods, the impact to the health and wellbeing of commercial fishers will be significant and must be acknowledged by DBCA as a serious concern and every effort made by DBCA to take this into account in the zoning scheme by minimising impacts of the PSCMP on fishers.

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The broader impact to the regions must be considered. The current draft candidate areas for sanctuary zoning will impact significantly on the community, regional and economic development opportunities and social amenity of the region. The current draft candidate areas will also pose a risk to the State Government's priority to build integrated regional economies, foster regional growth, create sustainable jobs, expand and diversify industry and ensure regional communities remain vibrant places to live, work and grow.

As such the SCMP zoning scheme should only be based on suitably robust socio-economic information that captures and quantifies current state and considers and quantifies future state associated with all potential impacts and opportunities associated with the SCMP.

DPIRD has seen no evidence of this type of socio economic information being applied in this process to date. Given this it is critical that the socio-economic information that is being used by DBCA in designing the SCMP is made fully available to, DPIRD, Traditional Owners, the CRC and community so that it can be understood, reviewed and questioned.

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The social and community amenity of the region must be considered. The candidate areas as they stand will impact on the region's social and community amenity and the ability to promote Esperance and its surrounds as tourism destination for safe fishing and to holiday. This is a key priority for the Shires of Esperance and Ravensthorpe.

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Unfortunately, many of the recommendations made by the Shire of Esperance to remove, reduce and/or amend areas to reduce the impacts ... have not been incorporated.

Noting the size and remoteness of some areas within the SCMP, compliance with the zoning scheme largely relies on community support and acceptance. It is DPIRD's view that the draft candidate areas for sanctuary zoning as they stand will be poorly received and not supported by the Esperance community and broader regional area. This poses a risk to the ecological values the sanctuary areas aim to protect and as a consequence may result in a loss of community support for the SCMP. It is not a good outcome for the Government if the community does not support the SCMP.

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The community requires a clear line of sight between the planning process and the final outcomes for the SCMP. Given the impacts on the lives and livelihoods of community members and businesses that will be caused by implementation of sanctuary and special purpose zones in the SCMP it is critical that those people understand the priority/importance assigned to each individual zone, and how DBCA have prioritised the various values in the SCMP. It is not acceptable for people's lives and livelihoods, food security, recreation, mental health and way of life to be permanently changed by the SCMP without them fully understanding the basis for that change.

In the time I have available, it continues —

Noting there are 186 licence holders that can operate in the boundary of the PSCMP, compensation and support will be significant and is estimated in excess of \$20 million.

While DPIRD is not yet able to accurately estimate the costs of implementing and servicing the marine park, given the large size of the SCMP, its location and remoteness, weather and sea conditions, and the multitude of proposed zones, it is very clear that DPIRD will require significant additional resources (FTE, capital assets and operational funding) to undertake its roles and responsibilities. The additional costs to Government will be significant and likely exceed costs associated with servicing the recently finalised Buccaneer Archipelago Marine Park. Cost to government can be minimised if the amount of sanctuary and special purpose zones, and general complexity of the SCMP is reduced.

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Compliance in the South Coast Marine Park will be very complex and presents issues and challenges not faced in other areas of the State. The shape and location of the current candidate areas for sanctuary zoning impacts significantly on the ability to enforce compliance and activities in the area.

Preliminary assessment of compliance costs is estimated to be in excess of \$25 million over 4 years, and is dependent on Government providing additional funding to support the delivery of the additional SCMP services by DPIRD.

To put it bluntly, DPIRD has set out in its comments exactly what the community and industry groups have been saying all along. What will be really telling is if the Cook Labor government decides to release the draft zoning scheme in the form that it was presented in to DPIRD with the comments it has made. If it does, that will clearly show that it is not listening to not only the community, but also its own department. As the Minister for Fisheries has to sign off on this, one wonders whether he will sign off on it, given the advice of his own department, which is quite explicit in saying that it should not proceed in the form that it was presented in.