

## THREATS TO MARINE AND TERRESTRIAL ENVIRONMENT OF NORTH WEST

### *Motion*

Resumed from 22 March on the following motion moved by Hon Kim Chance (Leader of the House) on behalf of Hon Shelley Archer -

That this house calls on the Australian government to better protect the land and waters of the north west of Western Australia from threats to our marine and terrestrial environment such as -

- (a) illegal fishing of Australian waters and the consequent impact on marine biodiversity and fish resource use;
- (b) unauthorised incursion of persons, plants and animals onto the mainland and the consequent threat of quarantine breach; and
- (c) any other incursion that would affect the environmental and economic future of the north west.

**HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House)** [11.04 am]: In the short time that I had to introduce this motion yesterday, I outlined some of the extent of this threat to our marine and terrestrial environment. I also outlined some of the history of this issue; namely, that over many years the waters of the Timor Sea have been a traditional fishing environment in which people from further north have fished in Australian waters and, indeed, right down to the Australian mainland. However, the degree to which this fishing has escalated, and the nature of that fishing, has radically changed.

The traditional fishing arrangements are still lawful due to an arrangement between the Republic of Indonesia and the Commonwealth of Australia. The traditional fishermen, particularly those from Roti Island, have legal access into those waters under traditional fishing rights. The issue has become complicated, ironically, by the fact that the plunder of Indonesian waters by fishermen foreign to Indonesia has pushed Indonesian commercial fishermen further and further down into Australian waters. It is at this point that this issue becomes extremely serious.

I want to make it clear at the outset that the purpose of this motion is not to in any way impede the existing traditional fishing rights and the agreements that have been reached between Indonesia, Timor and Australia. It is in the trend towards commercialisation that we see the greatest threat. I finished my short contribution yesterday by making the point that the risks are high. This is a big-stakes game. I mentioned the black-striped mussel. That one threat alone - which is a very easily portable threat - could completely wipe out our pearling industry; that single pest could wipe out an industry almost as big as our rock lobster industry. We had a scare in the port of Geraldton a couple of years ago in which a barge that had been laid up in Jamaica moved into Geraldton to carry out harbour-deepening works and was found to contain either black-striped or a similar mussel. That was a major emergency and had to be dealt with very effectively.

However, that is just one threat. The number of other threats - not only marine, but also terrestrial - are quite frightening. There have been reports of vessels carrying monkeys and other animals that can carry rabies and similar diseases. We are always under threat of diseases like foot and mouth disease. If, for example, foot and mouth disease were to enter northern Australia during the wet season and infect the feral pig or feral buffalo population, it might be years before it was discovered. The task of then clearing out an area as inaccessible as our north coast - be it Cape York, the Gulf of Carpentaria, or anywhere in the Northern Territory or the Kimberley - would be horrendous. This is an immensely serious issue.

There is a dimension of sheer commercial pressure, even if we are to confine this issue only to the impact upon fish stocks. I want to give members an idea of just how fragile our northern waters are. I would like to explain this with reference to one quite small fishery - the Kimberley demersal fishery. This is a fin-fish fishery based out of Broome. I wish I could remember the coordinates; I used to know them. It is approximately in the area east of longitude 123 degrees east, basically from Eighty Mile Beach across to the Northern Territory border. This fishery was put into management in the time that I was Minister for Fisheries. The process of putting a fishery into management involves taking it out of an open-access arrangement and structuring it as a managed fishery, by which means the output can be controlled. We ran through a series of scenarios to determine the sustainable catch from that fishery. It was quite a big slab of country, from Eighty Mile Beach all the way to the Northern Territory border. The scientific assessment of the sustainable catch for that area was in a range from 750 tonnes per annum to 1 550 tonnes per annum. The Department of Fisheries chose a figure of 850 tonnes per annum as a basis for its licensing arrangements.

Prior to being put into management, this fishery was open to international fishing boats, particularly Taiwanese commercial long-line vessels. It is estimated that out of the same group of blocks east of longitude 123 degrees east, the Taiwanese fleet alone was taking 17 000 tonnes per annum. Our estimate of the sustainable catch was

somewhere between 750 and 1 550 tonnes per annum. That is the frightening scale of exploitation. It must be borne in mind that these are long-lived fish, mostly of the kind we put in the snapper and groper family. They reach sexual maturity only after a number of years in the water. It is not a resource that we can fish heavily and expect to recover quickly. It is the kind of resource that may never recover if it is fished too heavily. This is quite different from the case of prawns, for example, which have a life span of only about two years. It is possible to fish a prawn stock down very hard and expect it to be back at its full exploitable level within a couple of years. This is a much more fragile source.

The word "fragile" is one we need to take a great deal of notice of. We tend to regard the north of Australia as a fairly robust place with fertile oceans and high rainfall. The people who live there are certainly robust and very tough, but the country itself and the marine environment of our far north are immensely fragile areas that require very careful management. That fact was brought home to me quite recently on a visit to Camballin station, where the effects could be seen of people attempting to interfere with the greatest river in Australia, the Fitzroy. I could see how disastrous it could have been and, indeed, how bad it was. We were lucky that the impact of those works was not much worse. It is fragile country that needs to be managed extremely carefully. It is also inaccessible country. North west of Wyndham, the Drysdale River flows into the Napier Broome Bay. The area around the mouth of the Drysdale River is Aboriginal country. A traditional owner of the country walked into the Derby office of the Department of Agriculture one day with a twig in his hand. He asked what the twig was. The Department of Agriculture officer identified it as African acacia, and asked where it had been found. The traditional owner said that it was growing all along the Drysdale. Of course, that caused a minor panic. Departmental officers went into the area and confirmed what we had been alerted to by the landowner; that is, we had a major weed problem in the area. I am happy to report that, I think, over the next two or three dry seasons we will have at least the core of that knocked out.

I have actually flown into that area. It is accessible only by helicopter, except at certain times of the year. I estimate the age of some of those trees to be 30 years. That is how long a problem can be in that country before anyone even becomes aware that the problem is there, and this is in the case of trees that cannot hide from anyone! Members can only imagine how hard it is with an invasive marine species or a disease in animals. We cannot think of this country in the same way as we think of either the south coast or mid-west coast, which are within vision all the time. I refer to remote country that is difficult to access. For those reasons we must be all the more vigilant in the way we control who goes where.

A joint government strategy has been developed that can work towards achieving the outcome that is identified in Hon Shelley Archer's motion. This strategy has been developed by the governments of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Until recently the federal government has been somewhat reluctant to become involved in the development of that strategy, although I am hopeful that we are now making some progress towards a better relationship with the federal government and that it is beginning to understand that this is a serious issue. However, a lot of work must be done before that strategy becomes a reality, not only for the waters of Western Australia but also the waters of the north end of the continent.

Realistically, this issue is not something that can be dealt with by one jurisdiction alone. Queensland cannot do it alone, certainly the Northern Territory cannot do it alone and neither can Western Australia do it alone. It is a single biological region, and a problem in one area is a problem for all of us. It is a matter that needs to be dealt with at the very highest level. I hope the federal government will now commit adequate resources and devise the strategies that need to be developed to give the rest of Australia some assurance in this regard. I welcome what seems to be an interest by the Prime Minister in his taking this issue forward at a commonwealth level.

I will briefly outline the key elements of the strategy, some of which are now beginning to come to fruition. Firstly, there have been urgent meetings of the relevant state and federal officials. Those that have not happened yet are due to happen very shortly. That will enable the development of effective protocols and a framework for cooperative compliance, drawing on models already being developed to deal with terrorism and other border security issues if they are required.

The Minister for Fisheries is seeking a summit of relevant state and federal ministers to give consideration to the proposals and to provide some clear directions on how to tackle what has become a foreign fishing crisis. A working group of senior fisheries compliance officers will be formed to facilitate the development of those protocols, to facilitate the development of processes for the sharing of fishing intelligence, and also, and this is very important, to facilitate the development of cross-jurisdictional authorisation of fisheries officers.

If I may just illustrate something that we all might have expected to have been the case now, and how absent that cross-jurisdictional cooperation can be, I have made the point that it is a single biological zone. I believe that most of us would have the expectation that, as a result of that, the relevant authorities would have cross-authorisation, or at least the capacity to talk to each other. How can they possibly deal with an issue like this unless they have that capacity? The situation became so bad that a few months ago, when state officials

identified the existence of a vessel, and then ultimately handed that issue over to commonwealth officials, the state officials were told that they were not even to tell their minister that the vessel had been arrested. How crazy is that? Whose side are we all on? I do not know whether those officials told the minister. That is something members would have to take up with him. It is just nonsense to say that state officials could not tell their minister or their executive director because it was commonwealth business and commonwealth officials had arrested the vessel under commonwealth law, even though the vessel had been detained by state officials. I think everyone would agree that that is nonsense. I hope that is one of the issues that this alliance of protocols and authorisations will finally overcome. Why it happened, I do not know. It could have been that a commonwealth officer misunderstood what his authority was or it could have been because of some complexity of laws in relation to what is an illegal vessel entering our waters and what might create a security threat. It could be that the commonwealth officer read it as a security threat, which would have been justification for those instructions. However, let us get the matter cleared up. I am not blaming anyone, but let us move on and sort these matters out.

The same working group will seek to address recidivism. We all know recidivism is occurring, because the same people have been arrested time and again. Through the development of an essential identification database, a consistent approach to deal with the prosecution of illegal fishing boats apprehended in these waters needs to be developed. We cannot have a situation in which the same skipper and the same crew, and sometimes even the same vessel, can be arrested in the Gulf of Carpentaria one week and in Western Australia the next week and nobody in the other jurisdiction knows that that has occurred. The strategy focuses on greater development of smaller patrol vessels along the Kimberley coast, supported by an Aboriginal marine ranger program in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory involving intelligence gathering and surveillance. We have already seen the first success from that with the ranger program at One Arm Point arresting, or at least identifying, trochus poachers.

An engagement strategy also needs to be developed with the Indonesian government to better match Australian aid programs to Indonesia. I have made the point that Indonesians also have this problem of foreign fishing piracy. It is important that we engage in a study to measure the extent of organised crime involvement in the illegal foreign fishing activity, and also we need to gain a better understanding through scientific research of the risks to northern fish stocks, particularly shark and snapper. There is a need to examine the economic and policy impacts upon domestic fisheries currently certified as sustainable under the commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and the inconsistencies of potential decertification through unsustainable practices resulting from illegal foreign fishing. I think the meaning of that is obvious, but one can imagine how happy our fishermen would be having gone through a process of reducing their take of the fishery and then finding that their fishery is decertified as a result of the actions of illegal activity.

We need positive consultation. We will not solve this problem without good cooperation and participation by all affected jurisdictions. The first way to solve that problem is to ask people whether they will take this issue seriously. Most of all, we need action now. I am not keen, nor is the Western Australian Minister for Fisheries keen, to make this a political issue any more than it already has been. We need to get on and do the job. We need a commitment to increase our ability to apprehend the illegal fishing boats. We need the resources to adequately respond to the crisis at hand. The problem is escalating; it is not going away.

One of the really frightening things that we have heard so much about is the extent of illegal incursion over the past couple of months. In past years we thought we would be free of this kind of fishing during January and February because we did not expect these vessels to enter our waters during the wet season. There have been unprecedented levels of incursions, even throughout the wet season. If action is not taken, what will happen by the time the weather improves and there is the normal flow of vessels during the dry season? We cannot stop this activity without patrol vessels. It is necessary to have keels in the water to carry out this task. We need vessels to respond to the sighting of these vessels operating illegally in our waters, and bring them to justice. The Western Australian government will continue to permit the Department of Fisheries' patrol vessel *Walcott* to stay in that region for as long as it takes to curb the flow of these fishermen into our waters. It is not good enough to simply have the resources available to respond to sightings of illegal foreign fishing boats; we need a consistent approach to deal with those boats. It is no longer good enough for the federal government to take the catch and the gear from these illegal fishermen and then send these vessels on their way. Hon Vince Catania will provide some figures on how often that occurs. That is an approach that has not worked.

We need to create an effective deterrent that dissuades not just the people who are coming into Australian waters illegally - I actually regard these people as victims of circumstance - but also the people who are investing in these vessels. The commercialisation of this illegal trade is organised crime. It is being run and funded by organised crime figures. This is not simply an explosion of traditional fishing rights, which I have already said we are quite happy to let continue. Members will no doubt agree that foreign illegal fishing poses a significant threat to not only our northern fish resources, but also our biosecurity in that area. It is also a threat to our

regional communities and our commercial and national security. It is not an issue about which we can afford to play petty political games. I encourage all members - government and opposition - to actively lobby for and support the government's position in a united front to protect northern Australia and all Australians. Given the serious threat that is posed to the resources and security of Western Australia, I urge support for this motion.

**HON BRUCE DONALDSON (Agricultural)** [11.30 am]: The opposition welcomes this motion. The threat to our marine and terrestrial environment is a very serious and complex issue and the opposition agrees with Hon Shelley Archer, whose motion this is. The Leader of the House has spelt out some of the issues quite succinctly. Being a former Minister for Fisheries, he is of course well versed in what has been going on. I know that Hon Sheila Mills, who attended an international fishing conference with me, is concerned about what is known internationally as the high-seas policy on fishing. Many nations have realised that the exploitation of fishing stocks is creating a huge problem. Unfortunately, not all nations are abiding by agreed fishing principles. It must also be acknowledged that around the world more than 100 million tonnes of fish - these are figures from a couple of years ago - are caught each year in the wild capture. In the past those fish were caught by just over a million fishing vessels. In the past 10 to 15 years the number of fishing vessels in the world has increased to more than three million. On top of all of that, of course, is technology, which is very sophisticated and very smart. Even the average amateur can go out fishing with technology that professionals would have probably killed for some years ago! There is therefore a real risk of exploitation of our traditional fishing grounds to the extent that they may be destroyed.

I was on a committee trip to Canada - I have forgotten which committee it was now.

Several members interjected.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** The committee was there but it was not a fishing committee. I do not know which committee it was; it has been a bit confusing over the years. While the committee was in Canada, an announcement was made that the well-known cod fishing grounds in Newfoundland had been virtually closed. The exploitation of those grounds had destroyed almost all the stock in that fishery and it had to be closed. Naturally that closure had a huge financial impact on many fishing people. It was an example of how not to manage a fishery. I am not fully aware of whether the exploitation of the fishery was by only locals or whether it was by incursions from others.

In acknowledging the insatiable demand for fish and seafood products around the world, China is now farming and producing some 23 million tonnes of seafood. That does not go a long way with 1.2 billion people. Aquaculture is therefore part of a new regime. Although there is new technology and three times the number of fishing vessels, the 100 million tonne catch around the world in the wild capture has not altered. About 80 to 85 per cent of it is what we would call edible; the rest is either dumped at sea or used in pet food and fertiliser.

There have been incursions into the waters of the north west of Western Australia off the Kimberley coast and into the waters of the Northern Territory off the coast of Darwin, and just recently from Papua New Guinea into the waters of Arnhem Land. There is almost a pincer movement coming into our fishing areas. In Western Australia we take credit for having a pretty well managed fishery. Many fishermen might not agree with that, but at the same time they are fully aware that we must conserve stocks to allow the industry to continue into the future.

Further to the Leader of the House's remarks, I refer to shark fishing, for argument's sake. The number of vessels licensed to fish for sharks off the north west coast has been reduced to eight. However, since that has occurred, incursions into that area by illegal fishermen have decimated the shark stocks. When vessels fishing illegally have been apprehended, huge cargoes of fins have been found on them. Unfortunately, those fishermen slice off the fins and throw the shark carcasses back into the water. We are trying to manage our own fisheries while those incursions into our fishing waters are destroying the managerial practices implemented by our Department of Fisheries.

The breeding grounds for the yellow fin and southern fin tuna are off the Java coast, and those grounds are being exploited by Indonesian fishermen and others. Those tuna migrate down to the southern coast of Western Australia. Some of the southern blue fin tuna veer off at the bottom of our south coast to South Africa. Others continue around the corner into the Great Australian Bight, which is where the Port Lincoln tuna fishery was developed. The yellow fin tuna travel down the coast and are caught by many of our own fishermen. A few years ago, the sea was literally bubbling with acres of yellow fin tuna in those waters.

At one stage an aquaculture venture was considering farming the tuna off the Abrolhos and floating them down the coast in sea pens at about one knot an hour. That sort of operation occurs from the bight in Port Lincoln, which enables value adding, and that makes a lot of sense. Many of the southern blue fin tuna probably disappear into the bight and are never seen again. Although some people are not in favour of farming or value adding to that type of fish, it limits the catch because of the very strict quotas. Value adding ensures that a lot fewer fish are wasted. In recent times, the numbers of migrating tuna have been decimated compared with the

very large numbers of the past. If we continue to allow exploitation of the traditional breeding grounds of tuna - depleting the fish numbers long before they reach Western Australia - there will be grave consequences.

In the past, the amount of fishing for tuna was accelerated because of the very high prices the Japanese paid for it. However, that has somewhat diminished now and has caused some hardship for those involved in the industry because they are not getting the same returns. Whether that has had an impact on the tuna stocks in the breeding grounds remains to be seen. I have not seen the latest forecasts. In any event, if fish stocks around the world are exploited, that will accelerate the depletion of stocks and cause worldwide problems. Unless we consider alternative measures of farming fin fish, molluscs, lobster etc, we will face serious shortages of seafood in the future.

These days health professionals are telling us that we should eat more seafood. In Australia the consumption of seafood is increasing due partly to the promotion of omega 3 fish oil. However, the issue Hon Shelley Archer raised is that of the very major responsibility of the Australian government, for a number of reasons. The Western Australian government controls only that area of water within the first three nautical miles from the coast. The commonwealth is responsible for the waters within a 200-nautical-mile limit. In addition, as the Leader of the House has well illustrated, there are quarantine issues. I can recall at one stage a couple of boats being apprehended and shoved up Broome Creek. The boats were found to have wood borers in them before they were destroyed. That is a very serious issue. People have been caught fishing illegally. An article two or three years ago reported that somebody who had bought a launch in an Asian country and had brought it back to Western Australia discovered that it was riddled with wood borers. Buyer beware. That creates a serious quarantine risk through the introduction of diseases and pests. Illegal immigrants pose a similar risk. We have stopped illegal immigrants coming into Australia, but they have been replaced by illegal fishermen. The Leader of the House is correct to say that the fishing incursions are being operated by organised crime groups in Indonesia and other countries.

This morning Woodside Petroleum Ltd announced that it had signed a \$10 billion agreement to sell to Japan two million tonnes of liquefied natural gas from its new Pluto field. The agreement will operate over 15 years and includes a five-year option. The gas field was discovered only 12 months ago. Hon Vince Catania might be able to help me with information on that. That is a huge amount of money. The state government will collect some \$200 million in royalties and the federal government will receive \$2 billion. Western Australia has a huge natural gas output. Never say never. The gas projects could be subject to terrorism activities. Who would have thought that 9/11 and the London underground bombings would have occurred? Although it is difficult to access the gas projects, there are sufficient sized ships - the so-called mother ships, one of which was apprehended recently - that are capable of accessing and creating havoc to either our gas platforms or the mainland. The commonwealth government should make sure that it provides a sufficient number of patrol vessels to protect our fishing resources and for the purposes of quarantine protection and national security.

The Leader of the House was correct to say that the Prime Minister has taken a far greater interest in this matter recently. The Prime Minister moved the former Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation sideways and appointed Senator Eric Abetz to handle the portfolio. Obviously the Prime Minister has told Senator Abetz that something must be done about this matter. I call on the federal government to work more closely with the Western Australian and Northern Territory governments to determine ways and means to provide a sufficient number of patrol vessels in the area that will enable the issues that have arisen in the north west to be dealt with. A few years ago many ports in Western Australia and the Northern Territory were very concerned about ballast discharge. When the boats get into warmer waters, some of the would-be predators of our fisheries pump out their ballast, which will create a problem for us in the long term. I believe that protocols have been put into place recently. I cannot remember off the top of my head the amount of shipping tonnage that arrives into Port Hedland, but a huge amount of ballast is discharged into the ocean. The ballast must be disposed of before the iron ore is loaded onto the ships.

A number of papers on illegal foreign fishing have been put out by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority. The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council has certainly written to the Leader of the Opposition, Matt Birney, pointing out some of the issues and looking for support, if I can put it that way. Whichever political party we belong to, this issue is very important to Western Australia. A satisfactory result can be achieved, first of all, only at a diplomatic level. I believe it is correct to say that we should look at the way in which we deliver our foreign aid. However, I take a more radical line. I would take the fishermen off the vessels that are apprehended and sink those vessels then and there. I would bring the fishermen back to the mainland, put them on the first plane and dump them in, for argument's sake, Jakarta - if it is safe in Indonesia. Let the Indonesians then worry about those people. I know it would be hard on those fishermen. However, that message must get a very clear run in the minds of people and be developed. The federal government needs to crack down when it can prove that some of this illegal fishing is being funded by crime syndicates.

The federal government, to its credit, has been successful in stopping people coming illegally to this country in boats. There is no reason that the federal government cannot successfully stop illegal fishing by putting in sufficient resources. It would be able to find those resources very easily. I believe it is beholden on the federal government to allocate sufficient dollars to provide those resources and to implement some of the protocols, guidelines and principles attached to the agreements that have been developed between the Northern Territory and Western Australian governments. There must be a concerted effort by all, because it is a complex issue, and it will not go away quickly. I believe Hon Sheila Mills will attest to the difficulties that many nations are finding, even in their own fishing grounds. Although some nations may have the will to abide by certain guidelines, unfortunately others do not. Therefore, the whole thing falls into a heap.

The clear message at that international conference was that the number of fishing grounds that are under threat around the world is quite significant. Moving away from the illegal fishermen, our fishermen have become too good also. They are very good at what they do. The fishing industry in Western Australia, in whichever form it may be, is very good at what it does. It is often said that when we implement management measures, the fishermen are very resolute and resilient. Although a 10 or 20 per cent reduction in catch may be imposed, in the first fishing season, whenever it may be, the catch does not diminish. Because of the work practices and efforts of the fishermen and the technology they have put in place and now enjoy, it does not make a significant change to the depletion of stock. However, the introduction of new managerial practices can cause financial hardship for a lot of people. I felt very sorry when those eight vessels were taken out of the shark fishing industry in Western Australia. It was suggested that maybe those vessels would be capable of becoming patrol vessels - the eyes and ears for the industry. It seems that when those eight vessels were taken out of the shark fishing industry and the catch in other fisheries was reduced, the illegal fishing suddenly took off. I do not know whether that was just a coincidence. A lot of fishermen will say that at least they are the eyes and ears for the industry. There are opportunities. The indigenous groups in the area will put up their hands. They could be trained to be involved, especially when the trochus shell, which forms part of their traditional fishing, is being raided. It is important that they be given an opportunity to also be our eyes and ears in the area.

I have said to a number of people, and I will keep saying it, that I would take a stronger position on how we handle the issue if recidivism continues. I have some figures that indicate that there are 168 000 illegal immigrants in Malaysia. These illegal immigrants do not spend time in a detention centre; they spend only enough time in the country to be put on an aeroplane and sent home. A big sweep was conducted throughout Malaysia to find those people who did not have the legal standing to be in the country. These people had slipped through the net. Malaysia had a huge cull of these people to get them out of the country, and it did not muck around. That is why I believe, to put it bluntly, we should take no prisoners. We should confiscate any gear off the boats, sink them and send those people back to their country with the clear message that if they come to Australia, we will deal with the matter. From a political perspective, the federal government needs to look more closely at its relationship with Indonesia on this matter. Surely it will understand the position because of its requirements for seafood products. That is fine. The Indonesian government also needs to take responsibility and do what we have done to weed these people out of the industry. That has not been very palatable to an awful lot of people. It needs to be understood clearly that Indonesia needs more managed fisheries. I do not know whether we should show it what to do. We showed Cuba how to manage its rock lobster industry and now it is our biggest competitor and is underselling our product - and it is very good at it. We have exported our intellectual property and helped the people of that country.

I think there will be bipartisan support for this motion; I will be surprised if there is not. I will certainly do all I can. I have not met Senator Abetz yet. He visited Perth recently, but I was in the country region, unfortunately, and I could not get back in time to meet him. However, his office has spoken with mine and we will certainly catch up in the future. I had dialogue with Senator Macdonald and was a bit disappointed with his follow-up on some issues. I believe that the Prime Minister is now fully aware of the position and realises the significance of the issue. He will certainly encourage the new minister he has appointed and his cabinet to ensure that sufficient resources are provided. As I have outlined, it is the federal government's responsibility for a number of reasons of equal importance as that of protecting our fishing industry. Many other issues relate to the protection of Australia, and especially Western Australia. We are blessed with a tremendous amount of gas reserves. About 500 or so ships come into Port Hedland each year to shift iron ore, and a serious terrorism risk is associated with such a large number of ships. I add my support to Hon Shelley Archer's motion. I am pleased to do so, because it has an effect on each and every one of us in some form.

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.55 am]: I, too, support this motion to deal with a very difficult issue. This issue has occurred over time and the problems it has caused have increased. In 1974 a memorandum of understanding between the Indonesian and Australian governments allowed traditional Indonesian fishermen to fish in Australian waters on the edge of the continental shelf in an area of approximately 52 000 square kilometres. It was approximately 230 kilometres by approximately 150 kilometres. The

southernmost corner of the area was less than 150 kilometres off the Australian coast. That memorandum of understanding was fine when traditional fishermen were using that area for sailing, collecting trochus and trepang and catching fish. However, that area has been absolutely denuded of fish because of lack of control of motorboats in the area. Of course, as Hon Bruce Donaldson mentioned, modern technology has also been a contributing factor. The area is used as a stop-off point and safe zone from which Indonesian poachers approach our waters.

I recently attended a meeting in Broome with the new federal minister Hon Eric Abetz, professional fishermen and pearling industry representatives. Hon Kim Chance raised the issue of the federal and state governments working together on this issue. I was pleased to hear that a joint strategy has been established. While I was at the meeting, it became obvious that it was being attended by state and federal fisheries officers and customs officers. I observed what was happening at the meeting. I spoke to the state fisheries officers after the meeting. The state and federal officers did not introduce themselves to each other, and I wondered where we were heading with this issue if they could not start talking on those grounds. The point raised by the Leader of the House is valid. Indeed, I experienced what he mentioned only two weeks ago. I will certainly be making my federal colleagues aware of this issue.

This problem is huge, and it threatens our marine and terrestrial environment. Hon Kim Chance mentioned the black-striped zebra mussel, which was discovered six years ago in Darwin. The then Northern Territory fisheries minister, Hon Kon Vatskalis, referred to it as the cane toad of the sea. That is probably a good description of the black-striped zebra mussel. It has the ability to wipe out Western Australian's pearling industry which, from memory, was worth some \$200 million in 2003. It also contributed some \$6.8 million to aquaculture pursuits. The industry has progressed a lot since 2003, so it is worth much more than that now. It is an extremely valuable industry not only because of the pearls it produces, but also because of the industries that hang off it, such as the tourism industry. I have seen some of the female members of this house wearing lovely pearls. I hope the pearling industry continues, so that women and men can make their lady folk happy by buying those pearls.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** I buy my own.

**Hon KEN BASTON:** That is very good. If I had enough money I would buy Hon Robyn McSweeney some pearls, but I do not.

Diplomacy is very important in this issue. The live cattle industry in the north can be affected by diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, but we also export those cattle to Indonesia. Some of the more down-to-earth people in the north have said that diplomacy is a bigger gun on a bigger ship. Unfortunately, that is not the answer. There are many issues. We can ask why these people come to Australia. It is to put food on their plates. The population of Indonesia is some 250 million and Australia's population is some 22 million, so members can understand why these people come to our waters to rape and pillage our fisheries. Even if they are caught, the prospect of going to jail is pretty good for them. The department pays them something like \$30 a day. If they receive a sentence of two years, they go home with a pretty good cheque. These are some of the issues that have to be sorted out.

Hon Kim Chance said that we need to work in unison, not only with the various departments, but also with the Northern Territory and federal governments, because we need a uniform policy for handling and catching these people. Yesterday in his opening speech Hon Kim Chance said that last year 13 000 vessels were sighted. I have been assured by some of my federal colleagues that sighting the boats is not the problem, it is having the manpower to catch them, tow them back and apprehend them. I was disappointed to read in some of the press releases that even though the federal government will increase surveillance with eight new DASH 8 aircraft and more boats, they will not be available until 2008. I am afraid that will be too late. The sightings in 2005 had increased by 35 per cent on the 2004 figures. We need to act quicker than that.

I have met with people from the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council who advocated the use of trawlers from the east coast where fishing licences have been cut back. These spare boats could be used as processing boats, which may help in apprehending these people. Hon Bruce Donaldson said he believed in sinking the boats at sea and dropping the people off in Jakarta so they had to walk home. Although I support those sentiments, we have other problems. Of course, if we sink these more sophisticated boats at sea there will be problems with diesel, oil slicks and environmental issues. It will be difficult to work through those issues. Another big issue is the organised crime that is entering this area. A typical example is the ice boat that was caught the other day, but there was insufficient evidence to hold it. That was quite embarrassing for us. That boat had a large tonnage of fish on board, but it had to be released. It was interesting that that boat was registered to the Chinese. Not only is there the Indonesian side to this issue, but also world fishing crime syndicates are developing to raid our lucrative waters.

In supporting this motion, all parties need to work very closely together to arrive at a resolution, including the Department of Fisheries, the Australian Customs Service and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.