

Grievance Speech - MARINE PARKS – 16 July 09

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:30): One of the most difficult parts of being in opposition is bearing the brunt of constituents' anger at having been deceived by this government whose dishonesty in dealing with community and industry groups is surpassed only by its arrogance. When these complaints begin to take on a familiar pattern and become constant and repetitive, it becomes even more difficult to assist, because what we are then dealing with is a government that is inherently arrogant, deceptive and completely unrepentant. Such a pattern has emerged and it has infected most, if not all, ministers and many of their departments. That pattern is one of broken promises, of hopes raised and dashed, and decent citizens left wary and untrusting of government.

The latest group to suffer this fate is the commercial fishermen of the Lower Eyre Peninsula whose fate is now in the hands of a minister and department who suffer from the Labor disease—so-called open doors but closed minds. This government boasts it consults widely with the people about all manner of things. They will state boldly on their final report that they have done so. They would have the reader believe that the consultation was somehow incorporated into the final decision and therefore the conclusion is popular and acceptable. This is rarely the case.

Representatives of the Lower Eyre Peninsula, local government and commercial and recreational fishing communities were invited to contribute to discussions and planning for a marine park, a subject now affecting literally hundreds of thousands of South Australians. They diligently went about thoroughly researching and preparing a submission, consulting carefully with respected scientists whose knowledge is current and relevant. On current form, when the minister's determination is given, nothing of their input will be apparent. Instead, vague studies from many years ago will likely take precedence over current and topic-specific science.

Comparisons have been made with fisheries around the world and conclusions drawn that bear absolutely no relevance to local conditions. For the minister to include statistics showing a 550 per cent recovery rate of fish habitat following the cessation of commercial fishing sounds reasonable. To learn that these statistics come from a location in the Philippines where dynamite and cyanide were the preferred fishing technique highlights how unbelievable and ludicrous such a comparison is. South Australia is acknowledged as having among the best managed fisheries in the world, but, no, the Minister for Environment and Conservation and his departmental experts can do it better.

This is the Labor disease: hear everything but listen to nothing; look at everything but see nothing; ask everyone but learn nothing. They say they consult widely, but take no advice. They send staff out to run public meetings designed to deceive the people into believing their opinions matter and will be noted. They send guest speakers and panel members to these meetings whose agenda is set and no discussion or negotiation is accepted. They have been sent to sing the minister's song and nothing else. They call it 'engaging with the community'. Nothing is more insulting than a broken engagement.

Well researched and presented submissions on bioremediation by community members have been ignored. Creative and cost-effective proposals for community projects to ease the water problems have been sidelined, only to find later that elements of their proposal appear in departmental plans. So much for engaging the community. Many disillusioned community members are already avoiding further community meetings in disgust.

The procession of complaints through my office is staggering. They cover almost every ministry. They include: aquatics, music education, country transport, prisons, education, police services and facilities, workers compensation, emergency services, roads, shared services, agriculture, country health—what a total fiasco that was (they called it 'consultation'), River Murray, Lower Lakes and other water management issues—an international disgrace, and now we have environmental marine parks—and that is just complaints to my office. In every one of these areas I have had individuals or groups complain to me that their opinion was sought and their input invited only to be completely discounted or simply ignored. South Australian electors should remember at the next election that this government suffers from an incurable disease—so-called open doors but closed minds.