



Speech by

## Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Tuesday, 15 November 2011

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### GREAT BARRIER REEF, FISH HEALTH

 **Dr ROBINSON** (Cleveland—LNP) (11.31 am): The government's continued bumbling and cover-ups with respect to Gladstone have now caused a crisis of confidence in every port region on the Great Barrier Reef. The Gladstone Harbour crisis, as it has become known, was a problem that should have been handled better—with openness, accountability, independent science and integrity. Instead, this incompetent, long-term Labor government—the fisheries minister in particular—has made the problem worse and its attempted bad old Labor cover-up has now created the crisis in confidence that now exists in Gladstone. This crisis of confidence is how this government handles ports and harbours on the Great Barrier Reef. This crisis in confidence on the reef has now spread to other parts of Central and Northern Queensland.

Firstly, the minister sat on the problem for months—since his department first knew about the problem in May this year. The minister gave the unbelievable assurances in this House that he only knew about it in mid-September. Secondly, the minister gave false assurances to the parliament and to the public over a period of two months that the fish disease problem was limited to one species of fish only—barramundi—when it was known to fishermen and then to scientists that many other species were involved. The minister is the only person today who believes that the fish disease is confined to barramundi. In parliament today the minister was given a chance to correct the record. Instead of admitting that he was wrong, he continued to cover up the problem.

Ted and Simon Whittingham, who are the owners and managers of the Gladstone fish market said this on 24 October—

I would like to express my concern that the governing authorities are suggesting that the unknown disease is only present within barramundi. The disease has now been identified in blue salmon, flat salmon, king salmon, bream, shark, stingrays, golden trevally, Spanish mackerel, whiting, sea snakes, prawns, crayfish and mud crabs.

Yet the minister continues to this day to ignore this and now can only be seen as deliberately misrepresenting the facts in the parliament today.

Thirdly, the minister even today continues to state that the skin lesions, rashes or burn marks on diseased barramundi are red spot despite scientists in his own department stating otherwise. The facts are that we still do not know what has caused the lesions on the barramundi. Recently, Biosecurity Queensland stated—

The cause of the severe ulcerative lesions on the barramundi samples from Gladstone Harbour could not be determined. EUS (red spot) and bacterial infection have been ruled out as causative agents. The skin damage is serious and increases the likelihood of mortality in affected fish.

These are the scientists who are speaking and they are saying the opposite to what this minister continues to repeat in this House, which is inaccurate, not factual and, in my view, is a deliberate misrepresentation of the information.

Fourthly, the minister has stated that fewer than 20 per cent of the fish tested were diseased. That is hardly a normal or expected level of sickness. Fisheries Queensland has admitted that this figure is not

correct and that the figure is actually higher—at least 30 per cent to 40 per cent. Fishermen have found the figure to be up to 80 per cent. The minister's 'count barramundi only' policy means that the government has underestimated the magnitude of the problem and continues to do so.

I join many other people—and we saw them express their views on the *Four Corners* program—in voicing my concern for the health of the Great Barrier Reef through the way this government is mishandling and covering up the situation. The government has failed to adequately protect the reef. When planning for the upgrade of Gladstone Harbour was done environment ministers, starting with the member for Ashgrove, failed to plan to protect the reef. The former environment minister has said nothing about protecting the Great Barrier Reef in the Gladstone area since she cut and run from the reef. Since the government knew about the problem in May, what did she know?

The LNP in government will not risk the Great Barrier Reef like this government has as we will balance the needs of resource industries with the environment, with the port and with future developments. The government stands condemned for its mishandling and cover-up and Mr Wallace should be withdrawn from the process.

*(Time expired)*