



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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Select Committee on Cronulla Fisheries
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Submission to the Inquiry into the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence.

Preamble

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of the Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of research facilities is a critical foundation underpinning the successful outcomes achieved by conservation reserves.

Background

At the time when the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence, the decision appeared to be a churlish response to research undertaken at the Centre that supported the establishment of new marine parks, something the incoming Coalition Government was committed to overturn.

The case for research

The Coalition Government was right when, after winding back Labor's marine park program, that the establishment of conservation reserves must be based on good science. However, in the particular case, the science had been done, with literally hundreds of published papers worldwide, supporting to development of marine parks.

The Coalition Government promised a review of the science on marine parks, and then promptly announced the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre, making it difficult to believe that the Government has any serious intention to allow any further scientific review.

There is always room for more research, and monitoring, but that will not be achieved by closing research centres.

The case to retain the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre

If we accept that continued research into conservation is necessary, and we strongly believe that it is, then the following arguments in favour of retaining the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre:

- Fisheries research has been undertaken at the site since Federation, more than 110 years ago, the first such facility in the southern hemisphere, with their research being internationally recognised as leading-edge.
- That century of research has developed a “brand” of excellence which will be lost forever if the site is closed.
- Much of the expertise that has been built up over time will be lost as the majority of experienced research and management staff will either be unwilling or unable to relocate. This is expertise and experience in specific areas of fisheries science and management that simply cannot be replaced.
- It is our understanding that laboratory facilities at Cronulla has only recently been upgraded at significant cost to taxpayers, which will need to be duplicated at another site if and when the Government honours that pledge. Meanwhile the Cronulla facilities will become idle, possibly sold to developers, and be torn down.
- The closure of the facility will ensure the scrapping of some important research programs, many of which were conducted in the Sydney marine area, or using the aquarium facilities at Cronulla, or at the Sydney Fish Markets. Economic restraints relating to the distance between these research points and the promised new facility, will force the closing down of these research programs.
- The Centre's closure will be a serious impact on employment in the Cronulla area, as it is currently is the district's largest single employer. The proposal to close it would have a significant negative impact on the local community.

In conclusion, we urge the Government to reconsider its decision to close the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment

Yours sincerely
John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.