



AUSTRALIAN BLUEFIN
3 December 1997

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Yesterday I spoke briefly on one of our wonderful business success stories from the electorate of Flinders, and today I give the House yet another example of where a regional business leads Australia or, in this case, the world, by example. Port Lincoln is noted as Australia's premier fishing port because of the volume and value of seafood products produced there. A total of 65 per cent of the State's fishing product actually comes from this part of the State. Those who are successful in the fishing industry have been practising, exporting and value adding for years, with a very significant increase in the jobs available in regional South Australia, and particularly on Eyre Peninsula. It is therefore fitting that one of these Port Lincoln fishing businesses won the AGRI business category of the 1997 South Australian export awards. The business in question is Australian Bluefin, headed by its President, Joe Puglisi, in partnership with Ron Waller. Joe is a pioneer in the tuna and prawn fishing and tuna farming industries. Mr Puglisi came to Port Lincoln with his brothers Bob and Mick in 1960 when tuna fishing was in its infancy. There was virtually no management of the industry in those early days. About a decade later, prawning started in Spencer Gulf. Those pioneering this fishery were very aware of the environmental and ecological issues that were a necessity in setting up a sustainable fishery. The Spencer Gulf prawn fishery was held up across the world as being a model for management of a renewable resource.

Joe Puglisi was one of the pioneers of prawning in Spencer Gulf before concentrating his interests on the tuna industry. His dedication to the environment long before that became popular and his vision have contributed to the sustainability and profitability of that industry. Pioneering must be followed with sound business practice if an industry is to survive. There is always considerable risk to such entrepreneurs. Joe Puglisi was one who saw the necessity of value adding by selling tuna on the sashimi market in Japan rather than relying on canning as a principal source of income, but the sashimi market is very selective: not just any fish, even if it is bluefin tuna, is acceptable.

Success in exporting depends on meeting the market rather than expecting the market to accept the product that is delivered. Special care must be taken to ensure the quality of the product. Mr Puglisi researched the market and developed customer contacts with Japanese companies. The company now exports to America, Europe and Japan, although Japan is still the main market. Regular visits to customer companies is a priority for Australian Bluefin. The visits to experience the culture of those countries to which the company exports are considered important.

The aim is to visit these destinations three to four times per year to keep up with changes and to forecast market opportunities. Due to dedicated business people in the fishing industry, the South Australian product is now as good as any other arriving in fastidious Japanese markets from around the world. The continuing effort to maintain the freshness of the product, coupled with streamlining the process of catching the tuna and getting it to market, is paying off.

When the average size of tuna being caught in the wild was smaller than the optimum size for the sashimi market, and with mounting concern over tuna stocks, Mr Puglisi became one of the pioneers in tuna farming. Basically, the fish caught in the wild are herded into cages where they are grown out to a fish of high market value. This method now best utilises the fish available and optimises the return to the industry. The undertaking of tuna farming has not been without difficulty but, to a man of Mr Puglisi's stature, a difficulty is simply a problem to overcome, and that is what he has done. Research into the farming of tuna, including the production of artificially prepared food in place of pilchards, is an ongoing process. Management, the environment and ecology are all facets of the research being conducted. South Australia is recognised as being able to export fresh tuna—a very perishable commodity—as well as any other country in the world.

It is important for South Australian export businesses and for the State's economy that we are seen to be a State that understands the needs of our overseas customers. Australian Bluefin, through its principals Joe Puglisi and Ron Waller, knows what it is talking about. South Australia is well placed to export to Asia in particular. This advantage will be strengthened when the railway to Darwin is completed.