



KING GEORGE WHITING
6 June 1995

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Owing to the great concern for the survival of the King George whiting resource, I take this opportunity to place on record some details of a workshop into the King George whiting resource, which was held at the SARDI Aquatic Science Centre at West Beach on 3 and 4 May 1995. One important conclusion was determined at the workshop: too many people are targeting too few fish. I believe that all the people involved in that strategic workshop agreed that the King George whiting resource was subject to too much fishing pressure. Personnel involved in the workshop came from a wide spread of interests and comprised tourist, recreational and commercial fishers, and researchers, writers and compliance officers. It was agreed that there is still much to learn about that icon of the State's fishing industry.

The proceedings were well organised, with debate being focused and constructive for the whole two days. I believe that its success can be attributed, first, to the dedication of those involved in the workshop and their commitment to ensuring the future of the resource and, secondly, to the ability of David Hall of PISA and John Keesing of SARDI in using their experience and ability to keep a focus on proceedings. I am pleased to say that many priorities were identified at the workshop, and I am sure that the State's fishery managers are now better informed on the directions necessary to achieve a fully sustainable fishery.

Not all the research data released at the workshop supported present practices in the fishery. Of serious concern to me was the finding that was released by SARDI marine scientist, Dr Martin Kumar, into the impact of hauling nets and recreational lines on the survival of under-sized King George whiting. The aim of that FRDC-funded study was to quantify the mortality rate of under-sized King George whiting taken inadvertently by commercial garfish net fishers using small mesh, hauling nets and recreational line fishers.

Although the study is incomplete and the results are unpublished preliminary results, they show that the mortality of King George whiting can be quite high from garfish netting in the first three months of the year, that is, January to March. That coincides with the fact that fish in those nursery areas are about 17 cms to 22 cms in length. Further analysis of the research will be used to quantify the effects of that netting technique on the yield and egg production of King George whiting. The workshop also identified that additional work is required in identifying important King George whiting nursery areas around South Australia. Once fully identified, additional protection can be afforded to those areas if fishery managers think that that is the appropriate step to take.

Also of concern is the status of the resource. An earlier workshop held at the SARDI Aquatic Science Centre on 7 and 8 December 1993 emphasised that the King George whiting fishery is over-exploited in terms of yield and egg production. While the finding was modelled on the best available data, many participants in the workshop agreed that much more research work must be undertaken to determine the true state of the King George whiting fishery.

In 1993, it was estimated that a 56 per cent reduction in total fishing effort was required to increase the estimated egg production to a target of 20 per cent of the maximum potential. Twenty per cent has been adopted internationally as the minimum benchmark for egg production of most fish species, thus lowering any risk of stock collapse in that species. We need better information on where and when fish actually spawn, where eggs hatch and where they settle in nursery areas.

I am concerned that many of our city planners do not understand the value of seagrass beds in our marine environment. Many planning decisions were made in the past without taking account of the effects on seagrass beds. All levels of Government have to improve their knowledge of the links which affect life in the sea. I am pleased that Flinders University has developed an annexe to the university on the shores of Boston Bay. The

university will increase our knowledge of the sea, which will lead to more profitable fisheries and to a more sustainable resource.

I am also encouraged that additional work will be devoted to a proposal to enhance the stocks of King George whiting in South Australian waters. I believe that a workshop should be held on that potential industry and that participants should be invited from tourist associations, economic development boards, local government, commercial fishermen, researchers and aquaculturalists-

Time expired

KING GEORGE WHITING 11 May 1994

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I wish to draw the attention of members of this Chamber to research data which shows a very high risk that South Australia's King George whiting fishery could collapse. It is for this reason that I applaud the courageous decision by the Minister for Primary Industries, Mr Dale Baker, in attempting to close the Coffin Bay waterways to net fishing. The marine scale fisheries were advised by SARDI as far back as 1990 that urgent measures were required to save the whiting fishery. The industry has been told that, to achieve sustainability of the King George whiting population, a need exists to set a minimum safe level of egg production of 20 per cent of the maximum. This figure is an internationally accepted one.

The management options to achieve this level of egg production include a reduction of the fishing effort of around 56 per cent. Current egg production for the King George whiting is very low.

The SPEAKER: Order! There are too many members in the centre of the Chamber. Will they please respect the honourable member who is speaking.

Mrs PENFOLD: Research data by SARDI shows that it is about 4 to 5 per cent of the maximum spawning potential at present. It is the King George whiting that the net fishery targets in the Coffin Bay waterways at this time of the year. The Coffin Bay waterway has been subject to a seasonal closure for many years, opening for netting only on 1 May. Each year the netting and hook fishing effort take these fish when they are about 2½ to 3 years of age. This is before they escape into the deep water to breed.

Fish catch in Coffin Bay by net fishing has increased in the past five years from approximately 25 to 50 tonnes per annum. These beautiful and protected waterways are a major nursery for the King George whiting. Tagging of these fish and subsequent recapture has shown that fish that escape from the Coffin Bay waterways have added to the stocks of fish as far away as Corny Point at the bottom of Yorke Peninsula and Thevenard which, as members know, is near Ceduna. The fishing industry has ignored the crisis in the King George whiting stocks to the point where stern action was required by the Minister for Primary Industries.

Catch rates by experienced hardworking hook fishermen support the SARDI findings. Several years ago, a Port Lincoln based hook fisherman was catching 6 tonnes of King George whiting a year by hand. Now his catch per annum is down to 3 tonnes. His family is now on income support from Social Security to keep food on the table. Is this good fisheries management? This man applauded the Minister's decision and said that he now had a future. He said that the marine scale fishery is dominated by netters and that any arguments to protect the livelihood of hook fishermen are always howled down. Yet, good hardworking hook fishermen based in Port Lincoln have an income as low as \$10 000 a year for their efforts, while at Ceduna, where net fishing has been banned for nearly 30 years, the better hook fishermen are reported to be making \$50 000 a year.

For the marine scale fishing industry to claim that it is a leader in fisheries management is very doubtful, and for the fishery to say that closing areas to netting will affect the future supply of fish is equally doubtful. The law of supply and demand dictates that, whenever high prices prevail for a commodity, it encourages the production of an alternative. There are fish farm operators who will be delighted at the opportunity to fill the very small void left by the Coffin Bay closure. SAFIC complains that the Government has placed controls on the catching of King George whiting. Many fishermen are, by nature, hunters and gatherers, and without control they would compete to catch the last fish in the sea. A report in the *Port Lincoln Times* of 22 March points to a fishing frenzy which saw about 25 prawn trawlers net tonnes of juvenile prawns near Cowell. It has since been described by fisheries management as carnage. After years of work to develop their prawn fishery management, it was all thrown out the window. Let us hope that for their sake it does not happen again.

This incident is nothing when compared with what has been happening in the King George whiting industry. Unlike the prawn fishery where there is only one interest group involved, there are many competing interests for the stocks of King George whiting. Many members of the marine scale fishery—