

SPEECH TO BEGA VALLEY SHIRE COUNCIL. GEELONG TRAWLER. SVEN HELLAND  
18.05.2016

My name is Sven Helland. I grew up here in the Bega Valley as my father did before me and; after moving away for a number of years - for further study and then for work. I feel privileged to return to the region I have always called home both to work in my chosen field of adventure ecotourism and to start raising my own family in this amazing area. With the third generation of Helland born here in the valley last June - now we are truly local.

I earn my livelihood as an adventure guide and outdoor educator. By taking people outside to experience and learn about our forests, beaches, estuaries, headlands, shoreline and ocean I hope to kindle a passion of respect and awe for the natural setting that we are surrounded by here on the far south coast. I lead day hikes and multi day expeditions; I take people kayaking, snorkeling, stand up paddling, camping, mountain biking, and surfing. And I do this in almost every eco tone and environment there is to offer from Batemans bay to the Border.

I have fished the beaches, rivers and estuaries of the south coast from the shore or from a boat since I was 4 years old, and I have been spear fishing the headlands and reefs since I was 13. For the years I was away one of the things that I missed the most was going fishing - as nowhere that I have lived in the world has, or had the biodiversity of marine life that we have. In my mind this abundance of sea life is the direct result of following 3 factors.

1. The number of healthy tidal estuaries and rivers such as Merimbula Lake, Nelsons lagoon and Bermagui River. These estuaries receive nutrients not only from the ocean but from the forests and land surrounding them in turn catering for the survival and development of small or juvenile marine animals - both estuarine and oceanic species - as many need to spend time in an estuary as part of their lifecycle.

2. The sedimentary metamorphic rocks that make our fixed shoreline features. Such as the Mimosa Rocks, Merimbula rock shelves, and protruding headlands, boulder fields and reefs.

The unique way that these rock formations have weathered through the eons has created a huge surface area of intertidal and underwater habitat. With more space more species can find a home. And they do hundreds of fish, seaweeds, soft corals, molluscs, plants, and crustaceans are found here - and if you ever go to a headland like Bournda Island, or Haycocks point you will find evidence of people having taking advantage of these spaces for thousands of years.

3. The convergence of two epic oceanic currents - the East Australia Current from the north, and an Antarctic current from the south. The EAC brings fish and other marine animals south into our region from the warmer tropical waters to the north. The southern currents bring nutrient rich waters seasonally that in turn can support the amount of life found off our coastline. The blending of currents produces for a few months out of the year a boom of activity offshore - millions of bait fish converge on the south coast at the end of summer bringing with them gamefish such as Tuna, Kingfish, Marlin, Wahoo, Mackerel, and Sharks. Also supported by this abundance is populations of migratory seabirds some who migrate half way around the world - such as Little Turn, Albatross, Gannet, Boobies, Pelicans and Shearwaters. Colonies of seals, little penguins and dolphins feed and live there too. And twice a year we get to see the migration of whales on their epic swim from the tropical

birthing waters of Queensland to the feeding grounds of Antarctica.

And you know who else is brought to our region by all of this activity?

Tourists. People on holiday who come for the fishing, who come to see a whale, or dolphin. Who want to catch a glimpse of a bird to tick off their list, and people who got to enjoy these phenomena themselves as part of their lives and now want to do so again now with their children.

As a child and youth growing up here in the Bega valley I saw the end to so many of our primary industries. The closure of the Green Seas cannery in Eden at the same time as the collapse the fishing industry here on the south coast. The gradual sell off of licences and boats resulting in empty docks, slips and moorings in towns such as Eden, Bermagui, and Ulladulla. Interconnected with our waterways and fisheries I have seen our local forests cut down and taken away on huge ships as wood chips. And I lived through one of the worst droughts in living memory and saw the desperation in my patients as they tried to sell off livestock and keep going before and eventually needing to part with the farm. I saw the effect the drought had on diary farmers - once our regions longest and proudest primary industry - as it forced many to sell out, or even give up completely. And I saw an entire generation of my peers feel that they could not go the way of our fore-bearers as it seemed at times there was no future for us. Will my daughter see a similar collapse to the tourism industry if one day soon the fish are gone?

But from within the fear and desperation of those times I saw countless members of our community stand up the important issues. In the past we have already stood for the forests, and the farmers, and the welfare of our regions people. And now we need to stand again together to protect our local way of life. As country people we have always looked out for our own at the same time as we share the bounty and beauty of the place we all call home. We share our stories of hardship with those who come to visit our region at the same time as we show them the hidden gems and best of what we have to offer.

I condemn the activity of large factory freezer trawlers in our local waters and label them environmentally reckless, financially insane and implore the Bega Valley Shire Council to make every feasible effort to stop, banish and, ensure that such vessels of death and destruction are never allowed back.

We can no longer afford ourselves the delusion that all issues such as the removal of many thousand tons of baitfish from the bottom of the food chain is not interconnected with the lives of people in the valley just as the ocean is connected to all waterways and therefore the entire planet.