

Australian lawmakers block super-trawler

13 September 2012



Workers loading tuna fish onto a truck at a port in the Pacific. Australia blocked a controversial super-trawler from fishing in its waters Thursday in a narrow parliamentary vote which forced concessions from the centre-left Labor government.

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Lawmakers voted 62-60 in favour of amendments to Australia's environmental protection and [biodiversity conservation](#) laws blocking the Dutch-owned FV Margiris from trawling its oceans until research into its impact is completed.

The 9,500-tonne, 143-metre (469-foot), Margiris, recently reflagged the Abel Tasman, was set to catch baitfish off southern Tasmania but a community backlash led by [Greenpeace](#) and local fisherman saw the government step in.

Environment Minister Tony Burke rushed amendments into parliament Tuesday blocking the ship from working in Australia until fears about by-catch and over-fishing could be scientifically assessed.

Super-trawler

The Australian government has announced plans to change environmental laws to prevent a 9,500-tonne vessel from fishing in its waters

Abel Tasman (formerly FV Margiris)
143 metres

- ▶ Fishing net length: 600 m
- ▶ Approved annual catch: 18,000 tonnes
- ▶ Daily max: 250 tonnes
- ▶ Cargo capacity: 6,200 tonnes
- ▶ Target species: blue mackerel, jack mackerel, redbait

An 84 m fishing boat

30 m tugboat

Source: Environment Tasmania AFP

Facts on a 9,500-tonne, 143 m fishing vessel Abel Tasman (formerly FV Margiris). Australia blocked a controversial super-trawler from fishing in its waters Thursday in a narrow parliamentary vote which forced concessions from the centre-left Labor government.

Burke's amendments were rejected by the conservative opposition, and a number of independent MPs Labor relies on to pass legislation expressed serious doubts about the extent of the changes.

But they were passed by the lower house Thursday after some [concessions](#) from the government, including a review after 12 months and changes to the wording to limit its scope to [environmental issues](#).

The scientific research is expected to take two years, and environmental groups welcomed the fact the super-trawler would not be able to fish during that time.

"We congratulate the Labor party, the Greens and

the independents for listening to the concerns of the public and scientists, and supporting the bill through the lower house to protect our fisheries and marine life from this super-trawler," said Rebecca Hubbard from the [Environment Tasmania conservation group](#).

The amendments still need to pass through the upper house Senate but that is not expected to be a major hurdle, with the environment-focused Greens party holding the deciding vote.

Greenpeace led the campaign against the huge vessel, taking a series of [blockade](#) actions in both Australia and the Netherlands, and it welcomed the lower house vote as a "victory for the community".

"Greenpeace will continue to work internationally to prevent over-fishing and target over-sized, over-subsidised fishing vessels," the activist group said.

Fisheries authorities have dismissed concerns about over-fishing, saying the [trawler](#) would be allowed to catch just 10 percent of available fish and would have little, if any, impact on the broader eco-system.

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