The Northern Territory Government delivered a blow to amateur fishermen tonight when it voted down a piece of legislation designed to give Traditional Owners and Land Councils more options to issue Aboriginal land permits.

“The Independent Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood, sealed the fate of the Aboriginal Land Amendment (Intertidal Waters) Bill by abstaining from the vote”, said Shadow Fisheries Minister, Willem Westra van Holthe.

“Presently, Aboriginal Land permits are issued to individuals; a cumbersome and inefficient process. This Bill created additional provisions within the Aboriginal Land Act so that Land Councils and Traditional Owners could give out broader permits to a ‘class’ of people, such as amateur fishermen.

“Some Traditional Owners see this type of legislation as a step forward, while the Labor Government goes nowhere with the Blue Mud Bay negotiations.

“Late last year Mr Wood indicated he would provide conditional support for the Bill.

“But how quickly things can change. In his letter earlier this month to Country Liberals leader, Terry Mills, Mr Wood said all bets were off in so far as supporting Opposition legislation was concerned.

“One generally expects Opposition Legislation to be voted down by this Labor Government, but Mr Wood created his own slice of Parliamentary history tonight when he abstained from voting.

“In his letter to Terry Mills, Mr Wood said he would vote against Opposition legislation if he opposed it, but would abstain from voting if he believed a Bill to have merit.

“I can only conclude from his failure to participate in tonight’s debate and his failure to vote against my Private Member’s Bill that he thought the legislation had merit.

“In addition to letting his constituents down, Mr Wood has also badly failed Traditional Owners, Land Councils and amateur fishermen.

“This is the first piece of legislation to fall prey to Gerry Wood’s arrangement with the Henderson Government and sadly, it won’t be the last.”

Further comment: Willem Westra van Holthe 0414 778 430