

MEDIA RELEASE

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Minister wrong about oyster fee increase

Fisheries Minister Rory McEwen is wrong about oyster growers' fee increases and that may explain why the new fees are causing so much angst in the oyster farming industry says Shadow Fisheries Minister Adrian Pederick.

Recent reports have referred to an average 450 percent increase in oyster licence and lease fees as a result of the Aquaculture department adopting a 'cost recovery' system for fishery management. Some growers have experienced fee rises of as much as 1500 – 2000 percent.

The matter has been referred to a Legislative Review Committee, with the subsequent publicity causing Fisheries Minister McEwen to suggest the industry has exaggerated the increase.

Mr Pederick said Minister McEwen's comments on radio on Wednesday February 11 were clearly incorrect.

'Minister McEwen stated that "the average cost to the oyster industry has doubled", up from \$350,000 to \$700,000. The mathematics are simple enough. Last year under the 'per hectare' system there were 1064 hectares charged at a total of \$167.75 per hectare. That's \$178,486 in total across the industry.

'This year they are collectively being billed close to \$750,000. That's well over twice the 200 percent increase claimed by the minister – a huge increase.

'Minister McEwen's statement that the industry paid \$350,000 last year is wrong. That figure appears to be based on a costing option that was proposed but not adopted.

'His mistake is unforgivable. How can he purport to make informed decisions and direct others in their deliberations when he clearly either cannot add up or doesn't check the figures?

'He has continually insisted that the model-based calculation of oyster industry administration costs is fair yet he can't even do an elementary calculation that underpins his whole argument.

'All the industry is asking for is proof that the cost recovery calculation is accurate and fair. This error gives them good reason to believe it may not be.

'Why should anyone in the aquaculture industry have faith in the process when fundamental figures like this are patently incorrect?

'I call on the minister to recheck the figures and present them in full to the industry so they can either confirm and accept them or identify where other mistakes have been made.'