

MEDIA RELEASE

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Food jobs lost, exports fall but there's no funding to replace Premier's Food Council

Despite the revelation in the 09-10 SA Food Scorecard that food exports fell and thousands of jobs were lost in the past year there is no direct funding for a new industry body to replace the industry's peak advisory body.

'With the Scorecard revealing an 11 per cent fall in food exports and 10,600 food industry jobs lost in the past year – for which Minister O'Brien declined to accept responsibility, he's still trying to make a silk purse from a sow's ear with figures,' said opposition Agriculture, Food and Fisheries spokesman Adrian Pederick.

'But funding of a new industry body to replace the now defunct Premier's Food Council remains a mystery.

'According to Agriculture Minister Michael O'Brien, the Food Council is to be replaced with a new strategy group – as yet frameless and nameless - 'to consider the opportunities available'.

'It is my understanding that many high profile Food Council members resigned through frustration at the Council's failure to reach objectives.

'A lack of government interest and commitment was also apparent. Bold, bright statements from the premier were followed by silence and inaction.

'Of particular concern is the minister's statement the government 'will have to make sure the remodelled department has the resources to assist and execute the directions that come out of the council'.

'In budget estimates, I asked the minister what funding was provided in the budget to support the proposed new group.

'His answer was uninspiring – talking in vague, nebulous terms about harnessing expertise and reallocating funding and, most disturbing, engaging external consultants.

'So other departments and programs will be plundered to enable the government to engage expensive consultants, probably from interstate, to reinvent the wheel.

'The minister said he was confident 'the resources are there' – meaning no new funding, just shifting the deckchairs and asking more of less people.

'He and the Rann government need to be far more proactive in supporting the SA food industry with action and funds, instead of more hollow promises and bold statements.'

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