

MEDIA RELEASE

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O'Brien adds fishing industry insult to injury

The release of industry figures by state Fisheries Minister O'Brien was naïve and insulting to the industry according to Shadow Minister Adrian Pederick.

Minister O'Brien published detailed information about the profitability of commercial cray-fishermen in the South East.

Mr Pederick said most SE fishermen would be outraged by this breach of faith by Minister O'Brien, which threatened to shatter any remaining goodwill between the government and the industry.

'This announcement is nothing more than a tactless and blundering attempt by the minister to justify his earlier decision to close October, thereby denying 180 South Australian licence-holders access to the most important and lucrative market they have – the China market.

'Despite requests, the minister has presented no credible, compelling evidence to support this decision. It was based on hearsay from less than 10 per cent of licence holders. What scientific evidence does exist is stacking up against him.

'It is interesting to note the minister acknowledges that a large proportion of the 76 per cent of the catch goes to China via Hong Kong.

'By his action, the future of that market is now at serious risk with buyers already searching for other suppliers and other Australian states looking to open their seasons in October to capitalise on this prized opportunity.

'Further, the minister's figures are meaningless without proper context. What about the fishermen's investment? They spend many millions on vessels, equipment, fuel and training as well as licences with no cast iron guarantee of an appropriate return.

'Licence holders and boat owners also have a responsibility for the safety of their crews. Forcing them to put to sea more days in a shortened season, regardless of the conditions, in order to catch enough fish to justify their investment may well lead to disaster.

'The ultimate responsibility for any such disaster will be sheeted back to this minister and the Rann government.

'The minister states he is having 'constructive talks' with the industry, with the October closure among topics being discussed. He says he took advice from 'some fishermen' about the risk to spawning females.

'I suggest he take more advice from some other fishermen – 90 per cent of them in fact – who also have the long-term sustainability of their fishery at heart.

'Minister O'Brien needs to understand he is managing a quota-based fishery, not an effort based one.'

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