

Port Lincoln marinescale fisher raises concerns with fishery reform




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 FAIR GO: Port Lincoln fisherman Shannon Cornelius is hoping the government can address concerns the Marine Fishers Association has with the fishery reform. Photo: Jarrad Delaney

The representative body of South Australia's marine scalefish fishery has called on the major parties to address "unfinished business" related to the commercial fishery reform which posed a long term risk.

The state government's reform of the commercial marine scale fishery came into effect on July 1 last year with the aim of more long term financial and ecological sustainability for the industry.

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However the Marine Fishers Association has called for areas of concern to be addressed, these included helping those who remained in the fishery to remain profitable, high licence fees and interstate investors taking ownership of fish resources.

Port Lincoln fisher and association representative Shannon Cornelius has been fishing in the local waters for more than 20 years and said he had concerns which were sure to get worse if not addressed.

He said the reform had posed challenges for those looking to get into the fishery and the ongoing high licence fees, which were the highest in Australia with more than 14 per cent of revenues.

"A lot of younger and new starters in fishing were disadvantaged through this reform and may have had to leave the industry as the reform made them unviable and uneconomical," he said.

"The reform has seen about 100 licences, which represent small businesses in regional towns, which have left the industry.

"We've always had higher fees and have been working with the government to find ways of reducing fees but with the reduced amount of licences out there it hasn't been reflected in a reduction of fees."

The association has also had concern about interstate investment and ownership of fish resources such as whiting, gar and snapper in the state.

Mr Cornelius said when quota was sold interstate, it was a loss of value of a natural resource for South Australians.

He said while the full effect of the reform were still about 2-3 years away, if not addressed it could affect the ongoing profitability for fishers who remained.

"The problem is many fishers have had to reinvest into their business, mortgage against other assets while others have had to leave," he said.

Association executive officer Barbara Venn said it was important for the government to address these areas to ensure the ongoing viability of the industry.

"It is imperative that the Government acts to address these issues so we protect this 186-year-old industry which contributes so much to regional areas of South Australia and which supplies local fish for all South Australians," she said.

Primary Industries and Regional Development Minister David Basham said the government was open to discussing the concerns of the association with members.

"We're happy to work with any industry body around their concerns," he said.

